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2018 Application
GOVERNANCE TEAM OF THE YEAR

Please complete all sections of this application form, save the file and email to tarasi@gsba.com by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, June 15, 2018.

School District:  Gwinnett County Public Schools
Governance Team Chair/President:  Carole C. Boyce, 2018 Chairman
Superintendent:  J. Alvin Wilbanks, CEO/Superintendent

Person Submitting Application

Name:  Berney Kirkland
Title:  Chief of Staff
Email:  berney_kirkland@gwinnett.k12.ga.us
Phone:  678-301-6011 (office)

x  Our district is eligible based on CCRPI data for the past three years (FY’15, FY’16 & FY’17).

Governance Teams will qualify if they have met one or more of the following criteria:

Please choose the one statement that best applies to your district

x  Minimum of 80 or better for last 3 years on CCRPI

Or Minimum of 80 for two of the three years with nothing lower than a 70 on the CCRPI

Or over a three-year period, the district improved their CCRPI scores from a 60 to a 70 and then to an 80.

Please verify that you meet ALL additional criteria to be considered for this award: (place an “x” before each true statement.

x  All of our Governance Team members have met the minimum state training requirements for the past three years (FY’15, FY’16 & FY’17).

x  Our Governance Team has had no issues with any accrediting agency for the past three years (FY’15, FY’16 & FY’17).

x  Our Governance Team approved the application for this award at the Board of Education meeting held on April 19, 2018.

Rating criteria:

Governance Team applications will be rated on rubrics that have been developed to align with the seven components of the Georgia Vision Project plus an additional component on communications and messaging.

Phase Two: Verification of the accuracy of the application will be confirmed as part of this process.

Phase Three: Rating of the Applications:

Applications that have been verified will be rated and scored by a national team with expertise in school governance. Applications will be rated according to the degree to which there is clarity of the outstanding accomplishments by the district, the correlation of the governance team responsibility with the accomplishments, and quality of the evidence as it relates to the criteria for the category.

The School District selected as GSBA’s Governance Team of the Year will not be permitted to apply for the award for two years following their recognition.

Application Questions

Provide the Governance Team’s response to the three questions below for each of the criteria on the following pages. Responses may not exceed one page (500 words maximum) for each of the criteria areas. Additional pages, including appendices or attachments, will not be read or considered.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Be sure to address all areas listed in the description of the criteria.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Governance Team’s role and/or actions that led to the accomplishment.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.

For any questions concerning the Governance Team of the Year, please contact Tony Arasi via email at: tarasi@gsba.com or via phone at 770.962.6841.
I. Teaching and Learning Resources

I1. Comprehensive Data System (5.2 & 5.3): A comprehensive system for collecting, storing and analyzing data is an essential part of the school district’s decision-making process. Relevant and accurate information is utilized for good decision-making. Comprehensive data systems allow school and district staff to track system budgets effectively, support formative and summative student assessment to personalize instruction, and connect student learning and teacher professional development. Relevant and accurate information is an essential part of communication with students and educators inside the school and the stakeholders in the community.

I2. Safety & Security: Systems are in place to provide safe environments for all students, staff and stakeholders (e.g., district/building access, stairs/elevators, fire safety, mechanical systems, custodial supplies and equipment, labs, shops, restrooms, health services, athletic facilities and playgrounds, corridors, interior doors, security and surveillance systems, food service and commons areas), as directed by Governance Team policy. The effectiveness of practices to provide a safe and secure environment and the implementation of an up-to-date crisis/emergency management plan periodically is reviewed by the Governance Team. The Governance Team supports plans that proactively seek improvements in creating a safe and secure environment based upon standards and research. There is evidence of improvements in creating safe environments for all students, staff and stakeholders.

I3. Technology: The district technology plan provides up-to-date technology and adequate infrastructure to effectively support instruction, assessment and district administrative functions and is approved and periodically reviewed by the Governance Team. The Governance Team supports plans that proactively seek ways to improve district technology. There is evidence of improvement in technology and infrastructure to support instruction, assessment and the administrative functions of the district.

On pages 5-7, please respond to the three application questions for Teaching & Learning Resources.
### I1. Comprehensive Data System – Please respond to the three questions that relate to this area.

1. **Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.**

   In Gwinnett County Public Schools, a practicing Quality organization, data is central to decision-making. The Governance Team ensures that critical data systems are in place, and that the applications and reporting tools that provide actionable information are developed. An enhanced Education Data Platform provides monitoring of data quality, enhanced integration with other systems through compliance with the IMS Global standards, and control over access to data.

2. **Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.**

   The Governance Team maintains a focus on the district’s strategic goals, and annually allot the financial resources to achieve them. Systems are set up to enable staff to turn the data gathered into actionable information that can have a positive impact on each student’s learning and the district’s overall performance. To that end the Governance Team has provided support for implementing the following:

   - GCPS developed an early-warning system based on individual students’ attendance, behavior, and course performance. This “ABC Report” provides teachers and school leaders with the necessary information to ensure most students graduate on time with the necessary knowledge and skills for college and career.
   - In addition, the Governance Team approved the implementation of a new student information system that allows for secure online registration of students, easy transfer across schools, integration with the teacher gradebook, robust reporting, response-to-intervention monitoring, and enhanced audit capability.
   - A new learning management system with sample course pages supports the district’s digital transformation initiative. It encourages more personalized learning for students through the use of technology, and led the Governance Team to authorize the use of “digital learning days” as an alternative to “snow make-up days.”
   - The Local School Plan of Improvement (LSPI) tool captures areas of student needs so schools can align professional development with them. Data is monitored through the year to measure the effectiveness of initiatives implemented based on the LSPI.
   - Local school assessments are accessible via the SchoolNet platform for immediate disaggregation of data to inform instructional and programmatic decisions.
   - GCPS’ Enterprise Analytics System disaggregates data at the district, school, teacher, and student levels.
   - Leaders use the Superintendent’s Data Dashboard, District Key Performance Indicators, and Enterprise Analytics to analyze the effectiveness of organizational support and district initiatives that support learning.
   - School leaders access the School Reports Database, Cohort Analyzer, State Longitudinal Data System, Principal’s Dashboard, and SchoolNet to develop their LSPI goals and measure progress on meeting them.
   - As part of the Results-Based Evaluation System, teachers develop individual goals using SchoolNet, Classworks, and Enterprise Analytics data. They then monitor student achievement using formative, summative, and standardized assessments to determine instructional decisions and progress toward their goals.
   - District-level, departmental, and school budgets are easily accessed and tracked through PeopleSoft.

3. **How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.**

   Using data from the various tools and resources provided by the Governance Team, schools are able to intervene earlier to help students. This has contributed to an overall increase in the graduation rate for all students for the last five years. As a result, GCPS has received numerous awards for student achievement, closing the achievement gap high, and providing access to rigorous coursework.
I2. Safety & Security - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. **Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.**

   The Board’s Core Beliefs and Commitments and the district’s strategic goals state GCPS’ intent to provide a safe, secure, orderly learning environment for all. The Governance Team employs systems, processes, and best practices designed to ensure this goal is met -- in the design and construction of schools and facilities, the operation of its transportation fleet, the maintenance of buildings and campuses, the protection of students and staff, and the prudent use of fiscal resources. Ensuring students and staff are safe is foremost in the minds of Board members, the Superintendent, and district and school leaders.

2. **Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.**

   - In the mid 1990’s, the Governance Team established the GCPS Police Department, with school resource officers (SROs) employed by the district. GCPS’ 74 SROs are POST-certified (Police Officer Standards and Training) and are housed at all high schools and some middle schools. They police the campuses, educate students and staff on safety issues, and work with administrators on school safety plans.
   - GCPS works closely with national, state, and local law enforcement and safety personnel to ensure emergency preparedness. The district’s Safe Schools Plan, mandated in Board Policy JGJ, includes guidance on incidents including injuries, illnesses, natural disasters, bomb threats, and civil disturbances. Schools develop and periodically update plans specific to their campuses and train staff on implementation. Drills and communication procedures must be part of the plans. The Governance Team authorized the installation of “visitor management systems” and “call buttons” in schools, and a confidential Drug/Alcohol/Violence Tipline where calls or texts can be used to report suspected issues. GCPS updates its emergency operations plans annually.
   - Governance Team policies and procedures call for adherence to industry standards and best practices in all operational areas. For example: Strict specifications ensure GCPS facilities are built to meet or exceed all safety standards. Every construction project is reviewed for compliance with local, state, and federal building codes. Comprehensive preventive maintenance includes annual inspections of elevators, boilers, intercoms, and fire systems, and quarterly inspections of playgrounds. Protocols dictate the acceptable use and disposal of chemicals and potentially hazardous materials. GCPS buses meet all state and national safety specifications and are inspected monthly. Driver training exceeds CDL guidelines by over 90 hours. Drivers perform pre- and post-trip inspections, must pass an annual proficiency test, and are randomly tested for drugs and alcohol. All drivers are certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid. They instruct students on bus evacuations monthly and conduct drills twice a year.

3. **How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.**

   The Governance Team’s expectation that SROs take a proactive approach to safety, based on trusting relationships with students, is commended by law enforcement and the community. GCPS’ Police Department maintains Georgia Law Enforcement Certification, a distinction held by only three school police agencies. State Patrol bus inspections and reviews by other State agencies/inspection programs verify the impact of the Governance Team’s safety expectations. Evidence of operational effectiveness is reviewed yearly in Board business oversight workshops. Most importantly, annual stakeholder surveys and CCRPI feedback indicate students, parents, and staff feel safe in GCPS schools.
I3. Technology - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. **Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.**

   A GCPS strategic goal is to “Support instructional and operational needs with technological systems and processes that support effective performance and desired results.” Consistent with this goal, a comprehensive technology plan to support academics and operations was instituted decades ago and is updated regularly. Thanks to voters’ support of GCPS’ five education SPLOST referenda, the Governance Team has been able to fund the technology resources needed to ensure that staff in schools and district offices have the information they need to do their jobs. At the same time, the Governance Team demands constant vigilance regarding data quality and security in order to protect all district-held information on students and personnel.

2. **Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.**

   • The Governance Team established the Executive Data Governance Steering Committee (EDGSC) to provide direct oversight of all technology-related projects and initiatives. Its primary function has been to develop and support a robust information technology security program. The EDGSC reviewed current security policies and procedures in order to ensure congruence with best practices and created new documents where gaps were identified. The committee also reviews proposed technology projects, decides which ones to implement, and determines the priority order of the work to be accomplished.

   • In each E-SPLOST-funded capital program, the Governance Team earmarked financial support for a significant amount of technology. As a result, a number of innovative instructional solutions have been implemented in GCPS. A few examples are:
     
     o **eCLASS** – An innovative system of applications providing a robust digital ecosystem that includes delivery of content to classrooms and students via the internet, a learning management system used by teachers and students, and access to a vast library of instructional videos and digital textbooks.
     
     o **ViewPath Cameras** – Almost 1,000 classroom cameras that teachers use for instructional purposes, for performance-review documentation, and for students’ future access to lessons via the internet.
     
     o **Blackboard Websites** – Consolidation of all schools websites into a single hosting service in order to enhance information security and allow the district to provide oversight to school websites.
     
     o **Digital Learning Days** – Innovative approach to providing a day of quality instruction while students are at home due to inclement weather by enabling them to engage with their teachers through the learning management system and an array of instructional resources via the internet.

   • E-SPLOST also funds ongoing retrofits of instructional and administrative technology and the underlying infrastructure on a five-year cycle. Before a school is retrofitted, instructional technology specialists work with school administrators to determine the computer-related requirements for that site. This technology review is followed by a market analysis of available solutions, ensuring at least a five-year cycle of stable delivery of technology-supported instruction in the classroom.

3. **How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.**

   Feedback from schools and administrative departments is solicited to determine if a solution is providing the intended results. Additionally, automated monitoring systems provide up-to-date information pertaining to system status, usage, and effectiveness. A state-of-the-art technology incident ticketing system allows end-users to provide feedback on their level of satisfaction with services and systems provided. The district’s current customer satisfaction rating is 98.4%.
Governance, Leadership & Accountability
II. **Governance, Leadership and Accountability**

**II1. Strategic Planning (7.1):** Long-term strategic planning occurs every few years. Strategic planning meets state requirements and includes an aligned vision, mission, goals and strategies focused on continuous school improvement as directed by Governance Team policy. The strategic plan includes Governance Team governance goals and strategies. Annual Governance Team review of the implementation of the strategic plan allows for any adjustments needed to provide continuous school improvement and respond to specific critical needs. The Governance Team’s strategic planning and the implementation of the district strategic plan have led to school improvement.

**II2. Accountability (7.1 & 7.4):** A comprehensive system of district accountability focusing on student performance is established and monitored. Reports on student learning, growth and progress are reviewed and clearly communicated with stakeholders. The Governance Team annually reviews the effectiveness of a comprehensive, student-focused accountability system in reporting, reviewing and communicating student performance data throughout the year. Data-driven decision making has led to measurable school and student improvement.

**II3. Governance Team Member Ethics & Ethical Behavior (7.4):** Governance Team members engage in ethical behavior as directed by district policy. Collaborative relationships among Governance Team members and between the Governance Team and superintendent facilitate a focus on student learning, district improvement and effective governance.

On pages 10-12, please respond to the three application questions for Governance, Leadership & Accountability.
1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.

In Gwinnett County Public Schools, strategic planning occurs on an ongoing basis. It emanates from the strategic direction of the school district set forth by the Governance Team and manifested in the foundational documents of the organization. These foundational documents consist of the Board’s Core Beliefs and Commitments; the vision, mission, and strategic goals of the school district; the Strategic Priorities for 2010-2020; the multi-year Strategic Initiatives and Priorities of the CEO/Superintendent that are updated each fiscal year, and the operational management plans developed by the heads of the seven organizational divisions for each fiscal year. Progress on meeting the dictates of the strategic direction is captured in the district’s Key Performance Indicators and in related reports to the Governance Team during monthly meetings of the Board.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team's role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.

As part of its strategic planning process the Gwinnett County Board of Education sets forth in policy its commitment to ensure that "District Key Performance Indicators" (KPIs) are established that communicate the Board’s priorities and progress to the public. The KPIs are measured each year against peer district standards and analyzed over time for improvement trends or areas of concern. The KPI performance dashboard will enable the Board and the public to monitor district performance in the areas of student achievement, district operations, and stakeholder satisfaction. The key performance indicators are integral to the Board fulfilling its management oversight responsibilities.

The Governance Team ensures that the CEO/Superintendent maintains and regularly updates the district KPI document and ensures that it is accessible to district stakeholders, both internal and external. The Governance Team periodically reviews the KPIs to determine if changes are needed to keep the measures relevant and current. Proposed changes to KPIs are subject to Board approval. Identified areas for improvement become part of the CEO/Superintendent's initiatives and are reflected in the yearly division objectives and operational management plans (OMPs) crafted by each organizational division. OMPs are tied to the district’s vision, mission, and goals and are the basis for each division leader’s evaluation with the Superintendent. Collectively, these elements ensure there is coherence and alignment between the strategic plan and the day-to-day operations of the school district.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team's practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.

In developing a process that establishes Key Performance Indicators, monitors them, and integrates their results into each division’s operational management plans, the data informs the Governance Team of the "health" of the school system. The data shows that 27 of the 31 Key Performance Indicators being tracked by Gwinnett County Public Schools will meet or exceed their projected standard or goal within the next two years.

Significantly, student learning results in Gwinnett County Public Schools have continued to improve despite dramatic and rapid increases in enrollment, poverty, and diversity, along with growing numbers of English Language Learners and Students With Disabilities who are served in the district’s 139 schools.
II. Accountability - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.

The Governance Team monitors student performance on all state accountability measures (i.e., Milestones, ACCESS 2.0, and GAA) and on national assessments, including NMSQT, SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement. This data is communicated to various stakeholders through district and school websites, publications, news releases to local media, and Board Meeting presentations. Additionally, the Governance Team has set in policy how accountability should be managed both academically and operationally to ensure the district’s vision and mission are realized. These policies include The Board’s Theory of Action for Change to Improve Student Achievement, Academic Accountability, Operational Accountability, and Balanced Assessment System.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team's role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.

- The Governance Team’s participation in the Reform Governance in Action program prompted it to establish policies that hold both the district and schools accountable for student achievement results.
- The Governance Team tasked the Office of Research and Evaluation with the development of the Results-Based Evaluation System (RBES). The RBES goes beyond the state’s CCRPI Accountability to look at the unique student enrollment at each school to fairly and systematically measure a school’s progress. As part of the RBES, each school receives a Weighted School Assessment (WSA) that evaluates it in the areas of Student Achievement, School Improvement, School Climate, and School Management. The WSA is carefully reviewed by district leaders and principals, then shared with teachers, and Board members are provided a report on sample WSA’s from schools in their electoral districts.
- The Governance Team implemented the High School Gateway Assessment as a graduation requirement to reflect what high school students should know and be able to do, to provide a model of sound instructional practice, and to measure student preparation for their roles as life-long learners.
- District and school performance data is reviewed by the Governance Team at monthly Board work sessions, which are open to the public and the news media. In addition, an Accountability Report is published for each school to inform stakeholders and community members about their schools’ student performance data.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.

- The scores from the GCPS RBES do not mirror the scores attained through CCRPI. One aspect of RBES is the Weighted School Assessment, which takes the CCRPI score and makes adjustments for the percentage of students who qualify for the free/reduced lunch program.
- The RBES takes into account data from various sources to get a picture of academic achievement at the school: CCRPI scores adjusted for poverty, Georgia Milestones scores, national assessment scores such as Iowa and PSAT 8/9, GCPS School Engagement Survey Data, Georgia Star Ratings for School Climate and Financial Efficiency.
- On the Gateway Assessment, students are required to demonstrate the ability to write effectively in the areas of science and social studies to earn a high school diploma from GCPS. Graduates of GCPS are well-qualified to meet the demands of career and college that lie ahead of them.
II3. Governance Team Member Ethics & Ethical Behavior - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.

The Governance Team of the Gwinnett County Board of Education and CEO/Superintendent has been a model of governance effectiveness for over two decades. The team’s effectiveness was further enhanced when in 2006 it was invited to participate in the Reform Governance in Action (RGA) program conducted by the Center for the Reform of School Systems (CRSS), founded and led by Dr. Donald R. McAdams. The Board and Superintendent participated in the initial two-year RGA program, and continued with the RGA Sustainability Program for the next two years. Since concluding the formal RGA program, the Governance Team has continued to use the teachings and resources from the program in its daily governance of Gwinnett County Public Schools. The RGA Framework has become the “gospel” for how the Governance Team assesses its performance and plans its work in governing the district for continuous improvement.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.

- Governance Team members adopted in policy clear standards of ethical performance and professional integrity. The policies include BH – Board Members Code of Ethics, BHA – Board Member Conflict of Interest, and BHB – Board Member and CEO/Superintendent Nepotism.
- A robust “Board-Superintendent Team Development and Training Program” has been in place since 2011 when annual training for Governance Teams was mandated in a new state law. Through the program Gwinnett’s Governance Team has engaged in deep and relevant learning around key education issues that impact public schools at the local, state, and national levels. National experts on education topics as well as governance practices deliver the training.
- Each member of the Governance Team is committed to being a person of high moral character and undeniable personal integrity, as evidenced by their words and behavior, both when functioning as a Board and when living their daily lives. They accept that as Board members they are a reflection on the brand of Gwinnett County Public Schools, positively or negatively, and they strive to always represent the district and themselves in the best-possible light.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.

- Governance Team members consistently abide by the standards of ethical performance and professional integrity as specified in Board policies BH – Board Members Code of Ethics, BHA – Board Member Conflict of Interest, and BHB – Board Member and CEO/Superintendent Nepotism. There have been no instances of misbehavior – alleged or actual – by the current Board members or the Superintendent over the two decades-plus that they have served as the Governance Team for GCPS.
- All requirements for annual Board training mandated by the Georgia Board of Education are met every year by the members of the Governance Team, individually and collectively.
- Based on its reputation as a high-performing school district, Gwinnett County Public Schools was invited to join the Bush Institute’s Alliance for the Reform of Education Leadership as an exemplary model of teaching and learning, professional development, and effective governance.
Human & Organizational Capital
III. Human and Organizational Capital

III1. Recruitment, Hiring & Retention (6.1): There is evidence of Governance Team policy regarding criteria for employment decisions. Objective measures guide the recruitment, selection and assignment of administrators, teachers and staff and are periodically reviewed and discussed by the Governance Team in collaboration with the superintendent. Multiple recruitment, hiring and retention resources are used to expand the pool of qualified candidates and result in effective employment decisions.

III2. Growth-Oriented Culture & Professional Growth (6.2, 6.3 & 6.4): A climate of collaboration and continued learning provides support for all educators. Performance-based evaluations for the superintendent and professional staff ensure educator performance that results in improved district performance, instructional programming, instruction and student performance as directed by Governance Team policy. Governance Team reviews evidence that the implementation of the performance-based evaluation process for the superintendent and professional staff includes on-going, timely, targeted and meaningful feedback and leads to improvement in educator performance, instructional programming and student achievement. There is evidence of improvement in administration, instruction and student performance.

On pages 15-16, please respond to the three application questions for Human Organizational Capital.
III1. Recruitment, Hiring & Retention - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.

   Consistent with its strategic goal to recruit, employ, develop, and retain a workforce that achieves the mission and goals of the organization, the Governance Team operates a comprehensive program of human resource development and talent management. The district provides a competitive compensation and benefits package to its employees, which includes competitive base salaries and a new performance-based awards system for teachers. A key retention strategy of the district is the investment in human capital. Opportunities for teachers to transition from the classroom to entry-level leadership roles, and for assistant principals to become principals, allow the district to increase retention among high-performing personnel.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.

   • The Governance Team enhances the benefits package offered to employees by providing basic life insurance, and funding towards health and dental insurance, to off-set the cost to employees.
   • In February 2017, the Board approved the framework of the performance-based compensation system for teachers, allowing the district to offer competitive salaries and performance-based bonuses to high-performing teachers, greatly increasing the ability to recruit and retain good teachers.
   • The Governance Team demonstrates its commitment to teacher and leader development through its Teacher Attendance Recognition Program and Quality-Plus Leader Academy. Currently, 92% of Aspiring Leader Program graduates serve as assistant principals, while 86% of Aspiring Principal Program graduates serve as principals.
   • The district has a long-standing commitment to fair hiring practices. In 2008, the Governance Team outlined a clear direction to guide the recruitment and retention of a highly qualified, diverse teaching workforce. GCPS continues to attract and hire teachers that are reflective of the student population. The percentage of minority teachers has increased from 18% to 29% over the last decade.
   • District and school-level job fairs lead to the effective recruitment, hiring, and retention of a high-quality work force. A Teacher Recruitment and Selection Guide provides strategies for the successful hiring of candidates.
   • The district continues to leverage performance evaluations and feedback to increase retention. As a result of effective training, leaders increase their effectiveness in providing authentic feedback to teachers that improves their practice. Teachers have the tools needed to experience success, feel satisfied in the job, and increase student achievement.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.

   • Over 95% of benefits-eligible employees participate in one or more of the benefit programs offered by the school district.
   • The competitive salary package approved by the Governance Team is evident in the fact that, when compared to other metro-Atlanta districts, Gwinnett County Public Schools ranks 1st out of 7 districts for teacher compensation for those with a doctorate degree at the top of the experience scale.
   • The sustainability of teacher recognition programs and the Quality-Plus Leader Academy provide evidence that the practices of the Governance Team are effective in meeting this criteria effort. The Quality-Plus Leader Academy continues to receive local, state, and national recognition for effective preparation and development of school leaders. In 2016, the Quality-Plus Leader Academy was selected to serve as Exemplary Program Provider in The Wallace Foundation Principal Pipeline Initiative, a $47-million initiative to improve principal preparation.
III2. Growth-Oriented Culture & Professional Growth - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. **Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.**
   
   An ongoing Strategic Initiative of the CEO/ Superintendent’s Office focuses on Leadership Development. The Governance Team is committed to a Leadership Development Program for new and veteran leaders, and the Board and Superintendent participate as faculty for the programs. Professional goals and accountability for continuous improvement are incorporated into employees’ performance-based evaluation processes, and professional staffs’ development is monitored by supervisors through observations and feedback to ensure professional growth leads to improved instructional practices and student outcomes. These improvement cycles are part of the district’s policies and cultural expectations for ongoing development.

2. **Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.**

   • Staff development is a priority within the district, and all employees engage in relevant learning opportunities for a minimum of 20 hours per year, in accordance with Board policy. District staff development courses are vetted prior to delivery to ensure alignment to district priorities and initiatives. Schools align local staff development with their Local School Plan for Improvement (LSPI) goals, which are based on student achievement data. Ongoing, differentiated professional development supports educators’ in implementing professional goals specific to their work. Additionally, all new teachers participate in year-long induction experiences that begin with the New Teacher Orientation. This initial staff development is designed to introduce new hires to the GCPS performance culture and expectations.

   • The Governance Team set policy for the performance-based evaluations to include targeted and timely feedback aligned to specific goals in order to strengthen the continuous improvement cycles for individual professional staff members.

   • The Governance Team sets expectations for collaboration and continuous learning to support educator growth. The Board evaluates the Superintendent based on both student achievement and district progress on strategic goals, priorities, and initiatives.

   • The Results-Based Evaluation System (RBES) measures performance in the achievement of system goals and defines accountability at the district, division, school, and classroom levels. In turn, school progress is evaluated on the RBES Weighted School Assessment (WSA), and school goals and action plans are developed to address areas for improvement. Flexibility is provided to those schools that are achieving system goals to the highest levels, and additional structure is provided to those schools not achieving to their capabilities. The Local School Plan for Improvement (LSPI) guides the instructional work within the school. Teachers’ RBES goals are aligned to the LSPI and student data results. The school and teacher goals are part of the evaluation process, which helps ensure the district’s relentless focus on teaching and learning.

3. **How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.**

   • In the performance-based evaluation process, formal and informal observation data demonstrate improvement in individuals’ performance. Professional staff record their personal reflections about their improvement based on the feedback received in the evaluation process and the data collected. Educators apply their learning to impact instruction with students yielding improved student outcomes.

   • GCPS continues to maintain a pool of qualified candidates for principal and assistant principal positions, ensuring stability in leadership for schools and within the district.

   • One of the four metrics used in calculating a teacher’s score under the Performance-Based Awards system is Professional Growth, which elevates the importance of continuous learning among GCPS.
IV. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

IV1. Current comprehensive curriculum (4.3): A current, comprehensive curriculum is externally aligned with Georgia standards approved by the State Governance Team of Education and internally aligned within and across grade levels and all subject areas in every school. Current Governance Team policies support a systematic review, evaluation and revision of curriculum that includes input from all stakeholder groups. The Governance Team periodically reviews the curriculum for its alignment, delivery, improvement and effectiveness. There is evidence of implementation of Governance-Team-approved curriculum in all classrooms.

IV2. Strong instructional leadership and effective instruction (4.1, 4.2 & 4.3): Instructional leadership and instructional practices are based on evidence from a body of high-quality research and high expectations for all students. The Governance Team periodically reviews instructional leadership and instruction for effectiveness and impact on student performance and supports plans that proactively seek improved instructional leadership and effective instruction. There is evidence that improvement in instructional leadership and instruction has led to increased student performance.

IV3. Balanced and comprehensive system of student assessment (4.4): An effective comprehensive assessment system (e.g. formative, benchmark and summative assessments) measure progress toward subject mastery and student goals in all curricular areas. Ongoing formative and benchmark assessments guide instructional practice, including individual remedial and enrichment requirements. Student performance data are communicated in ways that are clear and meaningful for all stakeholders. The Governance Team periodically reviews the effectiveness of the student assessment system and the clarity of the communication of student performance data. The Governance Team supports plans that proactively seek improved assessment practices for instruction and student performance. Assessment practices have led to improvement in instruction and student performance.

On pages 19-21, please respond to the three application questions for Teaching, Learning & Assessment.
IV1. **Current comprehensive curriculum** - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. **Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.**

   Beginning in 1996, the Governance Team pursued development of the Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS) curriculum, which supports teaching and learning aligned with the Georgia Standards for Excellence. The curriculum is aligned vertically K-12 across all content areas and supported through instructional resources developed and adopted to be coherent with the AKS. All Gwinnett County Public Schools teach the AKS.

   To ensure the AKS remains rigorous and relevant year after year, the Gwinnett Educational Management System (GEMS) Oversight Committee convenes annually to review and update the AKS curriculum. The GEMS committee includes all stakeholders — community members, teachers, local school administrators, and district leaders. Current and proposed AKS are reviewed, evaluated, revised, and recommended for adoption by the Board prior to implementation. Proposed courses are aligned with current Georgia grade level standards/courses or with those proposed to the Georgia Department of Education prior to the GEMS committee’s meeting each year.

2. **Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.**

   • According to Board of Education policy: The Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS) curriculum represents the Board of Education’s accepted content standards for excellence in academic knowledge and skills for all students. The Board of Education has determined that all state-mandated curriculum is incorporated in the AKS. The AKS curriculum is reviewed and evaluated by the professional staff, and shall reflect the essential curriculum for all students as validated by Gwinnett teachers, parents, and the community. The CEO/Superintendent and staff inform the Board of the status and progress of the instructional program and make recommendations for necessary AKS curriculum changes. All AKS content standards shall be approved by the Board.

   • Board of Education policy also states: The Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS) curriculum will be reviewed annually. All input will be presented to the GEMS Oversight Committee, comprised of teachers, administrators, parents, community members, business leaders, and post-secondary educators representative of the district population and geographic diversity. Recommendations from the GEMS Oversight Committee annually will be presented to the CEO/Superintendent for his review and approval, and subsequent presentation to the Board of Education. AKS revisions, deletions, and additions must complete this review and validation process prior to classroom implementation.

3. **How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.**

   • The AKS is an engaging, rigorous curriculum designed to support student learning and student achievement at high levels. The AKS standards are aligned to the Georgia Standards for Excellence, but often extend beyond state expectations. The Gwinnett community actively engages in the review and revision process to ensure student learning needs are being addressed at high levels. The Governance Team reviews all feedback and recommendations prior to implementation in GCPS classrooms.
IV2. Strong instructional leadership and effective instruction - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. **Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.**

   The Governance Team has established in policy its theory of action to maintain and improve a district in which high-performing schools educate all children to high standards; eliminate the achievement gap; provide a quality instructional program that includes a rigorous curriculum, effective teaching, and ongoing assessment; and ensure that all students are taught in a safe and secure learning environment. The Board’s theory of action is managed performance/empowerment. It includes the alignment of adequate resources, effective management, highly qualified teachers, and a rigorous curriculum and assessment program. At its heart is the Board’s belief that Gwinnett County Public Schools must manage for performance.

2. **Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.**

   - It is the Governance Team’s intent that GCPS set standards by Board policy or management directive for all important goals and processes. Where higher standards will promote excellence, the district’s standards will exceed federal and state requirements.
   - The theory of action articulated in Board policy states that central office staff must accept responsibility for directly supporting and managing the district’s core business, teaching and learning, within flexible parameters that balance accountability with empowerment, according to the needs and performance of individual schools. This theory of action provides a framework to align the system’s vision, mission, goals, strategic plan, policies, budgets, and administrative actions. It builds on the Board’s beliefs about how children learn; the conditions that best promote learning; the quality and rigor of Gwinnett’s curriculum; and the policies, management systems, and culture that best promote the commitment and high performance of adults.
   - Building on academic content and performance standards, GCPS maintains a comprehensive instructional management system. Essential elements include a rigorous and aligned district curriculum (the AKS), professional development around the curriculum, a robust student information management system, formative and summative assessments, and high-quality instructional practices supported by carefully calibrated and appropriate interventions and extensions--by child, by teacher, by subject, and by school.
   - The Governance Team supported the establishment of the Quality-Plus Leadership Development Office, which provides district and school leaders with ongoing professional development in the area of effective instructional leadership.
   - It is the expectation of the Governance Team that all GCPS teachers use the district’s research-based Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies as the foundation for proven, effective instruction. Purposeful use of the strategies is monitored at the local school level through regular classroom observation, collaborative lesson development and lesson study, and analysis of student work products and student assessment results. In a district-wide process over the last two years the Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies were reviewed by GCPS educators and reaffirmed as valid teaching strategies for use in today’s classrooms.

3. **How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.**

   - As our student population grows and has become more diverse student learning results have continued to remain strong or increase. GCPS continues to perform above the state and/or national averages on standardized tests administered to students and to be a recognized leader in student performance, despite dramatic changes in the economic and demographic make-up of its student population. As GCPS has become larger, more diverse, and more poor, student achievement has remained high.
IV3. Balanced and comprehensive system of student assessment - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. **Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.**
The Governance Team supported the development and sustainability of Gwinnett County Public Schools’ comprehensive balanced assessment system to ensure meaningful, actionable data is available to all stakeholders to make instructional and programmatic decisions for students and schools. The assessment system includes district-developed formative and summative assessments, as well as state and national standardized assessments. Data from district assessments drives instruction in the schools and provides a benchmark to determine students’ progress towards mastery of the standards, which has led to improvement in instruction and student performance. Summary data is prepared and provided to the Governance Team for review on a regular basis to make determinations in support of curriculum resources, program determinations, professional learning, and funding decisions.

2. **Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.**
The Governance Team has supported and approved the funding for the following:

   - An assessment platform for the disaggregation of student data at the teacher, school, and district level
   - Development of ELA and Mathematics Curriculum-Embedded Performance Tasks at grades 4 and 7 to assess students’ ability to demonstrate knowledge of the curriculum at higher levels of rigor
   - An assessment coach to provide professional learning in targeted schools on the development of formative and common assessments
   - Ongoing professional learning on assessment literacy for teachers on the Assessment Leadership Team, whose responsibility is to review and promote understanding of the data from district assessments
   - Professional learning for administrators on “Leading and Monitoring Common Assessment Development” in the local schools
   - Development of new high school Gateway assessments for social studies* and science based on changes in curriculum, review of Gateway data, and the Board’s interest in increasing students’ knowledge of civics and civic engagement. (*The social studies Gateway assessment was changed from World History to U.S. History in 2017 and a district pilot was conducted in February 2018.)
   - Construction of a district scoring center to facilitate active teacher engagement to enhance their pedagogical knowledge and skills through the scoring of district performance tasks and Gateway assessments
   - Accountability Reports that show school performance on standardized tests are published for every school annually and are shared in hard copy and via the GCPS website.

3. **How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.**
Evidence of effectiveness of the programs supported and funded by the Governance Team is as follows:

   - Assessment platform houses and disaggregates data for over 430 district assessments
   - Over 50,000 formative and common assessments were created by teachers in the assessment platform
   - Over 1,100 teachers have been trained on assessment literacy, and over 400 teachers participate in Assessment Leadership Team activities
   - Curriculum-Embedded Performance Tasks were piloted in grades 4 and 7 with district-wide scoring to begin in June 2018
   - Training on “Leading and Monitoring Common Assessment Development” began in 2017, and Cohort II begins in fall of 2018
   - Because data is readily accessible, decisions that impact student achievement can be made sooner rather than later.
V. Climate, Culture and Stakeholder Engagement

V1. Positive School Climate (8.1, 8.2 & 8.4): A positive school climate is created, shared and implemented among all stakeholders as indicated in Governance Team policies. Ongoing communication with all stakeholders and community involvement informs and supports the implementation of the district vision, mission and goals as outlined in the school district strategic plan. The Governance Team periodically reviews data and feedback on the effectiveness in creating a positive school climate and supports plans that proactively seek improvement of school climate, communication and engagement. There is evidence of a positive school climate, on-going communication and broad participation in school life of all stakeholders.

V2. Culture of Learning, Culture of Innovation & Collaboration (8.3, 8.5, 8.6 & 8.7): A culture of learning and innovation supports practices that establish an environment where success and continuous learning for students and staff are expected, identified and implemented. Collaborative relationships among all stakeholders support effectively working and learning together. Data and feedback are periodically reviewed by the Governance Team on the effectiveness of practices to implement a culture of learning; an environment to support continuous learning for students and staff; and collaborative relationships among all stakeholders. The Governance Team supports plans that proactively seek improvements in creating a culture of learning. There is evidence of continuous improvements in the creation of a culture of learning and engagement for all stakeholders.

V3. Schools as Community Centers: The Governance Team leads the school district in raising the profile of their schools and the district within the community by developing and maintaining partnerships with organizations with a compatible vision for student success. These partnerships may include, but are not limited to, parent/family organizations, civic groups, business and industry, faith-based organizations, and other groups or organizations in the community. Effective, sustainable partnerships provide benefits to both school/district and partner through reciprocal services and/or resources. The Governance Team promotes regular, open communication between the district and its partners.

On pages 24-26, please respond to the three applications questions for Climate, Culture and Engagement.
V1. Positive School Climate - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.

   In its Core Beliefs and Commitments, the Board expresses the Governance Team’s pledge to “govern the district fairly and openly, seeking the engagement of the many stakeholders we serve.” This commitment requires ongoing, two-way communication, active engagement of the public, and a genuine desire to involve the citizenry – the “owners” of the public schools – in the work of those schools. The Governance Team does an exemplary job of meeting these requirements.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.

   - The Governance Team engages the public at regularly scheduled Board meetings, special GCPS events, and the series of Area Board Meetings held in each Board district annually.
   - The GEMS (Gwinnett Educational Management System) Oversight Committee brings together an array of educators and community stakeholders for curriculum input.
   - Each year Board members meet with the Teachers’ Advisory Council in small-group settings to garner their feedback on issues and trends in education. The Superintendent meets with the TAC five times during the year.
   - The Governance Team supports the Gwinnett Student Leadership Team, which develops student leaders within each school who provide the student voice on matters at the district and school levels.
   - As part of GCPS’ Continuous Quality Improvement process, cross-functional action teams of stakeholders work together to study system issues and make recommendations for resolving them.
   - Other key stakeholder groups include the Human Resources Advisory Council, Superintendent’s Business Leaders Council, Community-Based Mentoring, faith-based groups, business and civic organizations, and community non-profit organizations. The Governance Team’s interactions with stakeholders such as these promotes a positive school climate, productive engagement, and stakeholder buy-in.
   - As directed by the Governance Team, annual School Accountability Reports are published to provide information about each school in a consistent format. Each report provides a connection between the Local School Plan for Improvement and the district’s strategic direction. It also explains the school’s score on Georgia’s College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) and how the school fared when considering expected performance based on poverty measures. The Accountability Reports also show results from key assessments, information about student engagement, student and staff data, and other school highlights. These reports are created annually and are posted on each school’s web landing page, ensuring that constituents have easy access to school information. Accountability Reports are unique to Gwinnett, providing information not necessarily found in other state reporting tools. The Governance Team values these reports and insists that they be created each year. The Governance Team shares the reports with constituents as a way for them to view a snapshot of achievement and other highlights from each school.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.

   - GCPS continues to score well on the CCRPI Climate Star Ratings, at the school and district levels, and local perception surveys indicate clearly that stakeholder satisfaction with the schools and the district generally is high, with attention given to areas where improvements are warranted.
   - In 2017 GCPS was awarded the “Outstanding Great District for Great Teachers” award given to just 10 school systems throughout the nation. GCPS and one other district earned the “outstanding” designation.
V2. Culture of Learning, Culture of Innovation & Collaboration - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.

Gwinnett County Public Schools’ core business is teaching and learning. It’s a mantra well-known by everyone who works in the organization. Similarly, a statement repeatedly heard is that in GCPS there are two kinds of employees – those who teach and those who support those who teach. No one wants to find themselves in a third category! It is a strong testament to the culture of learning ingrained throughout GCPS that these statements easily roll off the tongues of its stakeholders, internal and external. The constancy of purpose this shared mission provides has contributed immeasurably to the success of the organization, over years and amidst great demographic change.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.

- Regular meetings and strategic leadership sessions help the executive team foster collaborative relationships and ensure that all areas effectively work and learn together.
- Cross-Functional Action Teams (XFAT) are utilized to address district-wide issues that surface based on customer feedback and supporting data. XFATs consist of a cross section of district and school personnel knowledgeable on the issues. The teams use continuous improvement processes over a 90-day period in formulating their recommendations. The Governance Team receives the XFAT recommendations, and funds those it determines will move the district forward.
- The Governance Team meets periodically with senior Leadership for the purpose of shared learning, strategic planning, and district collaboration. The sessions meet State mandates for annual Board training and allow the Board and senior leaders to have meaningful discussions around the district’s strategic direction.
- The Human Resources Advisory Council (HRAC) provides a collaborative forum for district and community stakeholders to engage in conversations about employment practices, especially as related to minority staffing.
- The Governance Team has established five-year “Strategic Initiatives and Priorities” that drive instructional, leadership, and operational innovation in GCPS. They outline expectations for innovative programming and development during the five-year period, and are updated annually to assure ongoing vision and continuous improvement. They also assure that GCPS resources are appropriately aligned to that work, and that stakeholders keep a laser focus on what is required to continue to propel student success.
- To encourage innovative practices in teaching and learning, the Governance Team supported establishment of the “Innovation and Transformation Award,” a monetary award earned by clusters or schools for imaginative work proven to transform instruction for increased student achievement. Integral to identifying the winners is the CIET Team, composed primarily of principals charged with promoting Creativity, Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Transformation (CIET) across the district.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.

- GCPS staff work together toward a common goal or objective, evaluate the outcome(s), and make adjustments to continuously improve. Two recent examples: Digital Learning Days and the Solar Eclipse Viewing Day.
- Since 1997 HRAC has been a good sounding board for district stakeholders to review GCPS employment needs.
- Implementation and impact of the Strategic Initiatives and Priorities is evaluated annually, with a goal to evolve initiatives into “common practice,” moving from innovation to operational.
- To date, four clusters have earned the “Innovation and Transformation Award.” A requirement of recipients is to share the knowledge gained with other GCPS schools.
V3. Schools as Community Centers - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. **Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.**
   In keeping with its Core Beliefs and Commitments pledge to “govern the district fairly and openly, seeking the engagement of the many stakeholders we serve,” the Governance Team strives to create and maintain partnerships with organizations that serve local children and families. As a result, GCPS is involved with and supported by multiple entities that are invested in the education of Gwinnett’s students. The Governance Team recognizes the need for coordination across these partnerships to optimize educational opportunities for students and to make GCPS resources available to advance the ultimate good of Gwinnett’s citizenry.

2. **Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.**

   The Governance Team supports district partnerships that include the following:

   - **State, county and municipal governments** – Holds periodic joint sessions between the county’s Board of Commissioners and Board of Education to review needs and coordinate responses and services; maintains productive relationships with mayors and city councils to ensure cohesion between city leaders and the schools in their municipalities; promotes ongoing collaboration between the Governance Team and district staff and the County Commission and its staff on matters that impact the two entities that provide critical services to county residents; conducts annual planning session with the Gwinnett Legislative Delegation to preview GCPS’ legislature priorities for the upcoming General Assembly session.
   - **Chambers of Commerce** – Maintains active membership and participation in the Gwinnett and Metro Atlanta chambers of commerce; Superintendent delivers the State of the School System address yearly at a Gwinnett Chamber membership meeting; participates as a leading member in Partnership Gwinnett, a public-private initiative dedicated to bringing new jobs and capital investment to Gwinnett County; jointly sponsors with the Chamber the annual “Principal for a Day” to introduce business leaders to school leaders.
   - **Business community** – Involves business representation in advising district decision-making through the Superintendent’s Business Leaders Council; values school and curriculum-specific advisory groups, such as local school councils; CTE Community Advisory Committee; Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology Advisory Committee; Paul Duke STEM High School Advisory Committee; academy advisory committees; GEMS Oversight Committee, etc.; established and funds community-based mentoring programs for African-American and Hispanic students
   - **PTA/PTSA** – Actively supports membership in and communication with PTA at the local and state levels
   - **General Public** – Welcomes citizen attendance at monthly and special Board meetings; recognizes GCPS partners/contributors during Board meetings; attends numerous celebrations and events in the community.
   - **Statewide Education Organizations** – Participates in state-wide organizations including Georgia School Boards Association, Georgia School Superintendents’ Association, Georgia Parent-Teacher Association, and The Georgia Vision Project.

3. **How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.**

   GCPS has deep and wide support from the Gwinnett community. This is evidenced by the district’s continued endorsement from a variety of entities and institutions. Perhaps most-telling is the district’s success at the polls, with voters approving five successive Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax referenda. Citizens’ repeated approval of this tax speaks to the Governance Team’s stewardship of resources, value to the community at large, and excellence in educating the students of Gwinnett.
VI. **School Finance**

**VI1. Budget Alignment (9.3):** The annual budget is aligned with the school district strategic plan, goals and objectives. Budget are continually reviewed for alignment to the strategic plan and effectiveness in meeting the goals and objectives of the plan. Data is used to track effectiveness of meeting the plan’s goals and objectives and to revise current and future budgets.

**VI2. Resource Management (9.3 & 9.6):** Monitoring of the effectiveness of programs, initiatives and activities guides decisions to continue, enhance or end programs. The Governance Team regularly reviews the cost-effectiveness of programs, initiatives and activities through staff reports including student performance data and analysis of current district progress in achieving the school district strategic plan goals and objectives. There is evidence of improvement in the cost-effectiveness of programs, initiatives, and activities in sustaining and improving the educational function of the district as outlined in the strategic plan.

**VI3. Financial Accountability (9.6):** There is demonstrated accuracy of standard accounting practices, auditing procedures and financial reporting as directed by state and federal regulations as directed by Governance Team policy and reflected in the current version of the Financial Management for Georgia LUAS Manual. A fraud-prevention system and competitive-bidding process are directed by Governance Team policy. There is evidence of reviewing financial reports and future financial forecasting based upon current and prior data from district and audit reports for improved practices.

On pages 29-31, please respond to the three application questions for School Finance.
VI1. Budget Alignment - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.

Gwinnett County Public Schools is the only school district in Georgia and in the Southeast this year to hold triple-A bond ratings from the two major investment houses, Standard and Poor’s and Moody’s Investor Services. The Governance Team prides itself on having such an excellent reputation for fiscal stewardship over many years, and it works diligently to maintain that sterling reputation. Regardless of the economic situation in the state or county, the Board annually adopts a budget that is balanced; is directly tied to the vision, mission, and strategic goals of the district; preserves the necessary fund balance for ensuring fiscal responsibility in succeeding years, and involves a budget-adoption process that seeks internal and external input before action is taken.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.

• Associated with the preparation of each fiscal year’s budget, division heads lead the development of division objectives and operational management plans that align with the current Strategic Initiatives and Priorities of the district as well as the strategic goals adopted by the Board. Funding to accomplish these objectives and OMPs, therefore, is tied to the core business of the district, teaching and learning, and to the activities and resources that support it.

• The Governance Team provides a process for stakeholder review of and input on the proposed budget that is transparent and helps ensure that stakeholder priorities are taken into consideration. This process includes a two-day Superintendent/Cabinet budget workshop; two Board Budget Work Sessions open to the public; two public Budget Hearings; and five Area Board meetings at which budget information is shared in print and in the CEO/Superintendent’s presentation.

• The Governance Team provided funds for an automated budget development process that facilitates the evaluation and prioritization of all budget “improvement” requests submitted by the seven divisions, resulting in optimal use of the district’s financial resources.

• Each month, the Governance Team reviews a “Budget Dashboard” that shows the status of actual expenditures versus those budgeted, allowing the team to continuously monitor the alignment of spending with the budget plan. Board approval is required for monthly budget amendments to ensure continued alignment. Also, an online budget dashboard allows for real-time monitoring of budgeted expenditures at the school and department levels.

• Policies adopted by the Board related to accounting practices, auditing procedures, and financial reporting solidify the Governance Team’s commitment to financial stewardship (e.g., Policy DCKI - Annual Operating Budget; Policy DCI - Budget Amendment; Policy DA - Fiscal Management Goals; and Procedure P.DA - Fiscal Management, which outlines the budget goals/benchmarks/processes to be followed).

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.

In addition to earning and maintaining the AAA and Aaa ratings from both Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s, GCPS is one of only 12 districts to receive a “Financial Efficiency Star Rating” of 4.5 or higher statewide for FY2017. The district’s average expenditure per FTE is $879 less than the statewide average, yet GCPS’ average SAT score is 34 points higher than the state-wide average. In FY2017, the “Unreserved Fund Balance” equaled 11.7% of annual expenditures, higher than the recommended level of 10%.
VI.2. Resource Management - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.

Effectiveness in the allocation and use of resources is an ongoing focus of the Governance Team as part of its business oversight and financial stewardship responsibilities. In addition to optimizing the district’s all-important human resources, the Governance Team ensures that its tangible assets (facilities, vehicles, property, equipment, technology, instructional resources, furnishings, etc.) are acquired, allotted, and maintained to support the strategic direction of the organization. All programs and initiatives are routinely evaluated in terms of the outcomes achieved. Cost-effectiveness and return on investment are key factors in decisions regarding resource acquisition, allocation, and management throughout GCPS.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.

- At the monthly Board work sessions division heads report on academic or operational initiatives undertaken in the district, sharing the outcomes achieved and the associated costs, if applicable.
- Key Performance Indicators are developed for the district that are aligned with the operational management plans crafted by each division that include defined metrics for desired performance.
- The Governance Team demonstrates fiduciary responsibility in the oversight of district-administered benefit programs – dental insurance, vision insurance, and short-term disability.
- The Governance Team is diligent about ensuring the prudent use of tax dollars provided by citizens through the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (E-SPLOST). District staff carefully review E-SPLOST-funded projects and ensures purchases are in keeping with voter approved ballot language and procurement best practices.
- The head of each support division (non-academic) provides an annual presentation (Board Business Oversight Workshop) to the Governance Team, reviewing key topics and issues relevant to the efficient and cost-effective operation of the division.
- Prior to the yearly Open Enrollment, the Board receives an annual update from the Division of Human Resources & Talent Management on the state of district-provided employee benefits.
- A core belief of the Gwinnet County Public Schools Board of Education is that technology can be an instructional strategic differentiator when properly applied. GCPS uses a variety of funding sources to provide for the technology needs of teachers and students, while maintaining a five-year refresh cycle in order to ensure computers are current and provide enough processing power to efficiently deliver digital content and resources.
- With prudent oversight, the Governance Team provided funding and support for eCLASS, the district’s innovative system of applications that provide access to digital instructional content inside and outside the classroom, resulting in successful deployment of eCLASS.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.

- GCPS benchmarks its performance against industry standards, averages, and best practices, with favorable results.
- Key Performance Indicators are measured against state, national and peer-group benchmarks.
- The Board of Education has not had to increase the employee rates for healthcare benefits, despite the rising costs, in over 14 years.
- The Governance Team repeatedly is recognized by state and national organizations for the district’s academic, financial, and operational excellence.
- Academic success was sustained amidst severe budget challenges and enrollment growth for over 15 years.
VI3. Financial Accountability - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.

Financial stewardship is a responsibility the Governance Team holds sacred and, as a result, it focuses all appropriate attention and resources on doing an exemplary job overseeing the financial operations of the school district. The Board and Superintendent continually review and maintain policies and procedures that ensure its accounting practices, auditing procedures, and financial reporting are fiscally sound and above reproach. Long-range strategic forecasting is utilized by the Governance Team in making all financial decisions, from adopting annual operational budgets to maximizing its fiscal assets to developing capital improvement plans to meet the district’s needs for classrooms and technology resources for instruction and administrative functions.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.

- The Governance Team adopted sound fiscal policies, including Policy DCKI Annual Operating Budget; Policy DCI- Budget Amendment; Policy DA-Fiscal Management Goals (and accompanying Procedure P.DA Fiscal Management Procedures), which outline the detailed budget goals/benchmarks/processes to be followed annually.
- The Governance Team adopted Policy DID Internal Audits (accompanied by Procedure P.DID Internal Audits and Procedure P.DIF Fraud), to provide guidance on detailed internal audit and fraud prevention processes.
- Additionally, the Governance Team adopted Policy DJE Purchasing (accompanied by Procedure P.DJE Purchasing and Procedure P.DJEB Purchasing Cards), which spells out the district’s purchasing fraud prevention and competitive-bidding processes.
- The Chief Financial Officer is required by the Governance Team to maintain a five-year strategic financial forecast that is reviewed and monitored by the team on a regular basis. The forecast incorporates data from the current fiscal year budget, the current budget as amended, and the projected budgets for five years forward.
- The CFO provides a monthly review of budgeted versus actual expenditures, along with an explanation of any negative variances, to keep the Governance Team informed of the district’s financial status in a timely manner.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team's practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.

- GCPS is one of only 12 districts to receive a “Financial Efficiency Star Rating” of 4.5 or higher statewide for FY2017.
- The district holds AAA and Aaa bond ratings from both Moody’s Investors Service and Standard & Poor’s, respectively.
- GCPS received “unqualified” audit opinions for FY2015, FY2016 & FY2017 with no findings or questioned costs, as well as “clean” audit opinion for all five years of the SPLOST IV capital program.
- The district has earned the Association of School Business Official’s “Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting” for 30 consecutive years.
- The GCPS Purchasing Department received the following awards: the National Procurement Institute – Achievement of Excellence in Procurement for 2015, 2016, 2017, and the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing – Outstanding Agency Accreditation Achievement Award for three years, 2017-2020.
Communications & Messaging
VII. Communications and Messaging

VII1. Communications Planning (District & BOE Plan)

A district communications plan is in place and contains a clear vision, purpose, goals, research and analysis of the community (internal and external audiences), timelines, communications channels, spokespersons, and information to be communicated. An aligned Governance Team communications plan is also in place to support the work of the Governance Team. The Governance Team communications plan includes the following components: identified goals; a designated spokesperson; strategies to ensure a single, unified voice on issues; and procedures for how the Governance Team will communicate with each other and the superintendent. Both communications plans are aligned to the Governance Team’s Goals outlined in the strategic plan. In addition, a Governance Team Advocacy Plan includes a process to advocate for public education to the community, legislators, businesses, parents and all vested stakeholders.

VII2. Messaging, Branding & Story Telling

The Governance Team has an established brand for visual recognition and marketing. The Governance Team effectively communicates its vision and goals for the district. A plan for communicating the positive stories of the district’s identity, impact, and purpose is in place. Advocacy for public education is embedded into the Governance Team’s messaging and storytelling and communicates the Governance Team’s policies, procedures, and the impacts of state law, legislation, and the State Governance Team rules.

VII3. Communications Evaluation

Performance measures for the objectives and strategies of the district and Governance Team’s Communications Plans have been established and are annually reviewed for effectiveness and alignment to the district strategic plan. There is clear evidence of effective collaboration among the community leadership (legislators, city councils, county commission, chambers of commerce, etc.), the district and the Governance Team.

On pages 34-36, please respond to the three application questions for Communications and Messaging.
**VII1. Communications Planning** - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. **Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.**
   In Gwinnett County Public Schools, communication is a stated strategic priority. The Governance Team expects the district to “promote open, honest, reliable, two-way communication that builds trust and confidence” and that GCPS “share accurate, timely, and relevant information with stakeholders.” With that in mind, the Governance Team ensures that the budget and resources are in place to manage and implement the district’s communication plan, which covers internal/external communication, media relations, social media/electronic media, community relations, as well as support for district initiatives. The Governance Team’s communications plan focuses on the work of the Board and its Core Beliefs and Commitments, targeting our core business of teaching and learning, students, safety, the school effect, their governance work, and stakeholder engagement.

2. **Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.**
   To help GCPS achieve its vision of becoming a system of world-class schools, the Governance Team’s communications exhibit the world-class characteristics expected from schools, including a shared vision of success and a focus on communication with internal and external audiences. For example:
   - Connections between the district’s communication plan and the Governance Team’s work abound, including communication of the Board’s Beliefs and Commitments (i.e., framed copies in all schools, used in districtwide communication, and referenced often in remarks/messages).
   - The Governance Team’s commitment to “govern the district fairly and openly, seeking the engagement of the many stakeholders we serve” is at the heart of its communication plan, serving as its overarching communication goal.
   - The Governance Team models stakeholder engagement, ensuring it is a part of communication planning. Examples include the opportunities built into many practices—e.g., budget public hearings, naming new schools process, redistricting, and instructional materials review processes.
   - The Board chairman serves as the primary spokesperson for the School Board, however, there are opportunities for all members of the Governance Team to share messages and items of importance.
   - Shared key messages on initiatives/issues ensure that the Governance Team speaks with one voice on topics.
   - The Governance Team interacts and shares key communications messages with legislators, community leaders, and others who have an impact on public education.
   - In addition to its monthly meetings, which provide time for citizens to address the Board, the Governance Team holds annual Area Board Meetings in each Board district.
   - Board members contribute to stakeholder engagement by working with staff. For example, this year, a Board member suggested the use of a web-based tool during the Area Board Meetings. This actively engaged attendees, allowing the Governance Team to answer questions and provide information that was most on the minds of those in the audience.

3. **How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.**
   Evaluation is key to the communication planning process. Feedback opportunities allow staff and the Governance Team to continually gauge the communications work. (For example, at the Area Board Meetings the web tool used allowed stakeholders to make comments and rate answers provided by the Board and CEO/Superintendent. Feedback was very favorable.) The Board receives regular updates from the Superintendent on initiatives, including how they are being communicated. Staff adjust the communication plans as necessary to ensure the Governance Team’s goals are met.
VII2. Messaging, Branding & Story Telling - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. **Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.**
   The Governance Team uses key messages to promote the GCPS brand. Key elements of that brand are the vision, mission, strategic goals, logo, schools, people, etc. GCPS has built a strong brand that is recognized and associated with excellence. Additionally, the Governance Team itself has a brand... one that has led it to be recognized as an outstanding example of governance and leadership. The Board’s work to communicate GCPS’ vision/mission/goals and update and communicate its Beliefs and Commitments are central to this Governance Team’s messaging, branding, and storytelling efforts.

2. **Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.**
   - The Boards’ Beliefs and Commitments are key to the Governance Team’s messaging and branding efforts. Becoming a system of world-class schools begins with believing— in the power of education, the potential of children, and the impact of the school. Toward that end, the Gwinnett Board of Education first adopted its Core Beliefs and Commitments in 2006, formalizing the long-held principles that had guided its decisions and were the foundation for the vision, mission, and goals of the district.
   - In 2016, the Governance Team updated its Core Beliefs and Commitments, adding a context piece that contributes greatly to the Team’s messaging, overall branding, and storytelling efforts.
   - Key to the success of the Beliefs and Commitments is the fact they were created by the Board members and Superintendent, truly reflecting what they believe and are committed to regarding public education.
   - GCPS has used the Board’s Beliefs and Commitments to enhance the messages and brand of the district. Messages correlate directly to the commitments and connect to other brand elements like the vision and mission. For example, the message “Teaching and learning is the core business of GCPS” is found within the Board’s commitment to “Ensure our core business of teaching and learning is built on a rigorous curriculum, effective instruction, and high-value assessments.” Likewise, another message “Gwinnett schools are safe” is tied to the Board’s commitment to “Provide a safe and secure learning environment” and our strategic goal to “Ensure a safe, secure, and orderly environment for all.”
   - The district launched and the Governance Team embraced “The Promise of Gwinnett” campaign as part of its storytelling efforts to share the Board’s Beliefs and Commitments. The Team has supported the Promise campaign for three years, providing funding and resources and promoting the Promise. The second year of the campaign focused on “Believe in the Promise of Gwinnett,” providing additional opportunities for messaging and branding surrounding the Beliefs and Commitments. In 2018-2019, the focus is on The Promise of Leadership and Keeping the Promise, critical messages as GCPS continues to focus on leadership development and good stewardship.

3. **How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.**
   The Board’s Beliefs and Commitments are well known throughout GCPS. The district’s key messages promote these principles and are used throughout the organization. The Governance Team repeatedly shares and talks about its Beliefs and Commitments, further enhancing the brand and extending the key messages. In addition, the Promise campaign has proven to be widely recognized and accepted, not only in the school district but also throughout the community.
VII3. Communications Evaluation - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.
   Evaluation is a key to communication and is built into the district’s communication plans. In addition, the CEO/Superintendent’s evaluation focuses on communication objectives of the Governance Team. As part of this evaluation, evidence pieces are presented for the Board’s review that show the district’s effectiveness in meeting these objectives and in advancing GCPS’ strategic direction. The work to achieve many of these communication objectives cannot be done in isolation… it is critical that the Governance Team work with others, engaging them in the story of Gwinnett County Public Schools and encouraging them to share the story.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.
   Since communication goals and expectations are woven throughout the Governance Team’s Core Beliefs and Commitments, as well as in the district’s Strategic Goals and Strategic Priorities, it is important to evaluate and to ensure that this communication is effective and aligned to the overall strategic direction. This type of evaluation is ongoing and takes many forms.
   • Evaluation is a part of major district communication plans.
   • Feedback opportunities are built into key district initiatives and updates are provided to the Governance Team.
   • Annually, the CEO/Superintendent updates his Strategic Initiatives and Priorities. The Strategic Initiatives and Priorities for 2018-2022 are the current version and are the basis for the CEO/Superintendent’s evaluation. One of the Priorities has been and continues to be Communication and Civic Engagement. For 2018-2022, key goals are stated with expectations outlined for each. As part of the evaluation process, the Governance Team reviews evidence pieces to support and evaluate the effectiveness of the district in these areas. Examples of the goals for the Communication and Civic Engagement priority are:
     o Effectively communicate major initiatives among internal and external audiences, sharing clear, concise, and compelling messages.
     o Reinforce accountability and stewardship messages by communicating activity related to and oversight of the 2017-2022 Building Program.
     o Seek input and feedback from external and internal audiences on major decisions before the Board and/or CEO/Superintendent through processes that provide all stakeholders with the information needed to develop informed feedback and clearly specify the channels for submitting that feedback.
     o Use technology resources to expand engagement and communication in a secure and strategic manner. (SchoolMessenger, websites, apps, etc.)
   • The Governance Team supports a partnership with the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce to provide a Principal for a Day experience to business, community, and civic leaders. As part of this experience, participants provide feedback on the overall experience. Additionally, they become part of the storytelling team, sharing what they have learned about GCPS.
   • As part of the Governance Team’s efforts to communicate with and gather feedback from legislators and civic leaders, it funds a Community Liaison/Government Ombudsman. This individual builds relationships, gathers feedback, and provides information to the Team and CEO/Superintendent about legislative initiatives and how key leaders feel about district initiatives and culture.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.
   Feedback and input gathered through qualitative and quantitative evaluation, as well as successful rollouts of key district initiatives, are primary indicators of success.
Early Learning & Student Success
VIII. Early Learning and Student Success

VIII1. Collaboration with local childcare providers and preschools. (3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.6): The Governance Team establishes and maintains partnerships with public and private sector groups that serve young children to ensure that children and their families receive the quality and quantity of services necessary to prepare them for success in school and life.

VIII2. Curriculum and Assessment for Early Learners (3.5): The Governance Team ensures that a curriculum exists for Pre-K through 3rd grade that allows for alignment of standards and assessment both within and across these grade levels. The curriculum promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language and cognitive skills. The Governance Team annually monitors the effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction for early learners.

VIII3. Instruction for Early Learners (3.5): The Governance Team ensures that instruction for children in grades Pre-K through 3rd grade is developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate. The Governance Team annually monitors the effectiveness of the instructional program for early learners.

On pages 39-41, please respond to the three application questions for Early Learning & Student Success.
VIII1. Collaboration with local childcare providers and preschools - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description. Recognizing the importance of preparing children at an early age to be ready to learn when they begin formal Kindergarten, Gwinnett County Public Schools established the Department of Early Learning and School Readiness in 2016. The school district has limited ability to meet the pre-K needs of Gwinnett’s children, due to current demands on resources, facilities, and funding. Therefore, the department is charged with addressing the growing needs for quality birth-through-five programs by serving as the district’s liaison among external partners, including licensed early learning centers, the Gwinnett County Coalition for Human and Health Services, Georgia Early Childhood Interagency Council, and the Metro Atlanta Preschool Consortium. The Director of Early Learning and School Readiness is a member of and serves as the chairperson for the Gwinnett County Coalition for Human and Health Services’ Early Learning Committee, which reaches out to local early learning providers to share information and best practices.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.
   • The Governance Team supported the creation of the Department of Early Learning and School Readiness in order to support those in the community who are directly responsible for the teaching of children aged birth to five years, including parents and early learning centers.
   • The Governance Team established and sustains an environment in which the Department of Early Learning and School Readiness has the flexibility to communicate with licensed early learning centers on an as-needed basis. For example, an email was sent to all local centers regarding Kindergarten registration. It included the registration times for each school as well as informative documents for parents created and funded by the school district. These included the brochures “Counting Up to Kindergarten” and “Tips for Reading with Your Child.”
   • The Governance Team supported the school district hosting a conversation sponsored by the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students’ (GEEARS) with early learning stakeholders in the county. Among the stakeholders were the early learning centers that partner with GCPS in providing pre-K services.
   • Through the aforementioned partnerships and activities, the school district focuses on communicating its expectations for school readiness. Licensed early learning centers receive relevant information that they are encouraged to share with the families they serve.
   • The Governance Team also authorized GCPS’ Department of Special Education and Psychological Services to serve as a resource for early learning centers that request training in specialized instruction. Additionally, to educate parents about quality early learning, the district developed the “Play 2 Learn” program that is based on the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.
   Although the Department of Early Learning and School Readiness is relatively new, the groundwork is being laid for a robust early learning program built on community partnerships. The support of the Governance Team for the GEEARS’ conversation has led to new ideas and partnerships between the Early Learning and School Readiness department and community organizations and businesses.
VIII2. Curriculum and Assessment for Early Learners - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.

Two years ago, the Governance Team supported the creation of the “Play 2 Learn” program for parents of children who are aged birth to five years. The program was instituted at three local elementary schools the first year. The main goal of the program is to build the capacity in parents to be their child’s best teacher for the years leading up to the child entering Kindergarten. The curriculum is based on the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards for children in this age band. The standards promote learning and development in the following domains: Cognitive Development, Communication/Language and Literacy, Approaches to Play and Learning, Social/Emotional Development, and Physical Development. These standards are correlated to the district’s Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS) curriculum standards for Kindergarten, which are aligned with the standards for the succeeding grade levels. The students in the Play 2 Learn program are assessed with a pre- and post-test based on the corresponding GELDS which then aligns to the assessment of the district’s AKS in grades K-3.

2. Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.

- Establishment of the Play 2 Learn program was approved by the Governance Team and funded in the school district’s annual budgets for FY2017 through FY2019, the current budget.
- Through a process involving teachers, leaders, parents, and community partners, the AKS curriculum for grades K-12 is reviewed annually. The board approves the curriculum after hearing suggested revisions that may be needed to ensure social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive skills are appropriately and sufficiently addressed. Since the curriculum for the Play 2 Learn program is aligned to the AKS curriculum for K-12, it is subject to revisions as needed based on changes to the AKS.
- A yearly progress update is provided to the Governance Team in which they have the opportunity to hear about the program successes as well as proposed plans for the upcoming year. The thought provoking questions and reflections on the presentation helps to guide the work.

3. How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.

- Based on promising results from year one, the Play 2 Learn program was expanded from three schools in the 2016-2017 school year to 15 schools in the 2017-2018 school year. Further expansion is being discussed for the upcoming school year.
- Effectiveness of the program is being assessed using a pre- and post-test based on the Georgia Early Learning Standards for each age. Preliminary data show that all students demonstrated gains in their learning. Data from this year’s Kindergarten Readiness Entry Profile, available in October, also will be utilized to measure effectiveness of the program. Student scores will be compared to overall district scores as well as to similar student groups.
VIII3. Instruction for Early Learners - Please respond to the three application questions that relate to this area.

1. **Describe what occurred that is outstanding in the criteria area. Address all areas listed in criteria description.**

   Consistent with the Board of Education’s expectations and support, the CEO/Superintendent ensures that pre-K through 3rd grade teachers are equipped to provide instruction that is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate. Toward this end, the Division of Curriculum and Instructional Support conducts a “Teaching and Learning Conference” each summer in which professional learning sessions are offered that demonstrate best practices in instruction for teachers in all content areas and at all grade levels. To further leverage its professional capital, the Governance Team funds at least one Reading Recovery teacher in each of the district’s 80 elementary schools. Moreover, the CEO/Superintendent and Board have invested in other promising initiatives aimed at improving foundational literacy instruction. These initiatives include the Early Literacy Coaching Cohort, the Early Literacy Conference, and Early Literacy Continuing Education.

2. **Describe how specific Governance Team practices achieved or contributed to the outstanding accomplishment for the criteria area. Describe the Team’s role and/or actions leading to the accomplishment.**

   - The Governance Team has ensured that there are no barriers to improving instructional practices in pre-K through 3rd grade education. Funding is consistently provided for instructional materials, professional development, personnel, and technology to enhance teaching and learning in the early years.
   - In FY2018, the Board ensured that up to 30 additional teachers could receive training in Reading Recovery each year by approving a budget improvement item that allowed for that funding.
   - The Governance Team has set the expectation for on-grade-level performance in literacy and numeracy for all students by the end of grade 3, as measured by the Georgia Milestones End of Grade Assessments.
   - Governance Team members also have shown a commitment to learning more about the impact of early learning on future student success. That learning has led to engagement around the strategies and benchmarks outlined in the “Learn4Life” initiative launched by the Metro-Atlanta Regional Education Partnership. Learn4Life focuses on a trajectory that extends from Kindergarten readiness through employment in a six-county area.

3. **How do you know it worked? Describe the evidence that demonstrates the Governance Team’s practices were effective in meeting the criteria area.**

   Gwinnett County Public Schools has the largest Reading Recovery program in North America. Most notable is the fact that 82% of Gwinnett’s students who begin the program “discontinue” from Reading Recovery in 1st grade. These students exit Reading Recovery as on-grade-level readers. Longitudinal data indicates that the vast majority continue to read at or above grade level through 5th grade. Furthermore, data on the quarterly assessments taken by students in the primary grades continues to reflect high levels of achievement for all learners in reading and mathematics.
Thank you for completing the application for the first GSBA Governance Team of the Year!

Please save this document, then email as an attachment to Tony Arasi at tarasi@gsba.com. Good luck to you.