



**The Georgia
Family-Friendly
Partnership
School Awards**

2016 Winners



PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP BY



THE RITZ-CARLTON

Congratulations from Georgia's State School Superintendent



It is a privilege and an honor to announce the six Title I school winners of the 2016 Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Awards. Families, schools, and communities work together to create meaningful relationships that ultimately lead to significant gains in student achievement and success. It is the school's responsibility to take the lead to develop and sustain this essential relationship by nurturing welcoming environments throughout the school and community.

The schools honored today are environments where families and community members feel they belong and, in turn, play an important role in supporting their school and their students' success. These schools have spent time and effort evaluating and refining their physical environments, communications, personal contacts, and school policies and procedures to ensure that all families feel included and welcome. They are models for engaging families and making parents feel welcome the moment that they walk in the door.

These schools represent the best in customer service for Georgia families, whether it's on the phone, in the front office, or online. These schools have welcoming staff members, comfortable waiting areas, clear signage, and engaging displays of student work on display throughout the building. They have easy-to-navigate websites that foster strong partnerships with parents to help improve student achievement. The schools also provide unique and innovative parent engagement programming that successfully reaches all families in the school. Most importantly, families are respected and seen as an integral part of every student's education.

It is my hope that other Title I schools will learn from these schools and participate in Georgia's Family-Friendly Partnership School initiative to ensure that all parents are welcomed into their schools. Through these small but influential changes, we will continue educating Georgia's future.

Congratulations to our 2016 Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Award winners!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Woods". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard Woods

About the Awards

The Georgia Department of Education launched the Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School initiative in the summer of 2010 to assist Title I schools, families, and communities in working together to create welcoming environments that lead to increased student achievement. A welcoming environment increases family engagement, which, in turn, helps students earn better grades, graduate from high school, and enroll in post-secondary education. This award takes the initiative a step further by recognizing Title I schools that have gone above and beyond to create an environment where families and community members feel that they belong, and where they play an important role in supporting their school's student success.

All Title I schoolwide schools that have not received the Family-Friendly Partnership School Award within the last five years are invited to submit a written application for the award. A panel of respected educators, parents, and community members from across the state evaluate the applications and select up to twenty finalists.

School principals are notified of their finalist selection, and then judges conduct school site visits over a three-month period. Site visits are not announced in advance. During the site visits, judges conduct surprise walk-throughs and interview school staff and visitors to assess each school's welcoming environment. Following the school visits, the judges select the Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Award winners. Up to ten schools may be honored with the award each year.

From the award announcement date, each school that is honored with the Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Award is designated as a Family-Friendly School by the Georgia Department of Education for five years. The school receives a special visit from the State School Superintendent to celebrate and honor its designation, a welcome mat to display at the school's front entrance identifying its family-friendly award status, and a special professional learning opportunity provided by The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center. This opportunity is designed to further enhance the winning schools' ability to provide welcoming environments to increase parent engagement to help improve student academic achievement.



The State School Superintendent presents each winning school with a plaque, commemorating their success in creating a Family-Friendly environment.



Four factors for assessing a school's welcoming environment

Physical Environment

The physical appearance of the school building and surrounding areas, such as the main entrance, halls, parking lots, signage, and landscaping.

Personal Contact

The visible interactions between school staff and families or community members, such as acknowledging parents or guests in the school, friendly greetings from front office staff, or public recognition for parents and community members who volunteer and contribute to school and student success.

Communication

The way that the school keeps families and the community informed through sources like welcome letters, up-to-date school calendars of events and holidays, staff directories, announcements on social media websites, or school maps for visitors; information for parents should be provided in various languages and easy to understand.

School Practices and Policies

The opportunity for families and community members to provide feedback, actively contribute by serving on committees that address policies and procedures, or participate in parent organizations that are inclusive of the entire school community.

In addition, schools must address how they are implementing the six National Parent Teacher Association Standards for Family-School Partnerships by creating welcoming environments to increase parent engagement throughout the school. Prior to applying for the award, schools are encouraged to examine their welcoming environments through the Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School initiative materials which include a self assessment, parent survey, walk-through, and virtual module. Completing the initiative before applying for the award provides a more complete picture of what is expected to be an award-winning Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership school.



Characteristics of a Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Award winner

- Outstanding customer service with families, whether by phone, email, or face-to-face meetings, that goes above and beyond to make all families feel welcome and to equip them with the information needed
- An overwhelming feeling of a positive school climate immediately upon entering the school building
- Engaging displays of student work throughout all parts of the school
- Placing welcome desks and signage, as well as comfortable, living room-type environments for visitors in the front office or in the school foyer
- Showcasing the school's diverse student and family population through pictures, artwork, and murals in foyers, classrooms, and hallways
- Forging non-financial partnerships with community and faith-based organizations to impact student achievement and success
- Displaying directional and informational signage in multiple languages aligned to the school's student and family population



- Providing parent and student information in easily accessible areas in the school office or at the school entrance
- Showcasing fun themes in the lunchroom, gym, and other common areas
- Showing evidence of parent support, parent pictures, and thanks to parents and community partners throughout the building
- Providing a designated, comfortable space for parents to meet with each other, as well as with staff, to discuss or receive information regarding student achievement and success
- Ensuring school grounds are well-kept and the school's name is easily recognizable from the road, as well as at the entrance to the building
- Providing an engaging, easy to navigate, up-to-date and relevant website with important school information



WINNER

Buford Elementary School BUFORD CITY SCHOOLS

The faculty and staff at Buford Elementary School firmly believe in going the extra mile to ensure that all families feel that they are part of the BES family. From the friendly office staff to the special dining café for students and parents to enjoy lunch together, families know that they are a treasured asset for the school. Student successes are celebrated throughout the hallways which display student artwork, projects, writing and accomplishments. It is evident that a common school goal is for each child and family to feel welcome and comfortable at Buford Elementary School.

BES is also dedicated to meeting the needs of their students and families through doing “whatever it takes” to provide needed supports. The school partners with community businesses to offer services such as eye and dental care, book bags, school supplies, shoes, and food. BES teachers and staff are commonly seen at students’ extra-curricular activities such as ball games or dance recitals. Attendance by staff at these events not only demonstrates a level of love and care for children, but offers teachers an opportunity to engage in informal conversations and build partnerships with parents. Parents and students have the opportunity to see and converse with the Buford County School Superintendent during his weekly luncheon in the BES cafeteria. The school has also partnered with Buford High School Education Pathway students who volunteer two periods a day to provide small group instruction or to assist the classroom teachers. A commitment to children and their families by the entire community is clearly evident.

Buford Elementary School has an active Parent Teacher Organization and School Council whose members meet with school administration regularly to provide feedback. An extensive parent volunteer program is evidenced by the number of parents seen around the school reading or reviewing math facts and sight words with students, cutting materials out for teachers, acting as mentors for children, and organizing donated clothing items for students to access. Media Center volunteers are on site daily to assist with shelving books,

organizing book fairs and the annual Santa Shop, or overseeing the quarterly stores to incentivize reading.

Each year the school hosts many special events for families to inform new families about the curriculum and school procedures and to provide parents with an overview of that grade level’s curriculum and standards. Parent workshops are offered throughout the year to teach caregivers how to support their students’ progress toward meeting grade level standards. Bilingual staff members are on hand at all family events to provide non-English speaking families the opportunity to participate in their children’s school events.

For parents not able to come to the school, BES has a YouTube library of tutorials available on the school website for families which are designed to train parents with supporting students in reading and math.

Teachers use the Homeroom App where parents can access information, pictures, and updates about their child’s classroom right from their phone. Parents are also provided with a weekly classroom newsletters, monthly school newsletters, individual classroom websites, a school Twitter account, and regular email and text blasts sent to parents. Buford Elementary School works hard to reach every single family, and undoubtedly, serves as a shining example of a Family Friendly School. Congratulations, Buford Elementary School!





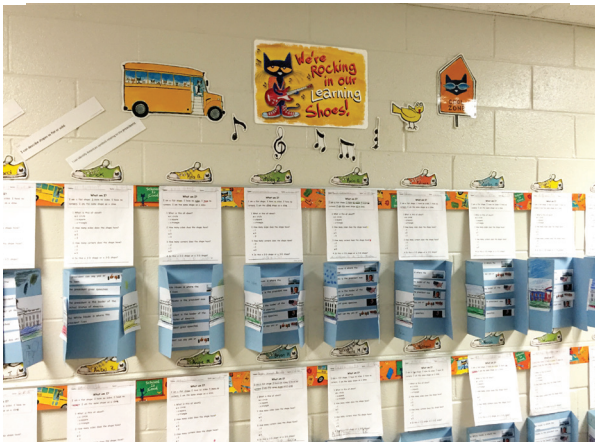
Hopkins Elementary School

GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Hopkins Elementary School (HES) is a special place for children to learn and grow because the adults take such special care to ensure that the smallest of details are attended to. The reception of the staff at the front desk makes one feel a member of the Hopkins family immediately because of the friendly, helpful welcome. The clean, cheery hallways, the bilingual signage, and the wide variety of student work displayed in the hallways continue to reinforce the school's attention to detail, however, the resounding feeling experienced is not the environment, it is that everyone is welcome in this school and that the staff takes great efforts to make your visit or your stay a wonderful experience. This could be explained away if HES had a few hundred students, but, amazingly, they can make a stranger feel this way with over 1,300 students.

Hopkins is always looking for new and innovative ways to work cooperatively with staff, families, and community to support student academic success:

- A Parent Resource Center
- Regular workshops and classes on a variety of educational topics
- Technology and English Language classes
- Literacy, Math, and Integrated Curriculum Nights
- Grits for Grandparents, a special Thanksgiving meal, Patriot Day, the Be There Fair, International Night, and the annual Talent Nights.



Student artwork on display in the halls of Hopkins Elementary.



The Parent Resource Center at Hopkins Elementary School.

The Hopkins experience extends beyond the school campus. The Local School Council and Parent Teacher Association provide input on school policies and improvement effort, but they have also worked to develop partnerships with local businesses and community organizations. The school works closely with Parent to Parent of Georgia to provide interpreters at all conferences, workshops, and Individualized Education Program meetings to assist parents with two-way communication about their children's education. HES staff works in cooperation with local library branches to provide the Prime-Time Reading Program for families of struggling readers. Community business sponsors help families to receive library cards, identify at risk students for Saturday school support, which was suggested by parents, and a Saturday Pre-K program.

Hopkins Elementary staff prides itself on maintaining a high level of communication between parents and staff. The school uses traditional methods, but they have also incorporated some new, innovative techniques such as email and phone blasts, text reminders, and a recently launched App for parents with iPhones or Android phones. Parents can download the App to follow any of the schools in Berkmar Cluster, allowing parents to stay informed across all grade levels and schools in the cluster. HES has a large Hispanic population, so administration has strategically placed Spanish speaking staff members in the Parent Resource Center, front office, and registration office in order to facilitate communication with families as soon as they enter the building.

As one leaves Hopkins Elementary School, it is easy to see that the staff not only believes in creating a village for children that encompasses the entire community, but also that they have, in fact, done so. Congratulations, Hopkins Elementary School!



WINNER

Norton Elementary School GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Norton Elementary School (NES) takes great pride in creating a welcoming environment for the families that come through its doors. From the bright hallways accented with an abundance of colorful student work displays, to the signs posted in each grade level pod designating that grade's graduation year, to the student ambassadors who provide school tours and a first friend to new students and their families, creating a community for the 33,000 students who have come through the doors since 1986 is what Norton Elementary is, and has always been, about:

- Working with their multiple local business partners and churches
- Opening the doors for extended time to support Boy Scouts of America
- Vertically collaborating with schools in their cluster to encourage high school graduation beginning in kindergarten

Families are encouraged to be visible in the school. Lunch menus are sent home on a monthly basis to invite family members to "do lunch" with their students. The Parent Resource Center is open for parents to check out educational materials and supplies to support learning at home, and the school offers about 25 parent workshops per year on educational topics that have either been requested by families or that support school improvement goals for the year. In order to facilitate parent attendance at these events, Norton offers child care and provides interpreters for non-English speaking families.

The school's Parent Involvement Coordinator works closely with classroom teachers to reach students and their families who are in need of academic support. Parents are contacted in various ways to ensure they are aware of student needs. If parents are unable to attend workshops, the coordinator sends the materials home and contacts the parent to explain using the materials. NES teachers send home Friday Folders that contain student work, important notices, and a weekly progress report. If there are problems with student learning, the school provides

a strong Student Support Team structure and multiple options for additional support such as the Saturday School program and the Kindercamp summer program for all rising kindergarten students.



Signage in each grade level pod at Norton Elementary keeps the students' eyes on their academic goals and their graduation year.

Norton Elementary involves parents in decision making in every area from workshop suggestions to school improvement efforts to budget. The Local School Council is active, meeting five times per year, and includes business partners, parents, and school staff. The Parent Teacher Association at Norton has a large total membership and recently had a Veteran's Program that honored

204 grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, brothers, and sisters of Norton students who are U.S. veterans.

NES has a large population of Hispanic, Bosnian, and Ethiopian families which can present some difficulties with communication; however, the school supports these families with bilingual staff members and outside translators to maintain continuous communication despite language gaps.

By making families such an integral part of Norton Elementary, it is no wonder that teachers bring their children and their grandchildren to school at Norton. Not only is Norton a family, but they are a flourishing second generation family created through a culture of love and support for what they call their "treasures." Of course, they are referring to their students. Congratulations, Norton Elementary School!





Peachtree Elementary School

GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

If there was a one word descriptor for Peachtree Elementary School (PES), that word would be inclusive. Amazingly, Peachtree students speak over 30 languages in their homes, there are more than 21 bilingual staff members that speak 14 languages in addition to English, and the educational differences between students, parents, and staff are vast, yet visitors feel only connection and a sense of excitement upon entering. The staff described the school receptionist as “one of the friendliest people in Georgia.”

While PES staff claim that they work actively to welcome families, it seems effortless. The Parent Center is staffed by a bilingual Parent Instructional Coordinator (PIC) who is available to talk with parents personally or via phone and email, and she often serves as liaison between the teachers and parents during class hours, while providing support to academically challenged students and their families. The Parent Center is also the site of ongoing training to families and staff members on supporting and effectively communicating with one another. Parents are invited to drop in for lunch, visit the Media Center, or volunteer at the school, as well.

PES has empowered a group of non-English parents, known as the “The Mom Squad,” which has taken ownership of the annual holiday luncheon by transforming the school into a special winter wonderland for students and families the day before the event. PES participates in the Kid’s Hope Mentoring Program and reinforces these efforts, when needed, by assigning staff mentors. The mentoring programs encourage students to stay focused on their academic and behavior goals and provide additional adult support toward success.

Peachtree goes above and beyond in supporting and communicating with students and families through a weekly, translated phone message from the principal that goes out by phone and email. Facebook, text messages, Class DOJO,

weekly folders, student agendas, and a 24 hour help line available in English and Spanish. PES is supported and enriched by forging partnerships with many community organizations, churches, and businesses. The local high school’s Junior Civitan, which is often comprised by former Peachtree students, volunteers its time and talents to students on a regular basis while serving as role models for their younger peers. Local churches supply back to school materials, ground maintenance assistance, and mentoring services to the school.

Local businesses provide everything from Positive Behavior Intervention and Support incentives, to technology equipment, to volunteers for field day and other school events, to eye exams and glasses, when needed, for all students. Kids Vision for Life (KVFL) has provided 846 pairs of eye glasses for students in the last four years.

Peachtree exemplifies the idea that family is not always defined by blood or even commonalities. Congratulations, Peachtree Elementary School!



The Parent Resource Center at Peachtree Elementary School.



Whimsical, creative displays in the cafeteria (left) and library (right) add to a positive school climate.



WINNER

Woodward Elementary School DEKALB COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

If you ask the staff at Woodward Elementary School (WES) to share their secret for success with families, they would, undoubtedly, begin by explaining their structure of routine around family engagement with a laser like focus on student achievement. Parents know that STAR, or Students Taking Academic Responsibility, folders which serve as a daily two-way communication tool between home and school. The bilingual monthly calendar with school updates are provided in that folder the week before each month begins, and instructional parent meetings are held on the last Wednesday of every month beginning at 9 a.m. like clockwork. Phone call blasts, including calls to the most populated apartment complex managers, are utilized when needed information is time sensitive. Because of the large population of Spanish-speaking families, school administration has continued to search for ways to place Spanish-speaking staff members in the building to make families comfortable with seeking assistance or information.

The school's intentional focus on structure and student learning have resulted in 80-100 attendees at the monthly parent trainings that include focus walks for participants, led by student leaders, where families can see the workshop strategies modeled by teachers in a classroom. Parents are given a checklist to document their observations of that specific strategy. Another opportunity called "Spotlight on Students," allows caregivers to spend one hour in a classroom working on a literacy and math activity with students. The goal of these efforts is, of course, that these activities will continue at home.

WES has also educated parents on reading student data and given them support with questions to use during conferences



The walls of the cafeteria at Woodward Elementary School have been painted to resemble a village. The painting enhances the school's overall aesthetic and adds to a positive school climate.

which their students lead them through. Students review their data notebook, with assistance from their teachers, with their parents;

this process allows the entire family to take responsibility for each student's learning. Parents of the lowest performing 25% of students are targeted for a special support network, and these parents have bonded to progress monitor their children, share strategies and successes, and develop a sense of urgency for supporting learning. Students are also consistently steered toward high school graduation a focus on college attendance such as fieldtrips to local universities for parents and students, workshops for parents on preparing for college, and monthly college spirit days. Students are further supported by a variety of local businesses that provide volunteers to work directly with students, paint hallways and classrooms, and assist with field day activities.

Parents are encouraged and recognized for pursuing various leadership opportunities such as Parent Teacher Association (PTA) executive roles, Latin American Association leadership positions, and enrollment in a Mexican American Legal Defense Educational Fund (MALDEF) 12 week course that emphasizes parent rights. PTA leadership and MALDEF program graduates have evolved to collaborate with other schools' PTA leaders and county representatives to attend leadership sessions, publicly speaking at school board meetings, and earning a WES identification badge. Families support school projects such as "Building your Home Library," where community members have donated books so that all students receive a package of six to twelve books to take home. Woodward received an approximately \$100,000 school makeover in 2015 from Georgia Credit Union's School Crashers project.

With all of the opportunities that Woodward provides to students and parents, it is easy to see why they were chosen as a Family-Friendly Partnership School. Congratulations, Woodward Elementary School!



Woodward Elementary School shows appreciation for their numerous parent volunteers with a "Wall of Fame" display board.



Fort Service Learning Magnet Academy MUSCOGEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Before reaching the front doors of Fort Service Learning Magnet Academy, visitors can already see that Fort is a school that values strong leadership and education. Upon entering the building, pictures and plaques honoring former students and teachers for their successes in academic competitions, and teacher of the year award winners, dating back to the opening of the school, accent the halls. Included in the mix of highlighted leaders, children can also see the very familiar faces of their own families who are honored as Parent of the Month winners.

When visitors reach the office, they are immediately greeted by staff, and as one staff member answers the phone, she says warmly “Thank you for calling Fort Service Learning Magnet Academy, the best middle school in the world! How can I help you?” Student work is proudly featured in colorful displays that explain the standards and showcase teacher commentary to students.

Fort has a Parent Coordinator who works with families on site to facilitate their needs. There are computers available in the Parent Resource Center and the Media Center for parents to use along with applications for the Georgia Department of Labor and federal assistance programs when families need them. Parents are offered various learning events throughout the year including Literacy Night, Leadership Legacy Day, Grandparents Day Brunch, Bring Your Family to School Week, and Transition Days for both incoming 6th graders and rising 9th graders. The 9th grade transition training for families focuses on educating parents on topics such as dual enrollment, Career, Technical, and Agriculture Education (CTAE) pathways, and graduation requirements. In addition to these regular opportunities, the principal hosts monthly workshops for families to discuss topics such as the Georgia Standards of Excellence and the advantages of implementing high school courses at the middle school level. The school also provides guides for parents on the Georgia Standards of Excellence each nine weeks which feature the standards to be focused on for that quarter, along with suggestions for families on how to support students academically over the next weeks of school.



Fort hosted a Grandparents' Day event to engage senior family members in the education of their grandchildren.

The staff works diligently to make communication personal to each child's family. All teachers are required to make phone contact with all parents within the first six weeks of school. The Special Education Department makes one positive phone call home per month for all exceptional students in the building; they feel this practice allows them to build supportive relationships with parents who may have received mostly negative feedback in previous years. The

principal sends a weekly phone call out to families providing an overview of the upcoming week, and parents are given the principal's cell phone number with instructions to call her until 11:30 p.m., any day of the week, if they need to talk to her. The Parent Coordinator uses every listed contact number to reach parents, if needed, and she and the social worker make home visits for families that cannot be reached by phone. The staff members feel that this level of personal attention is what builds the powerful connections they have with families in the school.

The many Partners in Education provide services to students such as food baskets during the holidays and job shadowing opportunities, but in return, students work with them to provide no-sew blankets to the homeless, food drives for the Salvation Army, a Christmas toys for children telethon in conjunction with a local radio station, and an Annual Community Job Fair where over 200 applicants last year were given the opportunity to meet and interview with local employers. There is an active Parent Teacher Association at the school and the Principal's Council of students ensures that students' input is heard.

Congratulations to “the best middle school in the world,” Fort Service Learning Magnet Academy!



Fort has an inviting library for students and families that is conducive to reading and learning.



FINALIST

Sweetwater Middle School GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Thanks to school staff and administrators constantly striving to make families feel part of the school community, Sweetwater Middle School (SMS) is a special and supportive place for students and parents. With colorfully decorated classroom doors and an engaging parent center housing a variety of instructional games and resources for bilingual families, Sweetwater Middle School provides a welcoming environment for all of its diverse families. Other family-friendly highlights are:



- SMS hosts “Breaking Bread Wednesdays” where breads, bagels, and sweets, donated by Publix and Panera Bread, are offered to families while they can fill out parent surveys, find out about school events, and build relationships with school staff and other parents.
- Thursdays are known as “Parent Portal Thursday” and offers parents an opportunity to drink coffee and get one-on-one assistance with accessing the Infinite Campus Parent Portal which allows families to progress monitor students.
- Students who are not on track to graduate may be eligible to participate in “Gear-Up Academy,” a program that allows students to complete one year of credits per semester in order to enter high school as sophomores. Parents participate as an integral part of this program and sign family commitments to their children’s school success.

FINALIST

Heard Elementary School BIBB COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Heard Elementary School (HES) is a beautiful school with a caring and personable staff. The hallways display pictures of former principals, teachers, and students that tell the story of a rich history that is deeply ingrained in the community. Multiple generations are represented throughout the building each day from the staff to the parents to the students. This school is dedicated to providing for the needs of its families and assisting parents in supporting their students’ achievement in school. Other family-friendly highlights are:



- HES hosts multiple family events throughout the year such as the fall carnival, an annual pumpkin contest, Thanksgiving lunch, “Breakfast with Santa,” family movie nights, the talent show, and Math Night.
- Parents are offered training opportunities around relevant topics like Georgia Milestones and progress monitoring students.
- The school utilizes multiple mediums to communicate with parents including “Wednesday Folders,” school newsletters, mass texts, emails, and phone calls.
- Heard Elementary School partners with various community members such as the Rutland Mason Lodge and Robins Air Force Base to provide students with school supplies, field trip opportunities, career fairs, and recognition for achievement.



Kipp Vision Primary School ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

There is no doubt at Kipp Vision Primary (KVP) School that families are viewed as part of “the village.” The school assists families with academically supporting their “scholars” through easily accessible formats such as GroupME, a group communication application that allows families to assist each other with homework and KVP requirements, mini-tutorials on teacher websites, and daily progress reports. This continuous communication also includes teacher cell phones that may be called until 10:00 p.m. nightly. Other family friendly initiatives are:

- Home visits are conducted each summer, before school begins, to welcome new families to the school. Parents and scholars sign the “Commitment of Excellence” and staff members answer any remaining questions about the school year.
- Scholars are rewarded for parent volunteer hours by earning points that may be used toward end of year field trips. These efforts result in an average of 26 parent volunteer hours at the school each month.
- The school has partnerships with multiple community partners such as Girl Scouts of America, Real Men Read, Emory University, various local churches, and Giving Back with Ronald McDonald.



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