



STAR Academy

A Proposed Pre-kindergarten through 8th grade STEAM School
Charter School Application

25 July 2016

Submitted to Alabama Public Charter School Submission

Submitted by: Jonta Morris, STAR Academy Executive Director/Founder and
Farrah Nicole Martin, Charter School Consultant
(On behalf of STAR Academy's Board of Directors)

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Letter of Intent

**New Rising Star Community Support Corporation
7400 London Ave.
Birmingham, AL 35206**

June 7th, 2016

**Alabama State Department of Education
Office of Public Charter Schools
50 North Ripley Street
P.O. Box 302101
Montgomery, Alabama 36104**

Re: Letter of Intent For A Start-Up Charter School

To Whom This May Concern:

I am Thomas Beavers, the Senior Pastor of New Rising Star Church and Interim Executive Director of the New Rising Star Community Support Corporation where our mission is to make Eastlake a community of choice through education and housing initiatives. The purpose of this letter is to share our intent to submit an application for a start-up charter school to the Alabama Public Charter School Commission.

Currently, the New Rising Star Community Support Corporation's educational efforts already include an Early Learning Center (6 weeks-4 years old), After School Enrichment, Spring Break Enrichment, and Summer Camp Enrichment. Our next step to improve the quality of life in our community is to launch STAR Academy as a means to restore hope, value, leadership, and empowerment to the people and future of our city. Our core belief is that demography does not determine destiny- all children, regardless of zip code and socioeconomic status, are deserving of a high quality education that prepares them for the demands of the 21st century workforce.

STAR Academy (STAR) will serve students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade and our hope is to open in August 2017 to a diverse population of students in Birmingham, AL. STAR will utilize an integrated Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) and project-based instructional model with a focus on literacy instruction, personalized learning, and character education. Our curriculum will be anchored by national and state standards for learning in all core subjects.

Please let us know if you need any additional information before we submit our application before the August 1st deadline.

Warmest regards,

Dr. Thomas Beavers
New Rising Star Church, Senior Pastor
New Rising Star Community Support Corporation, Interim Executive Director



7400 London Ave., Birmingham, AL 35206



Cover Letter and Enrollment Projections

Name of Proposed School: STAR Academy

Primary contact person(s): Jonta Morris & Thomas Beavers

Mailing address: 1731 Oak Park Lane

Helena, AL 35080

Phone (day and evening): Jonta: 720.326.9609; Thomas: 205.317.3107

Email: Jonta: jonta.l.morris@gmail.com; Thomas: pastortb@nrschurch.org

Primary contact for facilities planning: Thomas Beavers

Phone number: 205.317.3107

Email: pastortb@nrschurch.org

Name of entity or interest group applying: New Rising Star Community Support Corporation

Names, roles, and current employment of all persons materially involved in the presentation of this application or the organization or governance of the proposed school:

Full Name	Current Job Title and Employer	Position with Proposed School
Farrah Martin	Aman STEAM Academy	Consultant
Thomas Beavers	Pastor, New Rising Star	Voting board member/advisor
Ruben Morris	Executive Director, New Rising Star Community Support Corporation	Advisor

Does this applicant entity or interest group have charter school applications under consideration by any other authorizer(s) in the United States? Yes No

State	Authorizer	Proposed School Name	Application Due Date	Decision Date

Provide school opening information.

Opening Year	*Geographic area	Opening Grades	Grade Level at Full Enrollment
2017	East Birmingham	Pre-kindergarten through 1 st grade	Pre-kindergarten through 8 th grade

Model or focus of proposed school.

Science, Technology, Engineering, integrated Arts, & Math (STEAM)

Does the school intent to contract with a third-party education service provider (ESP) to manage the educational program and operations of the school?

Yes No

If yes, identify the ESO or other partner organization: _____

Proposed Principal/Head of School Information (If Identified):

Name of proposed principal candidate: Jonta L. Morris

Current employment: Principal Resident; Greenwood Academy K-8

Daytime phone and cell: 720.326.9609

Email: jonta.l.morris@gmail.com



Executive Summary

STAR Academy (STAR) will serve students in grades Pre-kindergarten through 8th and will open in August 2017 to a diverse population of students in Birmingham, Alabama. STAR will utilize an integrated Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) and project-based instructional model with a focus on literacy instruction, personalized learning, and character education. Our curriculum will be anchored by national and state standards for learning in all core subjects.

Mission: The mission of STAR Academy is to educate and empower our students to reach their limitless potential, by providing them with rigorous academic preparation within a joyful and nurturing community focused on developing personal success factors, problem-solvers, and leaders to create a better world for themselves and others.

Vision: At STAR Academy, we believe all children possess the inherent capacity to excel and learn. Our students are shining stars who have ideas that should be valued and cultivated. We create meaningful and lasting experiences that allow our stars to shine the light on what is possible. Stars make their own energy, producing light and are empowered to discover their limitless potential. We are proud of who we are as individuals and as a village and will use our voices to seek justice for humanity for a better community and world.

In accordance with the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act, the founders of STAR Academy believe that “different students learn differently and public schools should have the ability to customize programs that fit the needs of individual students.” Students of all backgrounds should have access to high quality instruction and schools should have the capacity to implement innovative ideas that can address individual learning needs.

STAR Academy, we believe that a high-quality education is the foundation upon which children build and realize their highest potential. Our commitment is to prepare our students for a changing local, national, and global context by re-envisioning our educational approach, and in so doing, foster a generation of change-agents, innovators, and leaders that not only think with their mind and heart. We also believe meaningful and lasting learning experiences do not happen in isolated silos, but are interconnected, and thus, so should academic learning in schools. We believe that children are naturally curious, observant, and creative and that it is our goal as a school to nurture these by providing authentic exploration and investigative opportunities beginning when children are young. We believe the visual and performing arts invite creativity and innovation, while science and technology-based instruction develops problem-solving and critical thinking skills that are needed to make personal and professional decisions in an ever-evolving world. We believe the sciences, technology, engineering, and the arts are catalysts for this creative expression and the building of skills that are needed for future-ready scholars, leaders, and citizens. Likewise, we believe, no matter what a child does when he or she “grows up”, success and happiness at home, in school, and in the workplace will be enhanced greatly if that child has a foundation of strong language skills; And that child has a much better chance of developing strong language skills with a focus on language development and literacy as early as possible.

STAR Academy will prepare students for this future environment by implementing our vision, mission, and philosophy through a STEAM (integrated science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) model that infuses a focus on literacy throughout its curriculum and instructional themes.

Shared Institutional Values: Our shared values represent the foundation for everything we do at STAR Academy and are central to our program and results. STAR is built on six shared institutional values in which our teachers, leaders, support staff, and board members will exemplify a strong commitment towards our culture, curriculum, and performance measured by:

1. **Empowerment** – providing the right environment and opportunities to nurture a set of skills and habits of mind that will empower students to make independent and responsible decisions.
2. **Equal Access** – all students, regardless of ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural, or geographic backgrounds, should have access to first-class instructions and enrichment opportunities.
3. **Innovative Curiosity** – children and adults should become familiar with the opportunity to consider new possibilities, take responsible risks, and explore creative solutions.
4. **Authentic Experiences** – true learning and transfer of knowledge is fostered when students are provided authentic learning experiences that allow for meaningful and relevant real-life connections, reflection, and application.
5. **Perseverance and Follow Through** – we do not believe in blame or excuses, but hard work and results; we resist complacency and continually push ourselves to learn and grow at all times; when a problem arises, we find a solution and implement quickly; we are relentless about excellence and are resilient, refusing to back down and committed to accomplish our goals and mission.
6. **Collaboration and Diversity** – by embracing and celebrating individuality and differences, people with differing perspectives and experiences can identify opportunities to materialize a shared vision and common commitments.

The STAR Academy school model will build students academically, socially, emotionally, and in character. When a “star” (student) leaves STAR Academy we expect to see the following exhibited in each of these areas:

- **Academic-** Be literate and/or bi-literate; well-rounded learners possess a love and joy for learning, regardless of the content; Possess the capacity to connect in school learning to outside school experiences; Be equipped with a rich vocabulary that can be used to express academic and personal ideas and thoughts with people from varying life groups; competitive in their respective fields; Outperform their peers on district and state assessments and rank among the top performing schools in the country
- **Character-** Appreciate others and diversity, empowered with the life skills that will allow them to make informed decisions for their lives; Possess the resilience to push beyond and overcome obstacles; be wholesome in character

- **Social-** Have an awareness of social etiquette that will allow them the capacity to thrive in diverse social environments; Maintain a service mindset and sense of responsibility to their community that empowers them to leave a legacy for future generations; Be financially literate; Possess the advocacy skills to advocate for themselves and issues in which they find themselves passionate
- **Emotional-** Possess self-confidence and a sense of self-pride, and maintain coping and outreach skills that build the foundation for emotional constancy

Educational Need and Anticipated Student Population: STAR Academy founders realize the need and opportunity to offer a high-quality, STEAM and literacy focused educational option to the students and families in East Birmingham. Birmingham City Schools (BCS) is the fourth largest school district in Alabama, with 42 schools (18 elementary, 8 middle, 8 K-8, 7 high, and 1 alternative). According to the 2010-11 average daily membership, the Birmingham City Schools System has approximately 25,798 students. This is a promising number considering the loss of over 12, 643 students from the BCS system since 2003.¹ The loss of students has impacted the school system, forcing the closure of seven schools and resulting in equal measures of state funding cuts. The Alabama Accountability Act: Failing Schools classifies a failing school as the bottom 6% of Alabama schools for the 2014-15 school year based on the state's standardized assessments (ACT Aspire, Plan, and Alabama Alternate Assessment in reading and math.² Testing 3rd-8th graders on the ACT Aspire and 10th graders on ACT Plan, 18 of Birmingham City Schools are considered failing schools. In 2014-15, 85.24% of BCS's third grade students did not meet or partially met (Levels I and II) state Reading academic content standards proficiency expectations and 70.83% did not meet or partially met state Mathematics academic content standards proficiency expectations.

Science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics (STEAM) are crucial fields when it comes to driving innovation. Yet businesses are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit qualified STEAM employees into their workforce. Overall there are 3.6 unemployed individuals for every open job listing, yet there is a definite shortage of candidates when it comes to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) jobs.³ For every open STEM job listing there is only one qualified unemployed individual, and that gap will only increase.

Three-quarters of the fastest growing occupations require significant mathematics or science preparation. By 2018, there could be 2.4 million unfilled STEM jobs. While jobs overall are predicted to grow just shy of 10 percent by 2018, STEM jobs are predicted to grow by 17 percent. More than half of this growth will be made up of computer careers, and more than a quarter will be engineers and technicians. Life/physical scientists, architects and surveyors, and mathematical sciences make up the remainder. However, US elementary schools devote an average of 2.3 hrs./week to science, a decline of 43 minutes since 1994.⁴ Analysis of Birmingham City Schools' fifth grade science ACT Aspire assessment

¹ http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2014/04/student_population_stabilizing.html

² <http://www.bhamcityschools.org/Strategic%20Plan>

³ <http://www.adeccousa.com/engineering-and-technical/employer-services/resource-center/Pages/stem-jobs-infographic>

⁴ <http://www.blackenterprise.com/education/be-smart-stem-facts-that-may-shock-you/attachment/stem-facts-that-should-shock-you/>

shows 84.72% of students within the district either did not or partially met state academic standards expectations in 2014-15.⁵

Many believe the STEM skills gap lies with education, and they are partly correct. Currently there are 271,000 graduates per year who earn a degree within STEM, yet there are 277,000 job vacancies at all education levels in the STEM category. This leaves 6,000 STEM vacancies unaccounted for. U.S. colleges are only graduating enough computer science engineers to fill 30 percent of STEM jobs by 2020.

African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, and Alaska Natives, historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, accounted for 10 percent of the country's workers in science and engineering in 2010; up slightly from 7 percent in 1993, but still a far smaller proportion than their share of the general population, which was 26 percent.⁶ Women were also underrepresented in the science and engineering workforce. While they represent half of all college-educated workers in the United States, they made up just 28 percent of science and engineering workers in 2010; an increase from 21 percent in 1993.

Three-fifths of students in public 2-year colleges and one-quarter in 4-year colleges and universities require at least 1 year of remedial coursework.⁷ About 20 percent of all 4-year colleges and universities graduates less than one-third of their first-time, full-time, degree-seeking first-year students within six years.⁸ Of the 45 percent of students who start college and fail to complete their degree, less than one-quarter are dismissed for poor academic performance. Most leave for other reasons. Research suggests that the reasons students are not entering into STEM jobs is not due to student's performance or attitude attributes, but instead are closely linked to an early loss of interest in science and feeling overwhelmed by the academic vocabulary and rigor of STEM curriculum.

A critical factor for student success in post-secondary education and in the 21st Century workforce is their pre-college experience. Students' academic preparation in K-12 schools has significant value in their success in college and careers. The factory model approach to K-12 education (adopted more than 150 years ago) finds its premise on teaching students only the essential skills needed for them to work in low-knowledge fields (farming and factories). Today, however, our world is much more complex and diverse, and therefore, so is the thinking, problem-solving, and innovative capacities of those who continue to move the world forward.

Millions of American children get to fourth grade without learning to read proficiently, and that puts them on the high school dropout track.⁹ The ability to read is critical to a child's success in school, life-long earning potential and their ability to contribute to the nation's economy and its security.

In May 2010, the Annie E. Casey Foundation published a KIDS COUNT special report, *Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, to launch the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

⁵ <https://www03.alsde.edu/accountability/accountability.asp>

⁶ <http://www.usnews.com/news/stem-solutions/articles/2014/02/06/minorities-women-still-underrepresented-in-stem-fields-study-finds>

⁷ Adelman 2005; Horn and Berger 2004; U.S. Department of Education 2004

⁸ Carey 2004

⁹ <http://www.aecf.org/resources/early-warning-why-reading-by-the-end-of-third-grade-matters/>

Early Warning summarized the research basis for focusing on grade-level reading proficiency as an essential step toward increasing the number of children who succeed academically, graduate from high school on time and do well in life and the workforce.

Early-grade reading proficiency in the United States continues to be unacceptably low for students from low-income families and children of color. New research has helped quantify and reinforce the correlations that Early Warning drew between poverty, failure to read proficiently and failure to graduate from high school. Sociologist Donald Hernandez found that children who do not read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers. Black and Hispanic children who are not reading proficiently in third grade are twice as likely as similar white children not to graduate from high school (about 25 vs. 13 percent).¹⁰

When we add poverty to the analysis, the findings are even more sobering. Hernandez found that the graduation failure rate for children who cannot read proficiently and are poor for at least one year is 26 percent, or more than six times the rate for all proficient readers. Overall, 22 percent of children who have lived in poverty do not graduate from high school, a figure about three times greater than the rate for children with no family poverty experience.¹¹

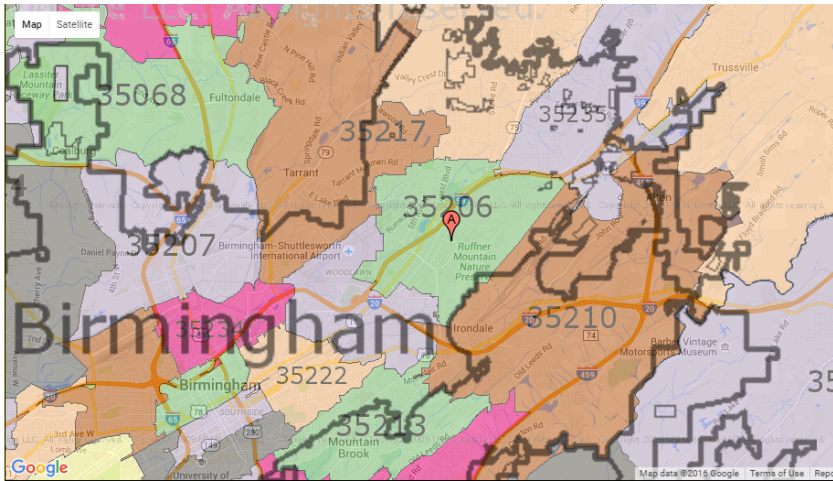
STAR Academy is projected to open in Century Plaza, a former shopping center located in East Birmingham and the Birmingham City Schools district. Data from the 2013-14 ACT ASPIRE assessment shows that 82.98% of third grade students in Birmingham City Schools either did not or partially met (Levels I and II) state academic content standards.¹² This number grew to 85.24% in 2014-15.

STAR's proposed facility is located in zip code 35206, surrounded by approximately eight other zip codes (see map below). Conducting a demographic analysis of all of the communities surrounding that projected location of our school (shown as point A on the map below), we placed emphasis on zip codes 35206, 35210, 35213, 35222, 35234, 35217, 35235, 35207, 35212.

¹⁰ <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-EarlyWarningConfirmedExecSummary-2013.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-EarlyWarningConfirmedExecSummary-2013.pdf>

¹² <https://www03.alsde.edu/accountability/accountability.asp>



Within these boundaries, there are approximately ten district managed schools K-5, K-8, and 6-8 schools. Of the 10 elementary and middle-school programs in East Alabama, as low as 67.30% of students (W.J. Christian School) and as high as 88.37% (Inglenook School) did not meet or partially met third grade Reading state academic content standards proficiency expectations in 2013-14. In

2014-15 as low as 63.05% of students (W.J. Christian School) and as high as 92.39% (Hayes K-8 School) did not meet or partially met third grade Reading state academic content standards proficiency expectations in 2014-15.¹³

The current educational approach is not setting students on course to achieve their personal best or to be on course for secondary, post-secondary, and life success. Now is the pivotal time to re-envision what education can look like an offer to our students and families. The captured image is one in which students are able to engage in 21st Century thinking and learning skills, working collaboratively on projects, engaging in learning experiences that connect skills, and concepts from various subjects into the bigger picture of life and work.

Integrating the arts into a STEM education (STEAM) is not just about art projects in class, but using arts standards with core curriculum to connect learning and engage students. When students are enthusiastically participating in the learning process, it makes learning fun...even in science and mathematics classes that can typically be viewed as intimidating. The engagement ultimately boosts academic achievement and forges authentic learning experiences that lay the foundation for future careers. STEAM also allows teachers to more effectively reach minority and second-language students through hands-on, collaborative instruction and activities. The group-work environment often forces students who previously sat back to engage and ask questions in order to understand what their role in the group is and better contribute. Exposing students to this educational framework and encouraging the use of creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills at the very foundational stages of learning increases their interest in STEAM fields, increasing the chance they pursue those as careers. Embedding a strong focus on literacy, provides students with the tools and concepts to not just be good readers, but to comprehend what they read in a manner by which they can formulate their own ideas and opinions about the information they have read. STAR Academy founders realize the need and opportunity to offer a high-quality educational option to the students and families in East Birmingham and are postured to provide that to the deserving students and families in this community.

¹³ <https://www03.alsde.edu/accountability/accountability.asp>



The STEAM curriculum, which builds its foundation on interdisciplinary and problem/project-based learning, allows students to connect their learning. This creates the context by which more enduring or lasting learning can take place. STEAM also allows teachers to more effectively reach minority students through hands-on, collaborative instructions and activities. The group-work environment often forces students who were previously sat back to engage and ask questions in order to understand what their role in the group is and better contribute. The literacy focus of STAR also seeks to ensure students can read and comprehend school level complex texts as well as to utilize and comprehend academic and career language that empowers them to competitive throughout their educational and professional paths.

The children and families of East Birmingham require a school whose model can address their specific needs and prepare them for future academic and personal success. The school intends to serve 248 Pre-Kindergarten through first grade students in year one, growing to 1016 students at full build-out in year eight. Based on the demographics of the local community and other nearby schools, we anticipate that 95% of our students will meet eligibility for the free and reduced lunch (FRL) program, 3% will be English language learners, and 10% will require special education services.

Enrollment Summary: STAR Academy will open in August 2017 with 248 students in Pre-kindergarten-1st grade. The slow implementation model has become the accepted best practice for new start-up schools. We will add one grade level each consecutive year. At full enrollment the school will serve 1016 students in Pre-kindergarten-8th grade. The following chart illustrates the grades served in each academic year. At each grade level, there are four classes of students. The numbers reflected in year one, and the model carried over into subsequent years, is 20 students per pre-kindergarten class (4 year olds that have been potty-trained), and 26 students per class in grades kindergarten and beyond. These projected numbers will allow our school to serve the maximum number of families, while still maintaining a classroom structure that allows for individualized learning.

Grade	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Pre-K	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
K	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
1	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
2		104	104	104	104	104	104	104
3			104	104	104	104	104	104
4				104	104	104	104	104
5					104	104	104	104
6						104	104	104
7							104	104
8								104
Total # of Students	248	352	456	560	664	768	872	976

Education Plan/School Design: There are six major tenets of our educational program:

STEAM: STEAM is an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics. The idea emphasizing these subjects in delivering curriculum has been driven by the business community, with the goal of preparing an agile and competitive workforce. However, there is a growing national push to blend science and the arts. It is important to note that STEAM is not a program, but a philosophy. In the real world, content knowledge is interwoven, layered, and sophisticated, not experienced in isolation such as in traditional educational settings (separate math time, separate science time, etc.). The goal of STEAM is to foster the true innovation that comes with combining the mind of a scientist or technologist with that of an artist or designer. STEAM skills are vital for success in the 21st Century and critical to our collective future. STEAM education teaches flexible thinking, risk-taking, and creative problem-solving needed to solve today’s most complex and pressing challenges. Students are engaged in authentic learning experiences that teach them to explore the world around them, create innovative solutions to problems, and communicate their results while learning the foundational skills of science, technology, engineering, the arts, mathematics, and content literacy.

The goal of STEAM is to foster the true innovation that comes with combining the mind of a scientist or technologist with that of an artist or designer so that students acquire the creative problem-solving, flexible thinking, and risk-taking needed to solve today’s and tomorrow’s most complex challenges.

A study by the National Endowment for the Arts shows that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who actively participated in the arts tended to score better in science and writing, and were more likely to aspire to college. The hands-on, engaging activities at the core of integrated STEAM curricula creates a natural environment for language development. Inquiry-based learning makes vocabulary come to life, and helps young people get exposure to the academic variety of English necessary for success in school, college, and careers. The group-work and team-oriented activities common to integrated STEAM instruction provide learners with additional time to speak

and listen to English in a low-pressure setting. Ultimately, STEAM provides the underpinnings for every child to be successful in college, work, and life. STEAM graduates are problem solvers, innovators, inventors, and creative thinkers.

Interdisciplinary, Authentic Learning Experiences (Thematic Instruction): Thematic, or integrated, instruction is an interdisciplinary teaching approach that presents subject matter according to themes or topics. Each theme or topic is presented in extended units so that students have enough time to develop understanding and to find connections to what they know and value. This approach integrates basic disciplines like reading, writing, math, and science with the exploration of a broad subject such as communities, water conservation, or the use of energy. Integrated instruction engages students in a variety of learning activities, and encourages students to explore topics deeply. We believe that learning becomes “sticky” when it drives student-driven, teacher facilitated, complex and nuanced, and framed in a “real world” context.

Thematic Instruction: the organization of a curriculum around a general idea or “themes” that have meaning to the learner

STAR’s instructional model will encompass elements of Expeditionary Learning (guiding questions, kickoff experiences, and case studies) and Design Thinking (public displays of learning and the design process) through a focus on building literacy skills and capacity among our students.

The curriculum at STAR Academy is integrated into STEAM units with unique themes that combine and intertwine concepts in language arts, math, science, social studies, emphasizing cross-curricular connections, and transfer and generalization of learning. Students will have opportunities to explore their local community in early grades, the state of Alabama in upper elementary grades, the United States in early middle school, and eventually the world when STAR reaches full capacity. All learning experiences will focus on student exploration, evaluating differing perspectives, communicating new ideas, and communal action. Students will participate in up to six learning experiences a school year grounded in anchor literacy and math national and state standards in all content areas.

Project-based learning (PBL): Project-based learning requires students to use real-world topics to begin in-depth investigations. In this approach students select an issue that holds meaning for them—it may be a situation occurring within the school or one occurring outside of school in the broader community. In some models, stakeholders from the community generate project ideas that are particularly relevant. When designing the project, it is essential that students are actively involved in decision making and that content standards are embedded. We believe learning should take place in and out of the classroom. Teachers will design rubrics to measure student mastery of projects and learning experiences as formative and summative assessments of student learning. Teachers at STAR will collect data on student learning and respond to it by adjusting instructional plans in real time. Students who do not master a daily objective receive targeted remediation the same day.

Personalized Learning: At STAR, we believe that children learn best when learning is personalized so students can be challenged every day. We also believe that support should be personalized. Every student has unique gifts and individual needs; learning supports should reflect this. Each student will be held to the same high expectations but will be allowed to reach them in a way that reflects their individual learning style. Classrooms and instruction will reflect multiple learning modalities including blended learning options, small group instruction, self-directed learning, project-based learning, and high levels of differentiation. STAR will have a personalized learning platform to enable students to access all of their online self-directed content, track progress toward their goals and take assessments to determine mastery of concepts, skills, and standards. Each student will receive a personal learning plan that will remain fluid based on student data and performance. Plans will be designed collaboratively with the student, family support network, and his/her teacher. Goals and a “How I Learn Best” playlist for each content area will be established in three-week learning cycles to be revisited at the end of each cycle with the student and team. In addition, each *Star* will have a dream team who will build motivation to take charge of their learning and connect their schoolwork to long-term dreams. Long-term goals then translate into more concrete monthly goals and daily to-dos. To ensure student’s goals and dreams stay at the forefront, the dream team will be comprised of the student, peers, a goal coach, mentor, and family members. These members will be charged with the mentorship and encouragement necessary to ensure the star reaches their goals and help foster to intrinsic motivation to succeed.

At STAR, we believe quality instruction and standards-based teaching are equally significant parallels. Our teachers align their instruction to national and state language, mathematics, and science standards and expect students to master all identified skills and concepts. Teachers at STAR will collect data on student learning and respond to it by adjusting instructional plans in real time. Students who do not master a daily objective receive targeted remediation the same day.



Whole Child Character Development: Our educational philosophy starts with educating the whole child. We believe an excellent education requires not only academic rigor but also personal success factors (character). As we move deeper into the 21st century, the need for 21st century skills are becoming more and more apparent. Our approach to meeting this need revolves around identifying a core set of researched character traits and providing direct instruction on those skills. This approach begins with STAR character traits being modeled by all adults in the building first.

All student culture and behavior systems will be tied to this core set of character traits. Teacher designed lessons, modules, learning experiences/projects, performance tasks, and assessments will all either teach, reinforce, measure, or assess student mastery of STAR's core character attributes. Students will receive mastery reports of character development along with mastery reports of academic standards.

Character objectives will be planned and taught daily in concert with regular learning objectives. Students will have multiple opportunities in multiple modalities to learn both personal character development and community development. The character development program is not an add-on or a support. Whole child development will be engrained in all we do including the wrap around services and learning supports we offer. All response to intervention systems will be grounded in our character development system given that most children of color are mistakenly identified as students requiring special education services when root causes of student motivational challenges can be addressed in the general education classrooms with the right supports.

Leadership and Service Learning: At STAR, we believe that education is a civil right. However, we also believe that those who have rights also have responsibilities. We believe that we are not only educating Birmingham's future leaders but also the world's future leaders. We are preparing students for careers and opportunities that are yet to exist.

We believe that students should leave STAR with a global mindset and local agenda. Our students will be equipped with a sense of global curiosity, local understanding, and universal responsibility. All students and staff will be required to engage in school wide service days and community action projects. We aim to create an equipped, organized, and mobilized corps of servant leaders.

Learning experiences will be grounded in local and global social justice issues. Students will explore opportunities through a foundation of literacy and math state and national standards with a lens of personal and communal responsibility grounded in authentic design challenges and learning experiences/projects chosen by students to facilitate a deep sense of agency, empathy, and service.

We will seek out like-minded partner organizations to provide resources, training, opportunities, and experiences to help students drive their service passions. Students will be celebrated and rewarded for their ideas and efforts first and foremost by the overwhelming sense of community these projects and efforts will foster. Secondly, leadership and service will be a direct means of earning privileges and rewards as a part of the school character development plan and student behavior management system.

Leadership and Governance: Jonta Morris, the school's founder and executive director, is leading STAR Academy's development efforts. Mrs. Morris' passion to create lives of choice of opportunity for children is fueled by the more than one thousand students that she has had the privilege to impact



throughout her journey as an educator, but more importantly who have had a greater impact on her. These children have not come from affluent zip codes nor statistically speaking, are expected to excel in America. Mrs. Morris believes that she must be the change agent who will help students defy the odds stacked against them because their zip code or skin color will not limit their potential.

A Teach for America alumnus, she taught first grade to 23 shining stars in Atlanta, Georgia. After two years in a traditional classroom, Jonta joined KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) as a kindergarten teacher in Bronx, NY. It is here where Jonta began to hone her instructional abilities and witness a village contributing to growing children's dreams. Mrs. Morris then had the wonderful opportunity to relocate to Denver, Colorado to aid in opening the first KIPP school in the Montbello community. It is here where Jonta taught middle school reading and became the school's first assistant principal. She transitioned to Denver Public Schools to help transform a priority turnaround school and her contributions resulted in significant academic and culture achievement. Jonta has also participated in two Denver Public Schools' principal residency/preparation programs: AP Ascent and Learn to Lead. Jonta is currently completing a year-long fellowship with KIPP-the largest charter management organization in the country. The Fisher Fellowship is one of the most reputable and highly successful fellowships in the country and is tailored for school leaders opening schools. Mrs. Morris holds a Masters of Educational Supervision and Leadership from National Louis University.

STAR Academy is building a strong governing board and founding team with the capacity to effectively oversee policies and the governance of the school. The board development effort is being spearheaded by local pastor and planning team member, Thomas Beavers.

Section 1: Educational Program Design and Capacity

Educational Program Overview

Philosophy and Research: STAR Academy is a new school model designed to help develop the best prepared students in the world. STAR will provide rigorous, high-quality instruction within a nurturing school community focused on developing self-motivated learners, problem-solvers and leaders. Students will benefit from more small group learning, greater access to technology, deep and meaningful enrichment opportunities (such as music, foreign language, martial arts & STEM inventions), and extended field trips that allow students to go deeper in an area of interest and experience hands-on learning in more authentic and engaging ways.

At STAR Academy five core educational beliefs guide our educational program:

- 1. *Children learn best when academic learning is connected to real life through authentic learning experiences.*** Authentic learning engages all the senses. Brain-based research shows that using all senses maximizes the learning experience.¹⁴ Interacting, manipulating, exploring, collaborating, discussing openly, and sharing for meaningful reasons optimize learning. Authentic learning experiences place emphasis on the quality of process and innovation. More than just understanding teacher-speak and regurgitating content, authentic learning experiences develop a body of skill sets and self-motivated inquiry methods in children that extends beyond the walls of a classroom. Content-driven education is a linear learning model that will fail to provide our students with the skills needed to address the steep challenges of the 21st Century. Content always changes, but processes are forever. On a planet that is rapidly changing, creating authentic learning opportunities in schools is critical to providing students with the tools to meet these challenges.
- 2. *An integrated learning environment and curriculum promotes discovery and imagination, and allows children to pursue learning in a holistic way.*** Also called “thematic instruction,” “cross-content instruction,” and “multi-disciplinary instruction,” integrated instruction focuses on connections in learning rather than on isolated skills and knowledge. Integration acknowledges and builds on the relationships which exist among all things. An integrated learning environment emphasizes the interconnectedness between academic learning and the real world, making a child’s classroom more relevant to what is going on in their lives outside of school; thus, it emphasizes critical thinking, problem solving, and inquiry. This approach develops the child’s ability to acquire and use basic skills in all the content areas and transfer their learning to other settings.
- 3. *Students learn best when given meaningful applications for learning that demonstrate mastery of content and process.*** Students involved in projects and hands-on learning take greater responsibility for their learning. Implementing multi-sensory activities and meaningful tasks, and exploring a variety of skills through real-world application provides students the

¹⁴ <http://www.authenticlearning.weebly.com/>

opportunity to create a tangible, useful product worth sharing with their teachers, peers, and community. Once the teacher provides an engaging task or challenge, students' natural skills and talents are allowed to soar as they imagine, create, and innovate. Engaging learners in this sort of authentic problem-solving process requires students, even kindergarteners, to learn to analyze research, study a problem through varying lenses, and creatively identify solutions.

- 4. *The sciences, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics are catalysts for academic growth, creative expression, and the innovation needed for future-ready scholars and leaders.*** We believe arts education can unleash the academic potential in every child. Through art and technology, we believe, education promotes discovery and imagination. Students are given the opportunity to think, explore, learn, and express themselves through experiences that cultivate their innate creativity. This type of learning environment encourages children to become intrinsically motivated to learn and more fully engaged in their personal learning journey.

- 5. *Children's early literacy skills are a foundation for all of their academic efforts and are closely linked to their health and well-being.*** Educators need a plan for literacy instruction that will pull our at-risk readers along and push all readers forward. One study showed that children who did not read well by the end of third grade were four times more likely not to graduate from high school on time, and not graduating from high school is closely linked to poorer health, unemployment, and incarceration.¹⁵ At STAR, we focus on the elements of strong literacy instruction, with a particular focus on developing children's language and reading skills. With increasing grade levels, the demands of the texts children must read increase in difficulty and yet, text is the primary way that academic content is delivered to students in middle school and high school. In fact, to be successful in all academic subject areas, children need to be proficient readers. Young children, especially academically vulnerable young children, require a cohesive learning experience as they move up through the grades; learning experiences that build on their strengths and address their needs, promoting knowledge and skill development along the way.

We materialize these five core educational beliefs through **Accelerated Expectations** (supporting our students to achieve at an exceptionally high level), an **Awesomely Powerful Community** (giving students a deep sense of belonging and purpose), and **Ownership and Personalization** (building intrinsic motivation so that students feel agency over and responsibility for their own learning).

Instructional Vision: At STAR Academy, we are committed to preparing our students for lives of choice through a rigorous, personalized, and joyful educational approach that fosters a generation of change-agents, innovators, and leaders who think with their mind but also their heart. We welcome mistakes for mistakes are the pathway for learning and passion. We cultivate our *stars'* natural curiosity, innovation and creativity by providing authentic exploration and investigative opportunities through science and technology with an arts emphasis instruction. Our *stars* will develop the necessary

¹⁵ http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/PreK-3rd_Getting_Literacy_Instruction_Right.pdf

problem-solving and critical thinking skills that are needed to make personal and professional decisions in an ever-evolving world.

Our instructional program is grounded on four outcomes:

- ***Accelerated Academics:*** We set the bar extremely high and push students to achieve excellence in academics
- ***Habits of Success:*** Students develop the habits, mindsets, and life skills that promote productive and joyful lives including growth mindset, curiosity, time management, empathy, and creativity
- ***Excellence in Enrichment:*** We offer students a chance to experience the joy of passionately pursuing an area of enrichment beyond traditional academics, such as STEAM innovations, Martial Arts, and Music
- ***Student, Family, and Staff Motivation:*** Our powerful community of students, staff, and families will consistently inspire and support each other

STAR Academy will provide an educational structure that capitalizes on each of these beliefs by integrating the STEAM (STEM and arts integration) educational framework and authentic inquiry, and project-based, literacy focused curriculum and personalized instruction for our students. By integrating subjects, and by nurturing children’s natural curiosity and creativity, STAR Academy aims to stimulate and engage learners across the content areas. Furthermore, by embedding visual and performing arts in STEM learning, and by implementing project-based learning, not only will children better understand abstract concepts but they will apply their learning in relevant and authentic ways.

While STEAM provides the framework for instruction and student performance tasks and informs our instructional philosophy, it is not a curriculum, but rather the basis for instructional design and implementation. Our STEAM program is not a lab, special program for high achieving or gifted students, or enrichment or periodic special activity in science and math. It is a school-wide curricular approach infused every day for all students. Each student of STAR Academy receives a minimum of 15 hours of STEAM related instruction weekly.

STEAM Pedagogy: STEM learning (emphasizing science, technology, engineering, and applied math) has garnered increased support in a nation-wide effort to boost science literacy. Of growing national and local concern is that career fields involved and related to STEM are multiplying in America while the number of qualified applicants are diminishing. Instructional staff at STAR will use the STEAM educational framework to structure learning. According to the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering and Institute of Medicine in “Rising Above the Gathering Storm Revisited,” the primary driver of the future economy and concomitant creation of jobs will be innovation, largely derived from

“We’re at, really, a pivotal moment in the history of American education and the question is whether we learn from the developments that are happening all around the world as nations are competing with us that never competed before.”

-U.S. Representative Chris Murphy

advances in science and engineering.¹⁶ America needs to maintain competitive edge in the global marketplace; furthermore, our own economy relies on STEM innovation. Not only are U.S. students as a whole lagging behind the highest performing nations on international assessments, but minorities and women are under-represented in STEM fields. Narrowing the curriculum to literacy and numeracy to the exclusion of integrated STEM education in order to make expected student growth gains is detrimental to the success of children and to the economy as a whole.

STEM education that fosters student engagement (that is inclusive of girls, minorities, and a broad range of learning modalities among all children) has given birth to the emerging STEAM pedagogy. This approach is supported by a growing research base indicating that increased student engagement, creative thinking, and innovation results by adding A for “Art” to bridge STEM to STEAM. STEAM models, including the Rhode Island Institute for Design, the Chicago Arts Partnership, Philadelphia Arts in Education Partnership, Arts Integrated Solutions, and the Art of Science Learning, demonstrate that arts integration helps abstract concepts become concrete, humanized, and relevant for students. According to Arts Integrated Solutions, the creative process of arts integration is rooted in inquiry and reflects the design process of identifying a problem, brainstorming, designing and building, testing, evaluating, redesigning, and sharing solutions. Arts education has a long tradition of critical analysis that is very similar to scientific peer review; in both the arts and sciences, individuals present an outcome to peers who then respond with questions, suggestions, and extensions of that work.

The key to developing a generation of successful American innovators is to encourage the convergence of art, business, creativity, innovation, engineering, and science.

The STEAM movement is continuing to gain momentum across the country. As stated by Margaret Honey, President and CEO of the New York Hall of Science, “It’s not about adding on arts education, it’s about fundamentally changing education to incorporate the experimentation and exploration that is at the heart of effective education.”

A study on arts integration in the United States found learning in the arts is linked with increased student achievement. Thirty students across ten classes in veteran/artist partnerships were selected to explore the processes and outcomes associated with arts integrated learning units versus learning processes and outcomes in comparable non-arts units. The sample evenly represented comparatively high, medium, and low achievers. Students from all achievement levels displayed significant increases in their ability to analytically assess their own learning following arts-integrated units. No such gains were associated with traditional instructional experiences. Students also described their arts-integrated versus non-arts learning differently. Arts-integrated instructions are as follows:

1. Created more independent and intrinsically motivated investments in learning.
2. Fostered learning for understanding as opposed to recall of facts for tests.
3. Transformed students’ characterizations of “learning barriers” into “challenges” to be solved.
4. Inspired students to pursue further learning opportunities outside of the class.

¹⁶ National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine. *Rising Above the Gathering Storm, Revisited: Rapidly Approaching Category 5*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2010.

A Montgomery County, Maryland, study with a rigorous evaluation design provided a more fine-grained look at the results of arts integration; the study compared three arts integration-focused schools (AIMS) to three control schools over a three-year period. During that time AIMS schools substantially reduced the achievement gap between high-poverty minority students and other students. The AIMS school with the highest percentage of minority and low-income students reduced the reading gap by 14 percentage points and the math gap by 26 percentage points over a three-year period. In the comparison schools, the number of proficient students actually decreased by 4.5% over the same time period. The AIMS schools with the lowest number of proficient students in reading and mathematics at the outset of the study experienced a 23% increase in the number scoring proficient over a three-year period.

Charles R. Drew Charter School, located in Atlanta, GA, is the city's first charter school. Although opening in 2000 with 240 kindergarten through fifth grade students, Drew now serves over 1200 Pre-kindergarten through ninth grade students. Drew's educational program focuses on STEAM instruction, with a strong foundation of literacy. Their interdisciplinary program integrates the five areas of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics, inquiry-based instructional program with real world context, emphasis on design and problem-solving leading to applications, and child-centered, community-based school focusing on science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. In 2012, Drew Charter School had the fourth highest test scores in the state.

Lincoln Avenue Academy STEM Magnet School (L-5), located in Lakeland, FL, received Intel and Scholastics 21st century School of Distinction in 2010, citing it as having one of the nation's top three elementary mathematics programs. In 2005, Lincoln was recognized as a BEST US elementary school in Technology Innovation and in 2010 and 2011 their K-2 students won a national award (3rd place in the nation) at the Siemens We Can Change the World Challenge. Lincoln Avenue Academy was established as a voluntary desegregation magnet school serving the needs of Lakeland's diverse population. They have implemented the STEM process of investigation, allowing students to apply learned skills and problem solve through challenging projects in all subjects from kindergarten on up. Technology is integrated to make art and music alive as K-5 students study digital arts, animation and compose music for podcast and movies. Lincoln Avenue Academy has the second highest writing scores in Florida, has met AYP each year of NCLB mandate, 96% of students meeting high standards in reading, 98% meeting high standards in math, and 100% of their third grade students are meeting third grade promotional requirements.

The Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) is a network of Chicago Public Schools, including classroom teachers, arts specialists, administrators, professional arts organizations and teaching artists, university-based researchers, and teacher educators. The 19 elementary schools operating the CAPE Arts Integration model showed consistently higher average scores on the district's reading and mathematics assessments over a six-year period when compared to all district elementary schools.

There are four program elements that comprise the foundation for implementing the STEAM framework at STAR Academy. They include:

1. Integration of core content subjects, STEM processes, and arts education through thematic instruction.
2. Use of the engineering design process as the unifying theme for cross-curricular units.
3. Utilization of authentic, project-based learning.
4. Emphasis on 21st Century Learning Skills.

STEAM represents an evolving approach to education that integrates STEM (science and technology focused instruction) with arts integration. It is important to note that STEAM is not a program, but rather a philosophy. In the real world, content knowledge is interwoven, layered, and sophisticated, not experienced in isolation such is evident in traditional education settings (separate math time, separate science time, etc.). STAR Academy is committed to the STEAM tenets, which detail the manner in which stand-alone contents and areas of focus come together to provide a rigorous, engaging, and 21st Century learning educational program for children.

- **Tenet #1: S = Science:** Science is everywhere in today's world. It is part of our daily lives, from cooking to gardening, from recycling to understanding the weather or how things work. We simply cannot escape the significance of science in our world.
- **Tenet #2: T = Technology:** Technology is transforming how we learn, work, and play. Today our children live in a dynamic, digital world and a global economy. To embrace that fact is to embrace our children's future ... as well as our own.
- **Tenet #3: E = Engineering:** Engineering, the practical application of math, technology, and science, emphasizes learning in the real-world context ... and it's FUN! Hands-on building and designing engages and stimulates learners of all ages.
- **Tenet #4: A = Arts:** Integrating arts across the curriculum boosts achievement and enhances learning. More than a mere "frill," visual and performing arts play an essential role in unlocking creative thinking and innovation, which is why federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Education and the National Science Foundation are currently providing research grants and underwriting conferences that help educators use the Arts to support Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education.
- **Tenet #5: M = Math:** Mathematics is the foundation of science, engineering, and technology. Mathematical literacy is critical for students to possess and to apply in order to grow skills in problem solving, communication, analysis, and reasoning.

Integrated/Thematic Instruction: Authentic learning is real-life learning. It is a style of learning that encourages students to investigate, discover, and use their imagination and creativity to create tangible solutions to content-based problems. Thematic, or integrated, instruction is an interdisciplinary teaching approach that presents subject matter according to themes or topics. Each theme or topic is presented in extended units so that students have enough time to develop understanding and to find connections to what they know and value. This approach integrates knowledge from different disciplines, engages them in a variety of learning activities, and encourages students to explore topics deeply.

The curriculum at STAR Academy is integrated into STEAM units with unique themes that combine and intertwine concepts in language arts, math, science, and social studies, emphasizing cross-curricular connections, transfer, and generalization of learning. In each unit of instruction, students are faced with

problems for which they will use the engineering design process to provide feasible solutions based on analysis of pros and cons and by balancing the constraints and evaluation of consequences.

With assistance from the curriculum and instructional staff at Lincoln Elementary in Lakeland, FL, and newly approved public charter school Aman Steam Academy in Aurora, CO, STAR has designed our own STEAM framework, based on research-based practices in education, common core standards and approaches to teaching mathematics and science, and focused on the engineering design process (graphic on the right) as the integrating concept. Within the STEAM framework, engineering is an integrating thread, a way of thinking and problem solving that ties other unit components together. The engineering design process is a series of steps that engineers follow to come up with a solution to a problem. Many times the solution involves designing a product that meets certain criteria and/or accomplishes a task. Starting in kindergarten, students use the engineering design process to explore and create, establishing a strong foundation of basic skills, the capacity to think critically, and enthusiasm for learning.



Although the academic focus at STAR is not geared towards any one curriculum, every lesson will be designed and implemented using the Rigorous Curriculum Design; a standards-based backwards planning process. As the school’s teachers develop projects that engage student interests, they are mindful of Common Core State Standards, Alabama Academic Content Standards, and Next Generation Science Standards. For example, a middle school science teacher may implement a chemistry-focused unit, having each student create a documentary about the harmful effects of drugs on the human body. The unit addresses many state standards in chemistry, such as functional groups, bonding, the periodic table, and molecular structures. At the same time, however, such a project integrates well with math and humanities, and achieves real-world relevance as students use technology to create educational videos that can be shared with other schools as part of a broader drug and alcohol abuse prevention initiative. Below is an examples of a Kindergarten Common Core Standards aligned, integrated/thematic unit.

Example of STEAM Integrated Thematic Unit Mapped to Common Core State Standards

STEAM Thematic Unit Title	Becoming a Engineer
Grade Level/Subject(s)	Kindergarten STEAM Unit- Integrates Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies
Duration	9 weeks
Description	This is an introductory unit for kindergarten students. Through this unit students will learn important concepts as well as behaviors that will make them successful scientists, engineers, and artists. This is a thematic unit and it integrates all subjects to help young students transfer knowledge. Science and engineering concepts are supported through reading and writing as teachers use big books to

	<p>introduce scientific concepts. During this unit students are introduced to the engineering design and creative problem solving process. Students will work together in small groups to develop a prototype of a new Twister game using teacher-provided materials.</p>
<p>Language Arts Standards Addressed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With prompting and support, ask and answer questions relative to key details in a text. • With prompting and support, ask and answer questions relative to details in a text. • Identify a book’s front cover, back cover, and title page. • Name the author and illustrator of a text and define the role of each in presenting the ideas or information in a text. • With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the text in which they appear (e.g., what person, place, thing, or idea in the text as illustration depicts). • Actively engage in group-reading activities with purpose and understanding. • Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print; Follow words from left to right, top to bottom, and page by page. • Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print; Recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters. • Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., explore a number of books by a favorite author and express opinions about them). • Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners relative to kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups; Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about topics and texts under discussion). <p>Ask and answer questions to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions, as desired, to provide additional detail.
<p>Mathematics Standards Addressed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know number names and count sequence; count to 100 by ones and tens. • Know number names and count sequence; write numbers from 0 to 20. • Know number names and count sequence; represent a number of objects with a written numeral 0-20 (0 representing a count of no objects). • Count the number of objects; understand the relationship between numbers and quantities. • Count the number of objects; connect counting to cardinality. • Identify and describe shapes (squares, circles, triangles, rectangles, hexagons, cubes, cones, cylinders, and spheres); describe objects in the environment using names of shapes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and describe shapes (squares, circles, triangles, rectangles, hexagons, cubes, cones, cylinders, and spheres); describe the relative positions of these objects using terms such as above, below, beside, in front of, behind, and next to. • Draw a picture graph and a bar graph with single-unit scale to represent a data set up to four categories.
Science Standards Addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ask questions, make observations, and gather information about a situation people want to change to define a simple problem that can be solved through the development of a new or improved object or tool. ○ Develop a simple sketch, drawing, or physical model to illustrate how the shape of an object helps it function as needed to solve a given problem. ○ Analyze data from tests of two objects designed to solve the same problem to compare the strengths and weaknesses of how each performs.
Social Studies Standards Addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop spatial understanding, perspectives, and connections to the world; identify common places to include to home, school, cafeteria, and gymnasium. • Develop spatial understanding, perspectives, and connections to the world; describe surroundings. • Ownership as a component of economics; recognize and give examples of one person using another’s object that requires asking permission and sharing. • Participate in making decisions using democratic traditions: explain why rules are needed; create and follow classroom rules; and contribute to making and maintaining class community decisions. • Civic participation takes place in multiple groups; practice citizenship skills including courtesy, honesty, and fairness in working with others. • Individuals have unique talents and work with others in groups; recognize membership in family, neighborhood, school, team, and various other groups and organizations. • Individuals have unique talents and work with others in groups; name groups to which they belong and identify the leader(s). • Individuals have unique talents and work with others in groups. Identify examples of times when people can play different roles and bring unique talents to a variety of groups. • Rules and their purpose in allowing groups to work effectively; explain that groups have rules. • Rules and their purpose in allowing groups to work effectively; recognize interpersonal boundaries. • Rules and their purpose in allowing groups to work effectively; exert self-control. • Rules and their purpose in allowing groups to work effectively; interact positively with others.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules and their purpose in allowing groups to work effectively; give examples of some rules that are permanent and some that change.
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Project-Based Learning: Project-based learning forms the basis of our STEAM education. Our curricular studies are driven by students asking questions and full engagement with the world through the activation of heart and brain. This ultimately leads to deeper understanding and connection. Inquiry-based learning is founded on the belief that human beings learn about the world through questioning and experience, starting at birth and continuing throughout adulthood. In our pre-kindergarten program, these inquiries often begin with materials and the questions they present. Our elementary and middle school programs shift to pursuits concerning our historic, cultural, artistic, and global communities.

Project-based learning requires students to use real-world topics to begin in-depth investigations. Project-based learning engages students with an authentic problem rooted in content (science, language, mathematics, social studies, physical education, and the visual and performing arts), requiring students beginning in kindergarten to learn to analyze, research, and study a problem with a cultural, social, political, economic, historical, artistic, and scientific lens. Students are immersed in the process of learning: exploring, discussing, designing, reflecting, and refining. Project-based learning transforms teaching from the industrial-factory model of education that is lecture style to a model in which students take ownership of their learning, while the teacher serves as a guide and facilitator of learning.

A school where children ask and answer questions naturally requires the expert facilitation of masterful teachers. This means that our teachers guide students through the creation of projects designed to develop their understandings of the world around them. STAR Academy teachers begin each year within grade-level teams with four themes that all classrooms respond to in different way. Teachers and teaching artists then create units that connect overarching themes and questions with specific skills and strategies, as well as authentic, and meaningful culminating projects that demonstrate student learning in social and academic content areas. Students will develop projects that address community issues and needs and they will work in collaboration with parents, community members, businesses, and organizations. Projects will be integrated, requiring students to use skills from other content areas (e.g., language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, physical education, and the visual and performing arts). For a group of 4-year olds this overarching theme may provoke the study of water in all of its forms. First graders may study food, ranging from how to measure ingredients to how communities are defined by what they eat. For fourth graders, it could extend into a study of elections, the democratic decision-making process, and this nation’s revolutionary beginning. For eighth graders, it might be a study on banking and finance that prepares them with the budgeting skills necessary to plan for college and beyond.

STAR’s project-based learning approach, a fundamental component of the STEAM model, is the key to its success in serving a diverse population of students. Students become active participants in their learning and are required to publicly demonstrate their learning through presentations and portfolios, introducing an additional and arguably more authentic element of accountability for quality work. STAR



Academy works diligently to provide exemplars of outstanding project-based instruction to its teachers so that all teachers may achieve base mastery in STAR's teaching practices.

That said, it's important to emphasize that the STEAM/Project Based Learning model is not merely about curriculum, programs, or materials—it's about leveraging partnerships; developing meaningful cross-content connections in learning; building school staffs' capacities for teaching 21st Century skills including collaboration, problem solving, and risk taking; nurturing responsibility; and fostering creativity in stewardship of resources. Teachers and community partners facilitate learning by providing needed materials and resources and by assisting students to create products following given tasks and parameters (e.g., only using materials provided by the teacher).

Every six weeks, the regular school schedule pauses, and students take time to hone their academic and enrichment know-how by engaging in learning projects that culminate in performances, competitions or other celebrations. By spending dedicated time going deep on real-world topics, students have an opportunity to extend and apply their knowledge and skills, expand their repertoire of word and world knowledge, and gain access to a robust set of life opportunities that will fuel their passion. These experiences can extend beyond typical curricula, and always deepen academic learning. These Expeditions, often conducted in partnership with carefully selected external partners, offer deep community building experiences for students, staff and parents—reinforcing their shared purpose and commitment to one another.

Whole Child Character Development: At STAR Academy, all children and families are known well. It is important to us that each child is consistently seen, heard, and respected for their individual uniqueness. We know from brain research that emotional connections form the root of all learning. A school should be a home and a supportive community for children, a platform from which they can take flight and be their best, most powerful selves.

Making this real requires great attention to self and social learning, through which children develop the fundamental skills and core competencies for life. These skills include understanding how the brain works, recognizing and managing emotions, developing empathy, establishing positive relationships, persevering through difficult tasks, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively, all with high ethical standards. Students at STAR Academy learn that their abilities grow with new challenges, effort, and persistence. We use these ideas to continually encourage a willingness to take challenges and risks, and to support cognitive development. With instruction, guidance, awareness, and practice, all members of our community support children to self-regulate, solve problems independently, and work well with others, thus preparing them to be better learners and collaborators in school and in life.

Personalized Learning Experiences: We all learn in our own unique ways. From the time we're children until long after we leave school, each person has their own way of learning and advancing. Unfortunately, the traditional school system doesn't allow for that. Our students—we call them Stars—get personalized instruction targeted to their needs and tailored to their unique learning styles. At STAR Academy, we have built an education model where students are truly at the center, learning is tailored to individual students' strengths, needs, and personal interests. Learning opportunities take into account existing knowledge, skills, and abilities, set high expectations, and push students in supportive



ways to reach their personal goals. Situated within flexible learning environments, learning experiences are built upon learner profiles and personal learning paths, and students move on when they demonstrate mastery. Above all, our classrooms nurture each child's individual strengths and interests, encouraging them to explore their world.

Personalized learning is especially important in diverse school communities because academic preparation can vary dramatically among students. In STAR Academy's classes of 26 students, students are dispersed across the classroom working individually, in pairs, or in small groups to complete hands-on, self-directed activities that have been personalized by teachers to foster student independence and to focus on child development well beyond academics.

Every child progresses through a customized learner's playlist of activities and assignments. Students might collaborate if they have common tasks, but the idea is that students are working at their level in each academic subject. The work plans are patterned off of other competency-based learning environments, where students have choice and control over their learning. The "transparent classroom" personalized learning platform will be used to assess standard-based student learning before and after instruction, to produce daily and weekly project exit tickets to assess learning and align instruction and assessment to individual student academic goals.

Curriculum and Instructional Design

STAR Academy Learning Environment: All classrooms (with the exception of Pre-kindergarten through 2nd grade) will utilize the “platooning” model. Also known as “specializing” or “departmentalizing”, platooning involves classrooms where teachers drop their traditional roles as generalists and serve instead as experts in one or two content areas. Schools that have embraced this model have found a triple yield: teachers will have a deep internalization of the standards and what is required for students to achieve, students will learn more from teachers steeped in a given subject, and teachers will be renewed and excited by diving more deeply into the subjects they are truly passionate about. STAR Academy students will spend time with one teacher for reading and writing, one teacher for mathematics, one teacher for science, and one teacher for social studies.

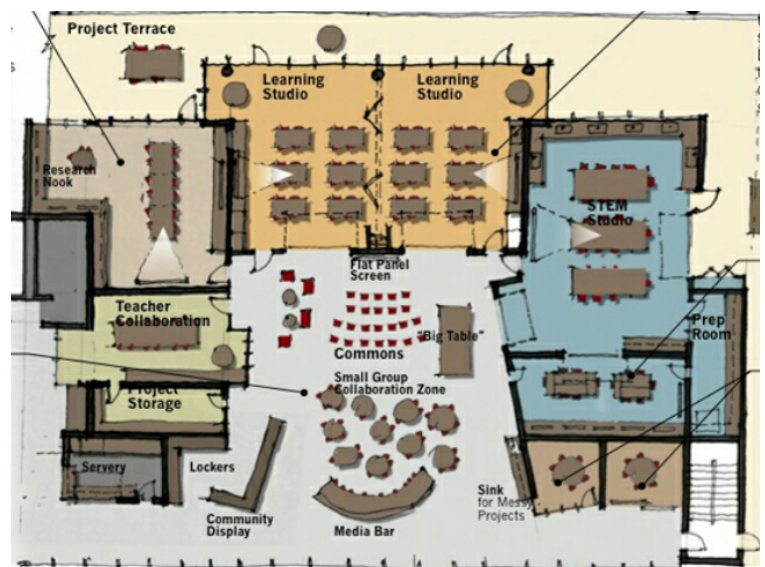
- Primary Classrooms: Pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten (self-contained classrooms with one teacher per class and a teaching fellow/paraprofessional)
- Lower Elementary Classrooms: 1st-2nd grade (self-contained classrooms with one teacher per class and a teaching fellow/paraprofessional)
- Upper Elementary Classrooms: 3rd-5th grade (platooned classrooms)
- Middle School Classrooms: 6th – 8th grade (platooned classrooms)

Using the platooning model at upper elementary and middle school grades will help to ensure instruction will be highly differentiated to meet the individual needs of each child in the classroom. This allows for maximum remediation and acceleration of learning for all students.

STAR Academy plans to use the STEAM Learning Community classroom model, which allows student the space and opportunity to work in a 21st Century driven environment that supports projects, collaboration, creativity, and innovation.

Learning Studio: The flexible learning studios are spaces that accommodate classrooms of 25-30 students. In the learning studio, direct, whole group and small group instruction takes place. The room is equipped with display space for sharing student work, digital share and workspace with a white board, rugs, beanbags, desks for independent seat work and sharing, tables for collaborative work, and teacher space for books, files, and supplies.

The Commons: The heart of the learning community, the Commons provides space for multiple zones of activity, from large group



presentations by students or education partners, to project-based work at the big tables, or individual or small group work at the media bar.

“Incubator” Small Group Rooms: These rooms are ideal for 2-8 students. Incubator rooms provide small, secure places for students and staff to develop ideas. They are also places where small group breakout sessions and 1-on-1 instruction can take place for students needing additional instruction or modeling. Incubator rooms are also great for individual or small group testing.

STEAM Lab: Provides space for students to discuss, debate, and develop ideas in a quieter more focused setting, while incorporating technology, resources, materials, and workstations for design and engineering projects.

Throughout the day, teachers and students will have the option to utilize spaces that best fit the learning needs of that moment.

Class Size, Structure, and Staffing: The class size and structure at STAR Academy promotes community, collaboration, and authentic learning experiences. As mentioned before, our 3rd-8th structure will also utilize a “platooning” (multi-year grouping) classroom structure. Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade classrooms will be traditional, self-contained classrooms. Students will remain with one teacher who will plan and execute lessons in all subject areas. These teachers will also have a teaching fellow/paraprofessional in their classrooms to assist with instruction. The full-time teaching fellow or paraprofessional allows for a tremendous amount of target support for students. Additionally, the highest performing schools have a stellar development pipeline. By hiring fellows, we are able to “groom our own” who will advance as full-time teachers; teachers who know and are invested in our mission and vision. Classrooms in 3rd grade and above will be platooned with four teachers teaching each core content (language, mathematics, science, and social studies). With the exception of two pre-kindergarten classrooms, we will have four classes per grade level, with a maximum of 20 students in each Pre-kindergarten classroom and 26-28 students in each K-8th grade class.

The purpose of the STAR Academy Primary program is to provide young children with a high-quality preschool education that is grounded in literacy instruction. Students will develop the ability to appreciate diversity, interact appropriately with others (including classmates and teachers), and become leaders. They will also develop specific skills necessary to be successful academically. The Pre-kindergarten program will only be open to families with potty-trained three and four year olds.¹⁷ The Kindergarten program will be opened to families with potty-trained 5 year olds and above.

Curriculum: The STAR Academy administration and teachers believe that curricula are tools used by teachers to ensure students receive the kinds of learning experiences that foster creativity, promotes academic excellence, and inspires a growing passion for learning in our students. Based on in-depth research in pedagogy learning, common core standards and approaches to teaching mathematics, science, and arts integration, we have worked in partnership with other STEAM (STEM and arts integration), STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and arts integration schools across the country to develop an innovative and unique curriculum to challenge each child and create

¹⁷ STAR Academy will accept students into our Primary program that are not yet potty-trained if there is a documented medical condition.

creative, compassionate, and joyful learners who use courageous and innovative thinking to become trailblazers and leaders in their life, careers, and community. Students of STAR Academy will not only master our standards-aligned STEAM curriculum, but also build the problem-solving and critical thinking, creativity and innovation, communication and collaboration, scientific literacy, and cross-disciplinary knowledge, skills, and habits that are necessary for them to live, work, and thrive in the 21st Century. It is important to emphasize that the STAR Academy model is not merely about curriculum, programs, or materials. Our curriculum is aligned to the Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and the Alabama Academic Content Standards, with various materials and texts used to enhance instructional delivery and student mastery of concepts. The following curricula will add depth to our educational program in each of the respective content areas.

Provide a Balanced, Rich, and Unique Focus on Literacy: One of the foundational tenets of our school’s model is a strong education in literacy. STAR Academy provides a balanced literacy approach that provides access to great literature, a curriculum that ensures fluency, comprehension, and written expression through the Common Core State Standards, and a 21st century focus on critical thinking and cross-context vocabulary for success in high school, college and beyond.

Balanced Literacy: When considering each aspect of our curriculum, we begin with the end in mind – we are driven by the belief that every student at STAR Academy must leave with a voracious love of reading. Through a grammatical foundation, a focus on writing about and reacting to great literature, and a development of critical thinking and discussing text, our students will have the opportunity to engage authentically with vibrant pieces of literature. Knowing that our target population will likely arrive at school not ready to read or reading far below grade level, we believe that additional literacy instruction in critical in Kindergarten through Grade 3, and we continue to extend literacy instruction in the upper grades to ensure that gains are not lost.

Research has unequivocally demonstrated that skill in reading impacts the academic success of a student in every subject and throughout their academic journey.¹⁸ Stanovich and Cunningham’s research demonstrates that the level of ability to read in the younger years serves as a predictor for comprehension throughout the entirety of a student’s academic career.¹⁹ Given the same reading assessment, students who scored in the top five percent of participants read 144 times that of the students who scored in the bottom five percent.²⁰

To ensure students are reading and engaging deeply in text, we believe in ensuring a co-teaching model for literacy instruction. Class size is 26, with rotations during the literacy block, allowing a ratio no greater than eight to one during small group instruction. This ratio will provide three major benefits for student success. First, teachers will be able to plan small group interventions based on our flexible grouping needs. For example, if a group is struggling with vowel blends, the teacher can spend additional time focusing on the specific blends that are proving difficult and slow down the instructional

¹⁸ Stanovich, Keith E. *Progress in understanding Reading: Scientific Foundations and New Frontiers* (1 Ed.). New York: Guilford Press. 2000

¹⁹ Cunningham, Anne E. and Keith E. Stanovich, “Early Reading Acquisition and its relation to reading experience and ability 10 years later.” *Developmental Psychology*. Volume 33(6). November 1997.

²⁰ Honig, Bill. “10 Components for a Comprehensive Reading Strategy.” *American Association of School Administrators*. September 1997.

pace to ensure student mastery. Second, small group size allows for additional practice and high levels of engagement, particularly beneficial to students with ELD or special needs who might benefit from additional previewing of vocabulary or repetition of key phrases. Finally, small group instruction allows for additional teachable moments for developing accountability in learning and ensure 100% participation for all students.

STAR's balanced literacy framework is a comprehensive program that explicitly and directly instructs students in fluency, accuracy, decoding, and reading comprehension, and provides ample time and teacher support to practice and apply skills.²¹

1. Word Study

- **Phonemic Awareness**-The ability to hear and differentiate between sounds, syllables, and words when spoken aloud, and the ability to rearrange and alter sounds to create new words
- Elements include: rhyming, hearing syllables, blending, and segmenting
- **Phonics**-An instructional approach connecting letters and their sounds in print
- **Spelling/Sight words**-Teaching patterns, definitions, and recognition of high frequency words
- **Fluency**-Reading with accuracy and inflection at an appropriate rate of words per minute
- **Vocabulary**-Building a knowledge of words, contexts, and meaning
- **Reading Books**-Developing an understanding of text structure, conventions in reading, and concepts of print through independent reading and guided reading

2. Reading Comprehension

- **Comprehension**-Beginning with a text's literally meaning and moving towards deeper understanding through retelling, connecting to schema, predicting, summarizing, inferring, and comparing and contrasting
- **Exposure to Literature**-Providing opportunities to engage with a canon of work both fictional works and non-fiction texts.
 - Develop understanding of author's purpose, character traits, and literary devices with extended studies on significant authors and genres
- **Independent Reading**-Engaging with text on their grade level and of their choosing to develop fluency and comprehension, as well as reading stamina

3. Writing

- **Instructional Writing**-Focusing on the five-step writing process, develop narrative and expository essays including a focus on organization, mechanics, and standard English conventions
- **Creative Writing**-Expressing ideas, emotions, and author's purpose through a variety of genres using the five-step writing process.
- **Grammar**-Learning rules and conventions of English language, including punctuation, capitalization, syntax, etc.
- **Handwriting**-Developing the fine motor skills to produce correct and legible work

²¹ This concept is supported by the Partnership for Reading, a collaborative effort of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute for Literacy, and the US Department of Education in their study, Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read.

Literacy Program in STAR Academy Primary (Pre-Kindergarten-3)

By the end of Grade 3, every student will be able to read, write, decode, and comprehend at or above grade level. To meet this goal, we devote 180 minutes per day to our literacy program, broken into seven components, which incorporate small group strategies, similar to the strongest programs in the nation, such as North Star Academy, the highest scoring non-selective school in New Jersey and KIPP. Students are grouped based on their assessment results in groups that are no greater than six, in order to ensure targeted intervention, frequent checks for understanding, and high levels of engagement. For student in the lowest 30%, we will supplement Eureka (EngageNY) with resources from the table below. As students' progress through both programs, the word study block will begin to include vocabulary development in Greek and Latin roots in order to encourage word decoding for meaning. KIPP Wheatley, Tools of the Mind, and Children's Literacy Initiative will also serve as highly effective literacy curriculum resources.

Comprehension will begin in pre-kindergarten, with explicitly teaching of comprehension strategies through the daily shared reading, in which students will have the opportunity to hear a fluent and proficient reader model and narrate the thinking skills that lead to strong comprehension. Students will evaluate and respond to texts through oral discussion, drawing pictures, and writing about text. Small guided reading groups of no more than eight students allow for stories, lessons, and discussions, in which students are explicitly taught the habits of discussion and accountable talk to share ideas and understanding with their peers.

Our integrated reading and writing program utilizes the KIPP Wheatley curriculum. In addition, students will begin with Handwriting without Tears in pre-kindergarten, as well as daily oral language in Grade 1 to emphasize neat and correct handwriting and proper writing conventions. A substantial time is spent developing personal narratives with a lot of choice built into much of the writing.

Literacy Program in STAR Academy Intermediate (4-5)

The transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4 is a critical one, in which students transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn."²² With our structured approach to phonics and phonemic awareness in the lower grades, we anticipate few students requiring phonics instruction, though we will continue to utilize the varying texts and resources for strategic intervention for struggling students.

By Grade 4, many of our students will be fluent readers, and the focus of our reading block will shift to comprehension and analysis of text. Students will participate in Reader's workshop, in which students apply comprehension strategies to their independent books and join in book circles in which small groups of three to four students read, discuss, and analyze a shared text. Structured through *Great Habits, Great Readers* students will engage in habits of discussion, answering text-dependent questions, and more. Every student will write analyses of their texts through a five-stage writing process on a regular basis. Students will continue in the KIPP Wheatley curriculum through a Writer's Workshop model. A more explicit focus on grammar will begin, with increasingly complex Daily Oral Language exercises and explicit grammar lessons applied through revision and editing of independent work. As writing develops through the grades, it becomes more and more focused on text-based writing.

²² Chall, J.S., and V.A. Jacobs. "Poor Children's Fourth-Grade Slump." *American Educator*. Spring. 2004

Literacy Program in STAR Academy Middle (6 to 8)

STAR Academy Middle believes that students must be fully prepared for the rigors of reading in high school, and in turn, the classes begin to more closely model the heavy reading, writing, and discussion elements to rigorous secondary literacy programs. Explicit vocabulary instruction will continue, but it is incorporated more fluidly into the reader's workshops. During Sustained Silent Reading, students annotate text and identify new vocabulary words. Vocabulary lists built upon the common words seen on the ACT test are sent home for weekly assignments, including crafting context based sentences to memorize definition and ensure appropriate usage in written assignments.

Middle school students will continue to analyze complex texts from a variety of genres and apply comprehension strategies to deeper and more involved texts that involve foreshadowing, more sophisticated literary devices and stylistic elements not present in intermediary text. In the middle grades, students will be expected to engage in Socratic seminars in which they guide their own high level analytical discussion of texts and write thorough literary analyses of their texts. Middle school students will be expected to apply the writing skills learned in a wide variety of contexts, with a significant emphasis on writing for research purposes. Students will have more opportunities to access technology to research topics, apply research to writing informative essays, and present on topics through oral and written presentations. Please see **Attachment 2** for more information regarding planned curriculum.

Prepare Students in Foundational and Advanced Mathematics

There is a direct correlation between knowledge of advanced mathematics and higher salary professions.²³ For so many students, access to careers in science and mathematics is stymied before high school, due to a lack of understanding of the conceptual knowledge necessary to engage in higher level mathematics. Aligned to Common Core State Standards, STAR Academy has selected research-proven curricula such as Eureka (EngageNY) for exploratory math, fluency, and practice with a Cognitively Guided Instruction approach and Everyday Math for calendar studies. STAR Academy provides 145 minutes in Grade K-4 and 115-145 minutes in grades 5 to 8 of math instruction daily through a variety of forms of instruction: calendar math, foundational rotations in which students develop number sense and computation through small group instruction, adaptive computer-based programming, and independent work, and problem of the day, in which students grapple with conceptual understanding using discovery and manipulatives. Students master middle school Math and Algebra I by the end of Grade 8, a critical milestone pursuant to success in advanced mathematics (Algebra II, Geometry, Trigonometry, and Calculus).

Mathematics research shows that Grade 1 students who understand the relationship between numbers, quantities, and basic addition and subtraction of quantities are far more likely to excel in Mathematics throughout elementary school.²⁴ At this time, STAR Academy has selected Engage NY as the primary mathematics curriculum, with an accelerated use of the middle school curriculum to ensure that Grade

²³ <http://www.payscale.com/best-colleges/degrees.asp>.

²⁴ Geary, D. C., Hoard, M. K., Nugent, L., & Bailey, D. H. (2012). "Mathematical cognition deficits in children with learning disabilities and persistent low achievement: A five year prospective study." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104, 206–223.

8 students have access to Algebra I. We will supplement our Algebra I curriculum, drawing from Foerster’s and Prentice Hall Algebra I curricular materials.

In Grades K to 3, students will engage in previewing, reviewing, practicing, and discussing math connects focused on real application of conceptual understanding of money, measurement, graphing, time, and other Math processes through the Everyday Counts Calendar Math program. Research from New Haven Schools, which shares similar socioeconomic demographics with STAR Academy, shows that use of Calendar Math increased the amount of hands on, math-based activities to almost twice that of their previous program, and use of the program provided English Language Learners with additional opportunities to engage deeply in “talking math.”²⁵

After calendar math, students will engage in a block called “Problem of the Day,” in which students solve a high level word problem by developing their own strategies through drawing pictures and using manipulatives. Problem of the Day uses Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI), a professional development program that connects teachers’ assessment of students’ innate mathematical knowledge to the concepts and operations formally taught through mathematics.²⁶ The terminology of CGI, as well as the written and visual requirements to communicate about solutions, are closely aligned to the Common Core State Standards, providing a deep conceptual knowledge of why mathematical operations work, versus merely teaching an algorithm.²⁷

Problem of the Day follows a clear, set schedule to emphasize routine and build students’ understandings of utilizing problem-solving strategies. The teacher presents the problem of the day, reading it clearly three times. S/he then calls on three students (generally, a higher level, average, and lower student) to repeat the problem. Students have the problem on a sheet at their desk with space to draw their strategies, write a number sentence, and write a sentence explaining their answer. Utilizing Unifix cubes or other manipulatives, the student solves the problem independently and records their thinking. The teacher circulates throughout the classroom, recording the number of students who got the right answer and what strategies they used to get there (Did they count by 1s? Did they count by 10s? Did they use tally marks, draw pictures, or use the manipulatives?). Utilizing this data, the teacher chooses three students using different strategies and has them present their strategies to the class – the teacher begins with the least sophisticated strategy (perhaps counting by 1s) and moves to the most sophisticated strategy (counting by 10s) to increase whole group understanding of the concepts that underpin mathematical algorithms.

After completing Problem of the Day, students will transition to math rotations, participating in three activities for 20 minutes each. One rotation will provide 20 minutes per day on a computer-based, adaptive mathematics program, such as ST Math. Students will also spend 20 minutes working with the teacher to develop fluency and understanding of direct instruction on math-skill building. Finally, students will spend 20 minutes working through spiraled and methodical practice using independent work from the Eureka (EngageNY) Curriculum. Our comprehensive math program, which allows for the development of both critical thinking skills and automaticity with procedural computation, allows students to become strategic mathematical thinkers.

²⁵ <http://www.greatsource.com/GreatSource/pdf/EveryDayCountsResearch206.pdf> p. 16.

²⁶ <http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=114>.

²⁷ <http://michellef.essdack.org/?q=node/139>.

Build Core Knowledge in the Physical and Social Sciences

Our rigorous, standards-based science and social studies curricula allow students to implement the literacy and mathematical strategies learned in their courses into high interest, research-driven subject matter with a strong emphasis on reading, comprehending, responding to, and utilizing non-fiction text. In the younger grades, science and social studies are taught with a strong correlation between the two subjects (i.e. in Kindergarten, when we are learning about community helpers in social studies, we might also talk about the work of a doctor and research the body). In the intermediate and middle grades, a STEAM course focused on science and social studies standards allows students to read authentic text and apply research methods in social studies, science, math, and literacy to create in-depth research projects with an emphasis on presentation skills, technology-based research, and expository writing. They can will then use the engineering design process to solve real-world problems and use up-to-date technologies to document their thinking and solution finding process.

Though much of the curricula will be supplemented based on the Alabama frameworks for science and social studies, we have selected two specific curricula from which to draw, both due to their alignment to our focus on STEAM and literacy in the sciences and because of their demonstrated success in implementing a standards-based program for the needs of urban students. While not explicitly a Core Knowledge school, we will draw from the Core Knowledge Sequence (**found in Attachment 1**), using both the state standards and the Core Knowledge sequence to add guiding content and resources for Science and Social Studies instruction. Social studies content and texts will be utilized in the SR Imagine It curriculum. Additionally, extensions to Social Studies standards and instruction exist in each of our STEAM thematic units. The Full Options Science System (FOSS) will serve as the foundational program in our science curriculum, allowing students to develop scientific skills and knowledge through a variety of scientific disciplines (earth, physical, biological, etc.), conduct experiments, and present their findings.

Students develop and master, at a developmentally appropriate pace, scientific knowledge and skills through the study of multiple scientific fields (earth, physical, environmental, biological, and social), apply the scientific method, conduct experiments of their own design, and present their findings professionally. We continue to develop additional curricula and thematic units to supplement this research-proven model so that students are receiving a rigorous foundational science curriculum and are fully prepared to enter a more advanced course of study of the sciences at the high school level and enter into STEAM fields. The FOSS program fully aligns with the Alabama science academic content standards.

Although some gains have been made since 2012, conversations with teachers in elementary and middle schools have revealed that efforts to infuse science into their instruction have been largely absent due to time constraints and a prioritization on math and literacy skills. At STAR Academy, scientific inquiry and method will be embedded in the curriculum, particularly during STEAM Theme and PBL. STAR Academy teachers will participate in STEM professional development training each year.

FOSS 3rd Edition (Full Option Science System) is a proven, inquiry-based, active-learning science program that focuses on depth of understanding over breadth of content coverage. Acting as a vehicle for deeper learning, the program allows students to expand their science knowledge and strengthen their thinking skills through investigations, the use of technology, science-centered language development, outdoor studies, and engineering problems. The instructional development of FOSS is driven by current research

relative to how children think and learn, and new information relative to best practices for classroom instruction. Each FOSS investigation follows a similar design to provide multiple exposures to science concepts. The instructional design includes active investigation as the cornerstone of students' experiences. With the concepts science notebooks students documents their learning experiences, and reading in FOSS Science Resources enhances their conceptual understanding, assessment to monitor progress and motivate learning and outdoor activities, and online simulations to extend and apply the concepts from the active investigation. Not only is FOSS a good match for STAR as a comprehensive and in-depth science program that is fully aligned with Common Core Standards, but it also advances the STEAM approach with interdisciplinary extensions for reading, language arts, math, and social studies.

The database of books and other supplementary materials extends the FOSS investigations and can be accessed at: <http://www.lhsfoss.org/fossweb/teachers/resources/index.html>.

In the new edition of FOSS, Science Stories were developed so that each revised FOSS module has a book written specifically for that module. The materials are incorporated into the revised science program, and every book has eight to twelve individual stories or articles that correlate to each module. The stories include:

- Historical and biographical readings.
- Fictional tales, myths, and stories about kids doing interesting things with science principles in an interesting context.
- Expository reading to add detail and to extend the knowledge gained from direct experience.
- Technical readings in which students follow instructions or technical explanations of scientific principles.

A Science Stories folio in the teacher guide helps teachers relate the reading to the investigations. FOSS Science Stories will be added to the library of resources (including a physical library, an eBook "library," the Internet, and multimedia) that STAR n will use to link reading, writing, and communicating to STEAM themes and PBL units.

Social Studies Integrated Instructional Model

Similarly, STAR Academy selected the TCI Social Studies Alive! And History Alive! Curriculum to support the design of our social studies program. Strongly aligned to the Alabama academic content standards and with strategic use of authentic historical text, these programs support the literacy development around non-fiction that we believe is essential for content knowledge. STAR will supplement these curricula with additional research opportunities for students to answer research-based questions and present on topics to develop their soft skills in presentation, as well as their research and writing skills utilizing a variety of non-fiction texts. STAR Academy is working with the TCI frameworks and the Alabama academic content standards to find additional opportunities to align our social studies curriculum with the work we are doing in our English Language Arts and science courses. For example, in Grade 3, there is a natural alignment during the English unit of study on myths and folklore to align with the Grade 3 social studies units on American Indians in regions of the country and the use of maps to graph weather and topographical conditions. This alignment strengthens students understanding of

history, people, and technology, and provides them additional opportunities to practice the skills they are learning across contents.

Music and Movement Education

Integral to the PBL/STEAM pedagogy and our mission to develop and share an integrated, inquiry and project-based STEAM approach to education, is music instruction and physical education (including both physical and comprehensive health). Brain researchers demonstrate conclusively that daily physical education plays a crucial and unique role in each child’s cognitive, psychological, and physical development (Bencraft, 1999; Jensen, 1998) and that music making contributes to the development of essential cognitive systems including reasoning, creativity, thinking, decision making and problem solving (Jensen, 2000). According to brain researcher Eric Jensen, music may be the foundation for later math and science excellence. As discussed in his book, *Music with the Brain in Mind* (2000), Japan, Hungary and the Netherlands require music instruction beginning in elementary school and these countries score top in the world in math and science.

As shown in the daily schedule **in Attachment 6**, students at STAR Academy will attend music and movement classes during teacher planning time; additionally, regular classroom teachers will team with the music and movement education teachers during a themed STEAM block in order to infuse music and movement education into the core curriculum. Teachers will also receive professional development training in the arts integration that includes music and movement from Think 360 Arts. Classroom teachers will collaborate with the music and movement education teachers and contracted art instructors to develop lessons that align with grade-level, STEAM-thematic units. Planning will occur daily, as well as during early release time on Friday afternoons (allowing for teacher professional development and student data analysis sessions).

Visual and Performing Arts

Eric Jensen, author of *Arts with the Brain in Mind* (2001), is a researcher who has compiled and reviewed research studies on the arts, the brain, and learning. In his review of musical arts, visual arts, and kinesthetic arts (including dramatic arts and dance, industrial arts and design, and recreational activities and physical education), Jensen concludes that arts are vital to educating our children and should be taught every day in our schools, just like language arts, math, science, and social studies. Research from the studies discussed in this book and the experience of countless classroom educators support the view that visual arts have strong positive cognitive, emotional, social, collaborative, and neurological effects. Involvement in the arts is associated with gains in math, reading, cognitive ability, critical thinking, and verbal skill.

Arts learning can also improve motivation, concentration, confidence, and teamwork. Education policies almost universally recognize the value of arts. Forty-seven states have arts-education mandates, forty-eight have arts-education standards, and forty have arts requirements for high school graduation, according to the 2007–2008 AEP state policy databases. The Goals 2000 Educate America Act, passed in 1994 to set the school-reform agenda of the Clinton and Bush administrations, declared art to be part of what all schools should teach. NCLB, enacted in 2001, included art as one of the ten core academic subjects of public education, a designation that qualified arts programs for an assortment of federal

grants. STAR Academy will contract services for visual arts and performing arts instruction. As artists-in-residence, contracted artists will work collaboratively with teachers. Think 360 Arts is an organization that connects artists to schools in order to enhance arts instruction and create authentic arts-integration. We will contract with Think 360 Arts to provide artists-in-residence.

Instruction: The instructional environment at STAR Academy is aligned to the Integrated Thematic Instruction (ITI) model, which is an integration of the disciplines approach that commonly uses themes and topics to describe an area of study.²⁸ In the thematic methodology or approach to learning, subjects or courses are considered secondary to the theme. This allows the typical separation between disciplines or subjects to overcome and a true STEAM learning environment to achieve.

The ITI model was developed based on a philosophy of how students learn. A significant portion of this philosophy has grown out of the work of Leslie Hart (1983). Hart's Proster Theory identifies five elements of brain-compatibility which are the foci for ITI.²⁹ These five elements are:

- **Trust:** Within a classroom, students should be able to count on daily activities that include thinking and problem solving in a respectful and caring environment
 - This includes the absence of threat from teachers and peers
- **Meaningful Context:** The brain is naturally seeking patterns and can handle vast amounts of input. Solving real problems within meaningful contexts is a key to learning
- **Choices:** Choices allow for greater success for a larger number of students
 - Choices should be available in the areas of curriculum, assignments, learning environments, and resources
- **Adequate Time:** There must be adequate time to thoroughly master material
 - Moving students from classroom to classroom in order to cover large amounts of unrelated material results in little learning
- **An Enriched Environment:** There is a connection between intelligence and experience
 - Classrooms should contain a variety of resources (both material and people) to assist students in seeking patterns and making connections to the real world; experiences should also be provided in the real world (outside the classroom)

At STAR Academy, these five elements and a variety of teaching strategies (e.g., cooperative group learning, physical movement, and direct instruction) will be used to create a learning environment of discovery, innovation, and success that will enable all students to master STEAM concepts and high levels of achievement.

The learning environment at STAR Academy are grounded in providing authentic integrated learning through the use of themes. Teachers design a unit-long (9 or more weeks of instruction) focus theme and then divide into topics that support the overall theme. Criteria includes that the themes: have substance and application to the real world, have readily available learning materials, have meaningful

²⁸ <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/ed555/zone3/iti.htm>

²⁹ Mateja, John M. *Human Brain and Human Learning by Leslie A. Hart*. Journal of Reading. Vol. 27, No. 4 (Jan., 1984), pp. 376-378; Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40029356>

content, are age appropriate, are worthy of time to create and implement, titles that are engaging for children, and are aligned to either Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, or the Alabama State Standards.

Within each thematic unit, teachers develop the core set of knowledge and skills which the student is to master at periodic intervals throughout their study (e.g., week, month, or year). This core information is presented in a direct instruction format. Project-based learning is a part of everyday instruction, but there is a time limitation to ensure students have ample opportunity to engage in projects that allow them to authentically apply the core skills they have learned. Also, the teacher identifies multiple resources (both inside and outside school) from which the teacher and students work.

Structuring an authentic STEAM learning environment can be challenging; therefore, STAR Academy will constantly seek out strategies and techniques that will help students to master content. This collection of research and evidence-based resources, the STEAM Instructional Toolkit, is a set of lessons, strategies, methods, and materials that have proven to increase achievement for students in STEM and arts-integrated learning environments. Additionally, these resources will support the creation of a learning environment of trust, embracing all learners' diverse backgrounds, interests, and abilities.

Approach to Curriculum and Lesson Planning: STAR Academy classroom relies on several instructional practices and strategies to provide each child with authentic and engaging learning experiences that are preparing them to be innovative thinkers that courageously, creatively, and imaginatively approach 21st Century problem solving.

The academic focus at STAR is not geared towards any one curriculum, but is carefully aligned to the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards. STAR Academy teachers will practice a standards-aligned, integrated approach to guide their planning and curricular design. Sources utilized will include STEAM Curriculum, teacher-created STEAM units outlining the standards, learning outcomes and objectives, projects, and activities incorporated into each theme. Teachers will strategically weave these resources together to build whole group and individualized learning to ensure that all STAR Academy students are on the pathway to attaining the learning goals and success targets identified in their individualized work plans. The quarterly work plan targets collaboratively set by teachers, students, and families, allow students to inventively and critically consider tasks they can carry out at their own pace that will support the successful completion of identified learning goals. Our STEAM focused instructional program is strategically designed to ensure our students become the kind of creative learners that use the kind of courageous and innovative thinking that establishes them as leaders in their personal lives, careers, and communities and secures them success in STEAM fields.

Rigorous Curriculum Design: Teachers will use the Rigorous Curriculum Design to plan their cross-content thematic units. Rigorous Curriculum Design is a backwards-design lesson planning approach in which teachers start with a group of priority standards that need to be taught throughout the course of an academic year. After pinpointing those standards, key concepts and skills are identified and translated into student-friendly learning objectives. These objectives are then used to create STEAM focused units of study with accompanying projects, assessments, and instructional strategies that will enhance learning for students at varying academic levels. Each unit will culminate in a "presentation of learning." The integrating thread in STEAM units is the engineering design process. This may be a

project, a presentation, or an oral report. These presentations provide opportunities to celebrate student learning in the presence of parents, families, and community stakeholders.

Data Teams and Collaborative Planning: The data teams process is distinctive in that it is not just looking at student test scores, but the combination of student assessment results, teaching strategies, and leadership support in efforts to improve school-wide instruction. Data teams focus teachers' attention on student learning by identifying a specific skill or topic with which students are struggling, and collaboratively developing a set of strategies to bring all students to mastery. According to the work of Doug Reeves³⁰, the five steps for data teams involve: (1) collecting and charting data; (2) analyzing student strengths and barriers to skill mastery; (3) setting, reviewing, and revising instructional goals based on analysis of data; (4) selection of instructional strategies that will lead to successful attainment of set instructional goals; and (5) determining what indicators or measures will be used to identify whether or not instructional goals are met.

Data teams are a way of helping educators move from “drowning in data to using information to make better instructional decisions.

Teachers at STAR Academy will work in their grade level/content teams two to three times per week to analyze student data (data-driven instruction), examine student work, internalize lessons/standards, etc. Each Friday, teachers will have the opportunity to engage in three-hours of school-wide academic and cultural professional development, teach back protocol (lesson plan feedback) with grade level, vertical content teams, and passion pursuits. For more information on this process, please see the section titled *Professional Development*. See *Academic Strategies Pyramid attachment for overall academic structure that will prepare students for college and beyond*.

Academic Support and Intervention: It is the expectation that all STAR Academy *stars* achieve mastery of identified standards, skills, concepts, and academically perform at high levels. Rather than waiting for students to fail, our instructional model utilizes a research-based approach to quickly identifying student learning gaps and implementing individualized instructional strategies (early on) to struggling learners that will accelerate their rate of learning.

Instructional Methods and Strategies

The students of East Birmingham represent a community of rich history and culture. As more and more students from diverse backgrounds populate 21st Century classrooms, today's classrooms require teachers to educate students varying in culture, language, abilities, and many other characteristics.³¹ A culturally responsive instructional environment minimizes the students' alienation as they attempt to adjust to the different “world” of school. Culturally responsive pedagogy facilitates and supports the achievement of all students. In a culturally responsive classroom, effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally supported, learner-centered context, whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement.

³⁰ Reeves, Doug. *Data Teams: The Big Picture: Looking at Data Teams through a Collaborative Lens*. 2010

³¹ Gollnick, D.M., & Chinn, P.C. (202). *Multicultural education in a pluralistic society* (6th ed.). New York: Merrill.

At STAR Academy, both the administrative and teaching staff will reflect the diversity of the community and families we serve. Extensive staff training will lead all teachers, administrative staff, and community partners to honestly examine personal values and beliefs that encompass who they are and operate through an equity lens. In doing so, an atmosphere of trust and acceptance for staff, students, and families of diverse backgrounds will be created, fostering an environment of compassion, joy, and success. Textbooks, bulletin boards, learning opportunities, behavior management systems, and classroom and school-wide activities will be culturally supportive of all STAR Academy community members, supporting our mission and vision to nurture human relationships and become a community of compassionate learners.

Sheltered English Instruction: Training and supporting classroom teachers in the effective instruction of English language learners (ELLs) is the key in order to ensure that the fast-growing ELL student population meets rigorous academic standards. Since the early 1980's content area teachers have looked to sheltered English instruction as a way to make content comprehensible for the ELLs in their classrooms; however, there are benefits for ELL students as well as native English learners with a variety of learning styles. The purpose of sheltered instructional is to deliver grade level subject matter content in a way that is accessible to all learners while at the same time promoting their English language development. Using the sheltered instruction approach, teachers in content classrooms use a wide range of strategies to make content and concepts understandable for all students.

Active Learning: The lessons at STAR Academy STEAM Academy are by no means spent in silent memorizations. Students walk around, gather information, ask advice from their teachers and peers, and occasionally rest on a sofa in the Commons or beanbag in the "Incubator" room to further process their learning and apply it in their project task. Classroom design, flexible furniture, writing surfaces, and technology all combine to support teachers in engaging with their students through collaborative learning activities and more participatory use of the media that make up STEAM work and design. Providing more substantive opportunities for teachers and students to actively engage in the teaching and learning process, active learning/flipped classrooms allow for diverse groupings of students which create a flexible environment for transitions between whole class, small group, and individual learning arrangements.

Research shows that both teachers and students enjoy active learning classrooms better than traditional classrooms and those students achieve more in these kinds of settings. Student engagement is higher and they often outperform the expectations of how much could be learned in a designated timeframe. Active learning environments help reduce problematic classroom behavior.

Collaborative Learning: Encouraging students to reach out to one another to solve problems and share knowledge not only builds collaboration skills but leads to deeper learning and understanding. On any given day at STAR Academy one will likely see groups of students huddling around laptops at the media bar, researching cultures of assigned countries and how identifying food plays an important role in that culture. One might hear students asking questions and explaining their thinking to each other or having a discussion about a book they are reading.

**Tell me and I will forget. Show me
and I may remember. Involve me
and I will understand.**

-Chinese Proverb

Collaborative learning not only allows students to work with one another, but also empowers students to consider their peers as a resource to reflect and refine their own work. It not only presents a platform for deeper conceptual understanding, but also develops the habits of mind that foster innovation, creativity, and invention. Collaborative learning builds a sense of community within our school; identifying common tasks where each individual within a group is dependent on and accountable to others to reach the end goal. STAR Academy staff and students will work collaboratively to complete group projects, join in problem-solving, debates, the creation of artifacts, and other activities.

STEAM Experiential Learning: Research confirms that students learn most effectively from active engagement with information and ideas. Students learn better when they take the initiative to apply concepts to practice, to solve real problems, to make decisions, and to reflect on the consequences. Experiential learning is the process of making meaning from direct experience or learning from experience. It allows teachers to pose problems, observe how students solve them, facilitate learning, observe learning as it occurs, and help students make meaning of their experiences. It is an excellent pedagogy that asks students to participate and to collaborate in their classes, being active in guided discussions, designing research projects, solving math problems, completing science experiments, staging debates, writing to politicians and authors, and more.

STEAM experiential learning allows students to gain hands-on, real-world experience in Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics early in their education. By engaging students in hands-on STEAM projects, teachers are facilitating learning beyond core content matter. For example, STAR Academy students will visit a local outdoor environment to learn about the lasting effects weather erosion in Alabama and how to preserve natural resources.

In addition to instructional planning, STAR Academy relies on research and evidence-based strategies for classroom management, student engagement, and impactful instructional strategies. Some of these strategies come from the following resources:

- **Creating Innovators: The Making of Young People Who Will Change the World by Tony Wagner (2012):** this book identifies how adult nurturing of creativity and imagination were critical factors in the lives of compelling young American innovators. He takes readers into the most forward-thinking schools, colleges, and workplaces in the country, where teachers and employers are developing cultures of innovation based on collaboration, interdisciplinary problem solving, and intrinsic motivation. It provides a roadmap for creating the change makers of tomorrow.
- **From STEM to STEAM: Using Brain-Compatible Strategies to Integrate the Arts by David Sousa and Thomas Pilecki (2013):** this book is comprised of teacher-tested techniques for fitting the arts into STEM classrooms, sample lesson plans across K-12, a worksheet template for designing your own integrated lessons, and tips for managing time and collaborating.
- **STEAM Point: A Guide to Integrating Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics through the Common Core by Susan M. Riley (2012):** this guide provides curriculum maps integrating Common Core English Language Arts and Math Standards, STEM practices and Fine Arts Standards, as well as lesson theme ideas. It also includes assessment strategies to measure student growth with integrity in performance-based tasks and processes, which is a key to 21st Century skills and STEAM practices.

- **Kagan Cooperative Learning** by Dr. Spencer Kagan and Miguel Kagan (2009): this book presents today’s most successful cooperative grouping learning methods. It also provides ready-to-do teambuilding and class building activities, hundreds of management tips, and up-to-date research on proven methods.
- **Kagan Structures for English Language Learners** by Dr. Spencer Kagan (2002): this book provides easy-to-learn, easy-to-use instructional strategies for promoting second language learning in classrooms in which the Kagan Structures are used regularly.
- **Win-Win Discipline: Strategies for All Discipline Problems** by Dr. Spencer Kagan, Spencer Kyle, and Sally Scott (2007): this book is a comprehensive and effective classroom discipline program that seeks a higher goal than other discipline programs. The goal is not merely to end disruptions; the goal is to teach students to meet their unmet needs so they no longer need to be disruptive.
- **Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement** by Robert J. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering, and Jane E. Pollack (2004): this book on quality instruction identifies nine strategies proven to be effective in improving student academic outcomes. It provides information on each strategy and how to incorporate them into lesson planning.
- **Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College & TLAC 2.0** by Doug Lemov (2010): this book offers effective teaching techniques to help teachers, especially those in their first few years, become champions in the classroom. The techniques are concrete, specific, and are easy to put into action the very next day.
- **Getting Started with Rigorous Curriculum Design: How School Districts Are Successfully Redesigning Their Curricula for the Common Core** by Larry Ainsworth and Kristin Anderson: each chapter in this book provides teachers and curriculum designers with insights and ideas to enrich and expand their understandings to redesign their curricula to prepare students for success on the Common Core national assessments.

Enrichment Classes:

Rationale for Enrichment Classes: Enrichment classes are a way for students to express themselves in different ways outside of the general education classroom. However, non-core classes have a natural connection between the curriculum and an art form. Classes such as physical education, technology, art, foreign language, music, and health affect a child’s growth in multiple ways: physically, mentally, socially, cognitively, and emotionally. Each of these non-core curriculum classes help students become well-rounded individuals. They increase peer-to-peer interactions, increase conflict-resolution skills, and improve academic achievement in school. Participation in specials classes also allows students to incorporate their creativity and promote imagination. With creativity and imagination, students will be able to write better stories, complete math problems by envisioning them in different ways, and understand social studies and science concepts better.

A non-core curriculum class, or an enrichment, is defined as instruction that is not taught in the regular core content classroom.

Integration of the arts allows educators to provide a balanced education for all students, helping them discover what they are passionate about and what they are interested in. “We have learned over the

years that this [students becoming well-rounded individuals] is especially true for elementary schools, where the integration of all content with the building of knowledge and skill on the part of teachers and their students is fundamental.”³² The arts and physical education teach students much more than disciplinary content, but enable students to look at the world with more complex lens by building critical thinking and social skills. They engage students in learning how to play well together, become team players, more responsible, and to take risks. The use of technology is important to the school setting because, if used properly, can enhance learning for students and enhance teaching for teachers. Opportunities to participate in art and music allow students to express themselves, putting their feelings into words, rhythms, or pictures.

Schools integrating the arts into the curriculum as part of a comprehensive education reform strategy are documenting positive changes in the school environment and improved student performance.³³ Arts participation and SAT scores co-vary—that is, they tend to increase linearly; the more arts classes, the higher the scores. This relationship is illustrated in the 2005 results. Notably, students who took four years of arts coursework outperformed their peers who had one-half year or less of arts coursework by 58 points on the verbal portion and 38 points on the math portion of the SAT.³⁴ An analysis conducted of multiple studies confirms the finding that students who take music classes in high school are more likely to score higher on standardized mathematics tests such as the SAT. One explanation is musical training in rhythm emphasizes proportion, patterns, and ratios expressed as mathematical relations.³⁵

Participation in other arts forms, such as dance or visual arts, also lends itself to the development of thinking skills. A group of 162 children, ages 9 and 10, were trained to look closely at works of art and reason about what they saw. The results showed that children’s ability to draw inferences relative to artwork transferred to their reasoning about images in science. In both cases, the critical skill is that of looking closely and reasoning about what is seen.³⁶

Enrichment Classes Offered: Upon its opening, STAR Academy will offer music, physical education, visual art, vocal music, and Spanish. As our program grows, we will offer drama, theatre, instrumental music, media arts, other world languages, and more. We hope to continue to enrich our enrichment offerings to increase engagement and achievement, but to also expose our students to the vast array of STEAM options available for future careers.

³² Holzer, 2009

³³ Deasy, Richard J. (editor) (2002), *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Achievement and Social Development*, Washington, DC: AEP.

³⁴ Ruppert, Sandra S (2006). *Critical Evidence: How the ARTS Benefit Student Achievement*, Washington, DC: National Assembly of State Arts Agencies.

³⁵ Vaughn, Kathryn (2002), “Music and Mathematics: Modest Support for the Oft-Claimed Relationship.” In R. Deasy (Ed.), *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Achievement and Social Development*, Washington, DC: AEP.

³⁶ Tishman, Shari, Dorothy MacGillivray, and Patricia Palmer (2002), “Investigating the Educational Impact and Potential of the Museum of Modern Art’s Visual Thinking Curriculum: Final Report.” In R. Deasy (Ed.), *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Achievement and Social Development*, Washington, DC: AEP.

Student Performance Standards

Student Performance Standards: The academic focus at STAR is not geared towards any one curriculum, but rather carefully aligned to the Common Core State Standards, Alabama Academic Content Standards, and Next Generation Science Standards. Every lesson will be designed and implemented using the Rigorous Curriculum Design (RCD); a standards-based, backwards-planning process. Our unique, innovative, research-based curriculum is designed to help each child reach their fullest potential, inspire the love of learning, build 21st Century skills, and prepare students for academic challenges in the future. Specifically, our program is defined by seven components: STEAM Pedagogy, standards-aligned integrated/thematic instruction, an inquiry and project-based approach, 21st Century learning, literacy-based instruction, self and social learning, and personalized learning experiences.

- **Common Core State Standards (CCSS):** The CCSS is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy that outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. The standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life. The state of Alabama adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2011 and began implementing in the 2012-13 academic year. Adopted by STAR Academy as well, our curriculum is in compliance with the Common Core State Standards, which reinforce our aim to build and strengthen students' higher-order thinking skills and create learning experiences that encourage depth of learning versus information memorization. The CCSS may be accessed at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction>.
- **Next Generation Science Standards for Today's Students and Tomorrow's Workforce:** The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) are K-12 science standards created through a collaborative, state-led process. A joint effort between the National Research Council, the National Science Teachers Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and Achieve has created the foundation for all students to have a solid K-12 science education. These standards, similar to the Common Core State Standards for English language arts and mathematics, identifies students' knowledge and capabilities to become a functional citizen, which includes being scientifically literate and an effective member of the United States workforce. These standards are available at: <http://www.nextgenscience.org/next-generation-science-standards>. A detailed scope and sequence of the Next Generation Science Standards can be found in **Attachment 2**.
- **Alabama Academic Content Standards:** Education policymakers and educators in Alabama are committed to improving the state's public education system to ensure that students gain the knowledge and skills they need to graduate from high school ready for real life. The state is on the path to implementing higher academic standards—the College and Career Ready Standards—which lay a foundation to ensure that classroom instruction across Alabama provides students with real world skills and knowledge in reading, math and writing. During the development of the standards, work groups developed the specific standards for the end of high school that would indicate college and career readiness (defined as the ability to succeed in entry-level postsecondary classes). The purpose of Alabama's College and Career Ready

Standards is to move away from rote memorization and “teaching to a test.”³⁷ Instead, the CCRS go beyond memorization to increase academic rigor, critical thinking and real learning for real life in math and language arts.

- **Core Knowledge Sequence for Science and Social Studies:** The result of a lengthy process of research and consensus-building by the Core Knowledge Foundation, the Core Knowledge Sequence is distinguished by its breadth and specificity. While most state or district standards and curricula provide general guidelines concerning skills students should obtain and master, the specific content in the Core Knowledge Sequence provides a solid foundation on which to build skills instruction. The sequence also builds knowledge systematically year by year. A copy of the Core Knowledge Sequence can be found in **Attachment 2**.

Promotion and Retention: All students will be expected to meet or exceed our academic expectations by the end of each school year. Students will be promoted based on their proficiency on specific grade-level standards and learning outcomes. Rather than giving students one grade on an assessment that addressed multiple skills, standards-based grading gives students a number of scores that represent their proficiency in each of the skills assessed. The goal is that at the end of the academic year, students will have mastered the essential content skills and standards necessary for the next level of learning.

At the beginning of each unit, teachers will break down the standards for the unit into smaller learning objectives and mastery criteria using a detailed rubric. During the unit of study, students are assessed to see if they are familiar with the material using a variety of assessments such as pencil-and-paper tests, projects, discussions, reports, or presentations of learning. The goal of this approach is to provide the teacher, student, and family an accurate assessment of the student’s learning abilities and to encourage a dialogue relative to how the student can master class and unit objectives.

In the traditional 100-point grading system, a student’s grades are typically based on all of the work assigned in class, including homework, projects, quizzes, and tests. These scores are often arranged in the grade based on the type of assignment rather than on the essential standards for the class. The grade may also include points for non-academic factors, such as participation, effort, or attitude.

Standards-based grading does not separate out tests, homework, or projects. All of the work a student does is used to assess the student’s mastery of the essential standards. A student’s scores from their work are tracked by the essential standards, which provide the teacher, student, and family a detailed picture of which standards a student has mastered. Non-academic factors like behavior, attitude, and attendance are not included in this grade, but are reported in a different manner.

Rubrics utilizing STAR Academy’s standards-based grading approach will use a four-point scale, meaning the following:

- **4.0:** The student demonstrates an in-depth understanding of complex, targeted knowledge and skills by completing advanced applications of the material; no mistakes evident.
- **3.0:** The student demonstrates a strong understanding of complex, targeted knowledge and skills, but making mistakes.

³⁷ http://www.aplusala.org/uploadedFiles/File/Common_Core_history_brief_rev03042014.pdf

- **2.0:** The student demonstrates basic understanding of foundational material that supports the targeted knowledge and skills, but is still working to master the complex material and needs more practice in order to master concepts.
- **1.0:** The student demonstrates very little understanding of the targeted knowledge and skills and can show basic mastery of foundational concepts with help from the teacher, but struggles when working alone.
- **0:** The student does not demonstrate understanding of the targeted knowledge and skills, even with help from the teacher.

The intermediate scores of 0.5, 1.5, 2.5, and 3.5 are used to show that a student has shown partial mastery of the next level of learning. Specifically, a score of 0.5 shows that a student has mastered some, but not all of the foundational 1.0 material, a score of 1.5 shows that a student has mastered all of the foundational material with help but only some of it without help, and a score of 2.5 shows that a student has mastered all of the foundational material at the 2.0 level but has only shown partial mastery of the complex, targeted learning at the 3.0 level. ***The four-point scale will be converted to a letter grade using the scale shown below:***

A	3.75-4.00	B-	2.75-2.99	D+	1.50-1.74
A-	3.50-3.74	C+	2.50-2.74	D	1.25-1.49
B+	3.25-3.49	C	2.00-2.49	D-	1.00-1.24
B	3.00-3.24	C-	1.75-1.99	F	0.00-0.99

This conversion scale sets clear expectations for student learning. Promotion to the next grade means a student must (with help) show an understanding of all of the foundational skills taught in a grade level. The C range shows that the student understands all of the foundational skills without help, and the B range requires a student to master the entire complex, targeted knowledge in the class. Finally, to receive an A- or A, the student must show an in-depth, advanced understanding of the material.

This grading scale will be communicated to parents in the family handbook and during school-sponsored family nights. It will be reiterated during home visits and goal setting sessions with families and students.

School Calendar and Schedule

School Calendar and Schedule: STAR Academy offers an extended day and extended academic year for our students. The school day at STAR Academy will be from 7:40 am – 3:30 pm Monday – Thursday. On Fridays, school will be from 7:40 am – 12:30 pm, allowing for purposeful and productive staff

The added time in STAR Academy’s academic calendar and school day will provide extended work time, lengthier time to engage in STEAM projects, opportunity to take short field trips in the community, longer time to engage in 21st century learning skills throughout the day, and extended teacher collaboration

professional development time. The teacher workday will be from 7:30 am – 4:00 pm daily. According to the Alabama Compulsory School Attendance Law, students should attend school for at least a full 180 days or its hourly equivalent of no less than 1080 hours and no less than six hours of teaching each day.³⁸ STAR will have an average of 7.8 hours of instruction per day. This added time allows for extended work periods, longer time to engage in STEAM projects and to take short field trips in the community, longer opportunity to engage build 21st Century learning skills throughout the day, and longer teacher- collaboration

periods.

At STAR Academy we will build a school calendar that provides a minimum of 180 students contact days. The STAR Academy calendar will also include days for teachers to engage in before-school professional development, set up classrooms, plan beginning of the year instruction, and days at the end of the school year to close out classrooms for summer vacation. Please see **Attachments 5 and 6** for examples of our school calendar, student schedule, and teacher schedule.

School Comparison

	STAR Academy	Traditional Public Schools
Number of Student Instructional Days	185 days	180 days
Hours in Each School Day	7.8 hours	6.5 hours
Total Hours Each School Year	1,443 hours	1,138 hours

STAR Academy values teacher collaboration and professional development, and as a result, our schedule reflects an intentional incorporation of common planning time and whole-group professional development.

Early release on Fridays will allow for staff professional development, data analysis, and teacher collaboration.

Embedded with each teacher’s schedule is common planning time with other grade-level and content teachers. Teachers will 210 minutes of uninterrupted planning time Monday-Thursday, which allows for well-planned and intentioned instruction. Additionally, each Friday school will dismiss at 12:30 pm to allow staff time to meet for whole-group professional development, grade-level planning and data analysis, and to work in vertical teams with other grade-level teachers. Devoting this amount of time to teacher development and planning, a critical component to authentic STEAM models will aid in teacher retention and avoid teacher burn-out.

³⁸ <https://www.alsde.edu/sec/pss/Attendance/2015%20Alabama%20Attendance%20Manual.pdf>

Scheduling early release on Fridays is most convenient for our parents and families and ensures that teachers have sufficient time to finish planning for the next week.

Every effort will be made to follow the Birmingham City Schools’ calendar as closely as possible. However, a few changes may occur to accommodate families, teacher professional development, sufficient data analysis, instructional planning, and relationship building with STAR families. The proposed calendar projections are for the 2017-18 school year (**see Attachment 5**).

Rationale for Start of School Calendar

The report date for teachers will be July 10th. The first year of a school being in operation requires more time devoted to operations, culture, and academics. The four-week preparation will set our school and students up for success. The summer professional development will include, but not limited to: team culture building, professional expectations, classroom organization and setup, unit/lesson planning, home visits, and professional development (e.g. school culture, STEAM instruction, curriculum and planning practices, behavior management, school-wide intervention system, and more). In future years, a STAR Academy boot camp will take place the first three days of before-school professional development to all new members of STAR’s staff; both instructional and non-instructional.

Due to our commitment to providing a safe, compassionate, nurturing, and joyful learning environment for our students, it is important to stagger the first day of school for our students. New students will arrive at school for Rocket orientation a day earlier than returning students to prepare them to enter into our school community, and to become familiar with our expectations and school’s core values. Because all students will be new in our first year, all students will start school on August 7th. The following schedule describes our first two weeks of school:

STAR Academy First Two Weeks of School Schedule

Monday Aug. 7th	Tuesday Aug. 8th	Wednesday Aug. 9th	Thursday Aug. 10th	Friday Aug. 11th
Pre-kindergarten Orientation- ½ day (8:00am-12:00pm)	Pre-kindergarten Orientation- ½ day (8:00am-12:00pm)	Regular Schedule for Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Elementary Students (full day)	Regular Schedule for Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Elementary Students (full day)	Regular Schedule for Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Elementary Students (early dismissal)
Kindergarten Orientation- ½ day (8:00am-12:00pm)	Kindergarten Orientation- ½ day (8:00am-12:00pm)	STAR school-wide and classroom culture expectations (8:00am-12:00pm)	STAR school-wide and classroom culture expectations (8:00am-12:00pm)	STAR school-wide and classroom culture expectations (8:00am-12:00pm)
Elementary School Students Orientation- ½ day (8:00am-12:00pm)	Elementary School Students Orientation- ½ day (8:00am-12:00pm)	Diagnostic Screening	Diagnostic Screening	Diagnostic Screening

		assessments for all students (12:00pm-4:00pm)	assessments for all students (12:00pm-4:00pm)	assessments for all students (12:00pm-1:30pm)
Monday Aug. 14th	Tuesday Aug. 15th	Wednesday Aug. 16th	Thursday Aug. 17th	Friday Aug. 18th
Regular Schedule for Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Elementary Students (full day)	Regular Schedule for Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Elementary Students (full day)	Regular Schedule for Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Elementary Students (full day)	Regular Schedule for Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Elementary Students (full day)	Regular Schedule for Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Elementary Students (early dismissal)

Daily Schedule Rationale

The daily schedule is crafted with the following objectives in mind:

- Provide longer periods of instructional time to promote more in-depth knowledge and comprehension of content.
- Adequate planning time for teachers.
- Common planning time for grade-level/looped teacher teams.
- Adequate time for students to engage in project-based learning tasks.
- Intervention time for students needing additional instructional support to master skills and concepts.

School Culture

Core School Culture Beliefs:

We embrace the beautiful struggle. All students need grace and space to thrive and grow. We value mistakes because they improve outcomes and allow us to learn from our failures. We seek challenges and obstacles because we can overcome them with resilience and hope.

We are critical thinkers. We fall in love with learning and develop critical thinkers that will equip our community with the necessary knowledge, skills, and mindsets to affect transformative change.

We co-create lives of choice and opportunity. We are radical and innovative in our thoughts and actions to deliver on the promise of equal access and true freedom for all children. We ensure academic excellence that leads to success in a competitive world and provides life-changing opportunities.

We (re)define possible. We equip children with the tools to take command of their futures and make the impossible, possible. All students have limitless potential and will serve as the next generation of leaders who will positively impact our communities and the world.

We will leave a legacy. We are in service of our community and must cultivate a service mindset. The community's identities will be reflected, celebrated, and honored in our school.

Culture Vision: At STAR Academy, we are a purposeful community that sparks love, pride and belonging into the core of who our *stars* are and who they forming to be. We foster confidence and dignity and teach our *stars* to be resilient in the face of challenges, celebrate and lift each other in moments of celebration and struggle. We extend grace to ourselves and others through risk-taking so that we can thrive. Our village uses our individual character strengths to social responsibility and shared accountability to lead with our character strengths. Our *Stars* will define their own narrative while learning from the past, excelling in the present while building for the future.

We at STAR Academy are: guided by hope; shaped by struggle; fueled by passion; limited by nothing.

Culture Statement: STAR Academy is not just a school, but a village in which all members (directors, leaders, staff, students, families, and community partners) feel profoundly valued, accepted, and respected. Together, our students, staff, and families will create a culture that strongly influences student social and academic success. It is imperative that the learning community feels safe and respectful in order that children are motivated to learn, staff are motivated to function at their highest professional capacity, and families are actively engaged and empowered. Our culture is identified as imaginative and creative, having fun, being thoughtful and embracing diversity, assuming the best of others, and being fully committed to the team. At STAR, we stress the principle "There is no them, there is only us."

Our culture ignites passion and brings out the best performance of each person. It will be an environment of collaboration, continuous learning and improvement, positivity, thoughtfulness, trust, and accountability. We constantly ask ourselves what story will our staff, students, families, and communities tell about STAR Academy? We believe that their story will be, "I cannot imagine working, learning, or sending my children to any other place." There are several ways that we will operationalize our school cultural vision. A few examples are as follows:

- **Commitment to Excellence agreements**
 - Staff, students, and families will discuss and agree to these commitments for the school year
- **Character report cards**
 - Character development is equally important as academics in the success of a child. Thus, students will receive character report cards in conjunction with quarterly academic report cards
- **Culture Rubrics & Audits**
 - There will be daily culture walk-throughs conducted by the leadership team as well as monthly “Culture auditors” which will be comprised of a teacher, parent, and student who audits cultural items such as student engagement, respect, cleanliness, etc.)
- **Early Stars**
 - In an effort to maintain a cohesive and strong culture, we will follow a protocol with all new to STAR Academy students. The components are as follows: entry meeting with parents/guardians, school tour/staff meet and greet, commitment to excellence, and buddy peer for the first two weeks

Staff Culture: Our staff culture is defined by a transcendent bond with each other that comes from dedication to our students. We are a community of educators who have joined together to re-envision 21st Century education to prepare our students as the next generation of innovators, artists, thinkers, and inventors. To accomplish our mission and realize our vision as a community of creative, compassionate, and joyful learners who use courageous and innovative thinking, we live by the following:

- ***Children come first.*** We put children’s needs before our own. The well-being and achievement of children is our highest priority, and 100% of our decisions are based on what’s best for them.
- ***Teachers should be revered.*** Schools should sustainable and promote strategies to respect, nurture, and support teachers in every possible way.
- ***We emphasize the team before the individual.*** We approach our work with humility rather than seeking the spotlight. We treat one another with kindness and put the interests of the group above those of the individual.
- ***We embrace and encourage continuous learning and improvement.*** We take initiative to continually improve everything, every day. We are relentless about excellence and about a strong work ethic. We believe that great teachers are always learning-so we put in the time and effort to maximize our own development. We plan together, observe and analyze each other’s lessons and collaborate to refine our teaching practices.
- ***We listen thoughtfully to one another.*** Open and honest dialogue is to the success of an organization. By truly hearing one another and assuming the best of one another, we work through disagreements and challenging situations.
- ***We are optimistic.*** We energize each other with positive words and actions. We exude joy and love for each other, our students, and the incredible privilege of being an educator.

- ***We hold ourselves accountable for results.*** We take ownership of our work and assume personal accountability for student achievement. We do not believe in blame or excuses, as individuals and as a team, just results and hard work.
- ***We are passionate and driven.*** We work for social justice with seriousness and a sense of urgency. We are resilient even in times of stress, because our work is a sacred calling.

There are several ways that we will operationalize our staff cultural vision. A few examples are as follows:

- **Monthly individual check-ins with leadership team**
 - We value genuine conversations that rely on affirming and adjusting feedback
- **Monthly grade level pulse checks with school leader**
 - An opportunity for grade level to share successes and failures as well as support needed in a safe environment
- **5th Fridays**
 - We value sustainability and believe that staff must renew to get stronger. In order to do so, each staff member will have a rotating “renewal” schedule

Student Culture: Using the Positive Behavior Support framework, we encourage a strong community and positive environment that feels safe and respectful so that all children can be motivated to learn, grow, persevere, and celebrated for their efforts. At STAR Academy, we chose a

Rockets represent innovative, limitless possibilities, high expectations, etc.

rocket as our mascot because rockets symbolize innovation, limitless possibilities, and high expectations. Every staff and faculty member, student, and family will take great pride in being an “Soaring Rocket” and exemplify those characteristics daily. We fully believe that this culture is set by STAR’s leaders and should be modeled for students and staff. We also believe in celebrating successes and honoring individuals who display the ideal character, attitude, and beliefs of a STAR rockets. These celebrations will happen often and frequently in our classrooms, hallways, and in our more formalized gatherings (e.g., passion pursuits, morning meeting, community circles, advisory, assemblies, etc.).

A key element to our school culture is our school-wide “POWER” values. Our POWER values are:

- ***Perseverance:*** Our work is fun, but it is also hard. We look every challenge square in the face and say, “I can overcome!” We are not afraid to fail. When we do, we pick ourselves up. When others do, we extend a hand.
- ***Ownership:*** We take ownership over our words and actions. We are open and honest. We freely admit mistakes and embrace difficult conversations. We deeply feel our shared responsibility for all our stars.
- ***Wonder:*** Education done right begins and ends in wonder. We marvel at – and are humbled by – one another and the world around us. We are obsessed with questions, exploring new things, and taking a vested interest in our learning.
- ***Everything with excellence:*** We approach new situations with excitement, effort, and energy and do them well! When things don’t go as planned, we remain motivated and think about how to make it better next time.

- **Respect:** We respect ourselves and others through our words and actions. We respect what others do for us and the opportunities we are privileged to have. We take personal responsibility to challenge injustice and value diversity.

Parent and Community Culture: Schools are the nucleus of a community. STAR Academy exists to serve the Birmingham community. With this belief at the core of what we do and say, families and community stakeholders are deeply valued and an integral part of our mission and vision.

There are several ways that we will operationalize our parent/community cultural vision. A few examples are as follows:

- **Family Leadership Council**
- **Monthly “Unity”**
 - These monthly events allow for our staff, students, and families to get to know one another on a personal level through joyful various activities such as games, dinners, and social outings
- **Specialized Meetings (Coffee & Conversations, Muffins with Moms, Donuts with Dads)**
 - These meetings will serve as opportunities for families to stay abreast of school happenings, provide feedback, and seek resources

Supplemental Programming

Summer school



Our personalized learning model as well as daily data analysis and reteach allows us to address student gaps in real-time. As a result, we will not offer summer school.

Supplementary Programs

STAR Academy will utilize supplementary programs to emphasize particular standards or to address students' specific needs or interests. Our collection of trusted programs will evolve over time.

STAR Academy will partner with New Rising Star Community Support Corporation to provide after school programming, and potentially before school programming. We are in current discussions regarding financial obligations for families.

Beginning in 2019, our 3rd graders will begin extra-curricular activities such as Girls on the Run, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts. We will rely on grant funding to support our extra-curricular activities. When our students transition to middle we will begin school-based sports such as basketball, football, and golf. We will also provide academic activities such as debate and speech. We will connect families to co-curricular resources should they choose to have their children participate prior to the start of our extracurricular programming. Staff members who choose to coach these sports and academic activities will receive a stipend for the coaching season should it be past the contracted school day.

Self and Social Learning

STAR Academy believes in developing well-rounded people. It requires that we know our children well. It is vital that every child is consistently seen, heard, and respected for their individual uniqueness. We know from brain research that emotional connections form the root of all learning. A school should be a home and a supportive community for children, a platform from which they can soar beyond the sky, and be their best, most powerful selves.

Making this real requires great attention to self and social learning, through which children develop the fundamental skills and core competencies for life. These skills include understanding how the brain works, recognizing and managing emotions, developing empathy, establishing positive relationships, persevering through difficult tasks, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively, all with high ethical standards. Students at STAR Academy learn that their abilities to grow with new challenges, effort and persistence. We use these ideas to continually encourage a willingness to take challenges and risks, make and learn from mistakes, and to support cognitive development. With instruction, guidance, awareness, and practice, all members of our community support children to self-regulate, solve problems independently, and work well with others, thus preparing them to be better learners and collaborators in school and in life.

Responsive Classroom Morning Meeting

Responsive Classroom Morning Meeting is an engaging way to start each day, build a strong sense of community, and set children up for success socially and academically. Each morning, staff and students

gather together in a circle for fifteen to twenty minutes and interact with one another during four purposeful components:

- **Greeting:** Students and teachers greet one another by name and practice offering hospitality.
- **Sharing:** Students share information about important events in their lives. Listeners offer empathetic comments or ask clarifying questions.
- **Group Activity:** Everyone participates in a brief, lively activity that fosters group cohesions and helps students practice social and academic skills (for example reciting a poem, dancing, singing, or playing a game that reinforces social and academic skills).
- **Morning Message:** Students read and interact with a short message written by their teacher and the school leader. The message is crafted to help students focus on the work they will do in school that day.

Peace for Kids

Peace education is also a part of the morning meeting and Positive Behavior Support system at STAR Academy. It embraces the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth of children with a framework deeply rooted in traditional human values. It is based on a philosophy that teaches love, compassion, trust, fairness, cooperation, and reverence for people.

Peace 4 Kids is an evidence-based K-12 Social and Emotional learning program that creates simple systems to teach behavior and academic skills. These skills prevent acting out and inappropriate behaviors and will create a school culture of connectedness, character, and academic success. For students with severe needs it is successfully used in treatment centers.

Peace 4 Kids teaches an updated model of Aggression Replacement Training (ART) skills through a K-12 Peace curriculum that includes training modules in emotional intelligence, anger management, impulse control, social skills, character education, and moral reasoning. It also includes a successful parent/family component.

Partnerships with Families, Communities, and Higher Education

Evidence from over four decades of research affirms that family involvement in a child's learning is one of the strongest indicators of social, emotional, and academic development and success. A key finding of Henderson and Mapp's (2002) synthesis of 51 studies was that "effective programs to engage families and community embrace a philosophy of partnership," and that "the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise among parents, school staff, and community members." With this in mind, STAR Academy aims to create a school culture that promotes community and family participation in the learning community. Numerous individuals from science and math-related fields have volunteered to serve in an advisory capacity for STAR Academy. Additionally, many local artists have offered their expertise in both performing and visual arts.

In the STEAM model, community partnerships are key components; business and industry partners serve as mentors who bring relevance to student's work and who serve on panels to review students' accomplishments. Partnerships will not be limited to the immediate community, but will include higher institutions and organizations outside the community to broaden the scope of project-based learning.



For example, Rachel Leonard from United Way has offered to support with a supplemental Pre-K curriculum called Success by Six. We have also had numerous conversations with representatives and Education department professors from The University of Alabama at Birmingham and Samford University.

Special Populations and At-Risk Students

Serving Students with Special Needs

STAR Academy is a public STEAM charter school that serves pre-kindergarten through 8th grade students, including those with physical, learning, and other disabilities. It is our belief that our students are students first and their disabilities are secondary. We seek to provide a quality education for all students, including those who have physical disabilities, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), 504 plans, behavioral challenges, and different abilities. We believe all students can learn and achieve, even if that requires more time and instructional support for them to do so. We also believe the most advanced learners should also be provided activities and curriculum options that support the depth and complexity of gifted students' thinking, and the opportunity to explore the potential of his or her abilities.

Students with disabilities will be fully integrated into the programs of STAR Academy whenever possible, with the necessary materials, mandated services, accommodations, modifications, and equipment to support their learning. STAR will comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) regulations, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Title 11 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Based on the demographics of the local community and nearby schools, we anticipate 15% of our student population will require special education services (approximately 11 students in year 1). STAR will ensure that any student with a disability attending STAR Academy is identified and receives the appropriate services to meet their individual needs.

STAR Academy will meet all the requirements mandated within a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) for all students entering with a special education disability determination under the Exceptional Children's Education Act (ECEA). The school will seek to offer an inclusion program for all students with disabilities; however, if the student's needs and IEP require a program other than inclusion. STAR Academy will attempt to meet those needs with existing or contracted staff using designated funds. A portion of per pupil revenue funds for students designated as needing special education services to support the salaries and benefits of special education staff, will be allocated to purchase of curricula, materials, or assessments needed by the special education department. As necessary, the school will contract with individual providers or arrange for services to be provided by Birmingham City Schools. We intend to purchase special education services from the district when a student's needs as set forth in their IEP require services from not only from a special educator but also from a special service provider (speech language pathologist, occupational/physical therapist, social worker, school psychologist, etc.). We look forward to working with BCS and contracted staff to define a Care and Concern process for our special education team that will cover:

- A process for identifying and referring students for assessment of special education needs
- Proper management of student IEPs including the provision and monitoring of all required educational and related services
- The various forms and documents which must be prepared, updated and filed related to a special needs student including initial referrals, triennial evaluations, etc., as well as the necessary signatures and recordkeeping requirements for each document
- A procedure for maintaining confidentiality, accurate, and timely reporting
- The responsible party (individual or organization) at each step in the Care and Concern process

- The collection of statistics required by IDEA, the state, and the district; for example, the number of students receiving special education services; the types and numbers of students exempted from state assessments; and the basis of exit for students with disabilities from STAR Academy.

Defining a Care and Concern process that includes these elements prior to the school's opening day will ensure that STAR Academy personnel understand their role in the identification, referral "and provision of services to students with disabilities under the IEP. Professional development and training for SPED staff, classroom teachers, and classroom assistants on best practices for working with special education (including students with disabilities and giftedness), student assessments will take place on an ongoing basis as well as during our two-week Summer Institute. During weekly job-embedded professional development meetings ("cluster"), special education staff will review students' IEP and 504 plans with classroom teachers and make sure they understand and can effectively implement modifications and accommodations for students.

Academic Intervention & Acceleration

STAR Academy is committed to ensuring that all students achieve and meet grade-level academic standards in all content areas. We will implement strong, research-based core curricula in all content areas. Universal screening of all students will be completed with intervention placement assessments: Terra Nova/SUPERA, MAP, STEP, and ACT Aspire (3-8). An examination of data across assessments will determine areas of possible intervention. Students in grades K-8 who are determined to be at the Tier 2 or targeted level will receive 40 minutes of targeted intervention (four days a week) in addition to grade-level instruction. Students in grades K-8 who are determined to be at the Tier 3 or intensive level will receive 40 minutes of intense targeted intervention (four days a week), grade level instruction, and additional pull-out support time during the 90-minute Friday Project-based Learning Extension Study block.

STAR Academy's unique daily schedule has been structured to allow students more time for integrated, project-based learning and engagement in 21st century skills. Within the Monday-Thursday schedule, student intervention is implemented by their grade-level/looped classroom teachers. Due to intervention happening at the same time for the entire grade level, no student will miss out on core instruction. An added social emotional benefit is that no student has to feel ashamed for being "pulled out" for intervention, feeling isolated or unfairly labeled for their academic or behavioral gap. All students will report to locations where they will either receive language intervention, academic intervention, or behavioral, social, or emotional intervention.

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a method of academic intervention used to provide early, systematic assistance to children who are having difficulty learning. RTI seeks to prevent academic failure through early intervention, frequent progress monitoring, and increasingly intensive research-based instructional interventions for children who continue to have difficulty. The RTI process provides help to struggling

learners faster, making interventions more successful and keeping students from becoming frustrated. The information collected along the way (such as progress monitoring data) becomes an important part of determining if a student needs to be formally evaluated for special education. The use of a RTI process as part of a school's procedures for determining whether a student has a learning disability and needs special education services can potentially:

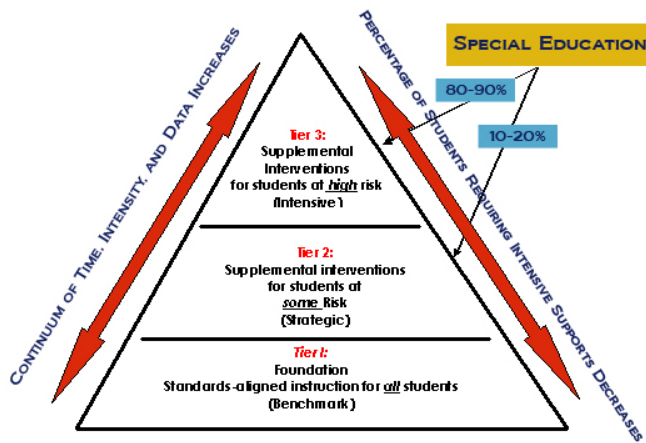
- Reduce the time a student waits before receiving additional instructional assistance, including special education if needed
- Reduce the overall number of students referred for special education services and increase the number of students who succeed within general education
- Provide critical information about the instructional needs of the student, which can be used to create effective educational interventions
- Ensure that students receive appropriate instruction, particularly in reading, prior to placement in special education
- Increase collaboration among school staff and parents

STAR Academy is committed to providing all students a quality educational experience, making sure the necessary interventions and supports are available for every student to experience success, and maximize their highest potential. RTI's underlying premise is that schools should not wait until students fall extremely behind to qualify for special education services to provide them with the help they need. Instead schools should provide targeted and systematic interventions to all students as soon as they demonstrate need. Therefore, RTI is not a framework that is specific to students that have been identified as requiring special education services, but a general education framework that involves instruction and intervention and the use of progress monitoring data to make educational decisions for the entire school. It is our ultimate goal to assist all students in succeeding within the regular education classroom setting with the standard curriculum as much as possible.

For this reason, we have included a Response to Intervention block into our school schedule, designating 45 minutes of intervention support four times a week to all students in our school. During this time, students will be horizontally restructured, attending intervention classes taught by teachers that teach them every day. As the school begins to grow, an intervention specialist will be phased into each school level lower (elementary, upper elementary, middle), to provide additional support to teaching staff during intervention time and to assist in planning data-driven interventions for students. At the primary level, each pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers have a classroom assistant. Intervention support will be provided by both the teacher and classroom assistant throughout the day and during the scheduled intervention block (kindergarten only).

Response to Intervention consists of four components:

- Universal screening using an assessment tool (Terra Nova/SUPERA, STEP).
- Identification and placement of students into three tiers of instruction based on their respective needs for intervention. All students start at Tier 1 and move through the Tiers based on progress, or lack thereof, towards meeting grade level standards



- Intervention instruction as appropriate based on the intensity of the students need(s) at each Tier.
- Continual monitoring to check progress.

Intervention support through the Response to Intervention framework occurs in three tiers, or levels:

Tier 1: Universal Level/Core Instructional Interventions

Powerful classroom instruction begins with the adoption and use of evidence-based curriculum, but effective teachers do not

simply teach such a program page-by-page in the same way for all students. Rather, they differentiate instruction, providing instruction designed to meet the specific needs of students in the class. Tier 1 interventions are those best practices that occur in the regular classroom from day to day. Tier 1 interventions will be successful with approximately 80-90% of the student population.

Universal screenings in core content areas will be administered three times per year to help identify students that may be “at risk.” The initial screening will occur in the fall (August), followed by a mid-year screening in the winter (January), and a final screening in the spring (May). All students will receive a universal screener. Strategies used for Tier 1 interventions include standards-based curricula and strategies, the use of whole group, and differentiated small group instruction to target the individual needs of students.

Tier 2: Targeted Level/Strategic RTI-Driven Interventions

An effective Tier 2 system is critical within the Response to Intervention model because it represents a mechanism for systematically providing early intervention for students who require additional support to successfully meet grade-level performance standards, but who do not necessarily qualify for more intense services such as special education. Based on our school-wide screening assessment (Terra Nova/SUPERA, STEP), students who are not meeting grade-level benchmarks with the support of Tier 1 interventions are not closing the gap will receive Tier II interventions. At Tier 2 students still receive the same instruction as students in Tier 1, but will also receive targeted interventions. Tier 2 is designed to provide secondary intervention for a small percentage (5-10%) of the student population who are performing below benchmarks in academically and/or behaviorally.

Students in need of interventions are assigned to the Student Support Team (SST) which reviews the data the classroom teacher collected at Tier 1. The SST team includes school administration, the director of academic success and innovation, lead, the school social worker, the English language development coordinator, interventionists, the classroom teacher, parents, and a member of the special education team. The SST team meets to problem-solve and design interventions by identifying research-based interventions for the classroom teacher. Tier 2 interventions are provided by the classroom teacher in addition to the standards-based instruction that continues to be taught in the regular classroom.

A 45-minute intervention/small group block will be provided for all grades K-8, four days a week. During this time the classroom teachers will be conducting small-group intervention instruction and monitoring specific work stations. Classroom teachers, intervention teachers, special education teachers, and classroom assistants will provide additional small-group instructions during that 45 minutes. Student groups will participate in double-dosing targeting specific skill needs using a variety of intervention materials. Possible intervention programs will include but not limited to: Imagine It Intervention, Read Well, KIPP Wheatley, Leveled Literacy Instruction, Six Minute Solution, PALS, Read Naturally, Math-in-Focus Reteach, Origo, Navigator, and Do the Math.

Tier 3: Intensive Level/Intensive RTI-Driven Interventions

Students who are not making adequate progress at Tier 2 will receive Tier 3 interventions. Tier 3 interventions include intensive instruction, specific to the student's highest areas of need, aimed at increasing an individual student's rate of learning. Tier 3 serves a very small percentage of students (1-5%), who demonstrate a need for an individualized program and, as a result, longer term interventions. Tier 3 interventions are provided in addition to the standards-based instruction continuing to be taught in the regular classroom the 45 minute small group intervention 4 times per week and any Tier 2 intervention. Students in need of intensive reading or math intervention will receive their instruction during the same 45-minute block of time as the rest of the students in their grade level. Tier 3 will receive pull out or push in services (as needed) during the 90 minute Friday Project Based Learning Extension Study block. This will ensure that students in need of more intensive intervention (IEP and ESL students) will still be able to fully participate in the core-instruction lesson, receiving daily instruction in grade-level standards. The only difference will be that they will participate in smaller groups for the entire 45-minute period using more intensive intervention curricula. Possible intervention programs will include but not limited to: Writing Road to Reading, Read Well, Wilson Foundations, Wilson Just Words, Wilson Reading, Language!, Math in Focus Reteach, Origo, Hands-on Standards, Navigator, and Do the Math.

RTI Leadership Team/Student Support Team (SST)

The purpose of the RTI Leadership team is to provide overall guidance and support to the RTI process. The team membership will consist of an administrator, interventionist, primary teacher, elementary teacher, and a middle school teacher. The team will focus on the following:

- Meeting monthly to monitor the RTI Instructional Plan to ensure that the data demonstrates that the plan is working as designed; making any needed adjustments
- Ensuring effective classroom instruction in the core
- Creating a process that ensures that teachers/interventionists use and document research-based intervention prior to bringing students to the SST
- Ensuring that regular observations are conducted to ensure fidelity of implementation at the universal, targeted, and intensive levels of instruction
- Ensuring that regular data team meeting cycles occur to monitor student progress and make timely adjustments to instruction

- Ensuring that budgeting and scheduling decisions are closely tied to student and teacher needs based on data.

The SST Process

Steps
Identify Student and Concern <i>This is a student for whom the regular classroom curriculum is not working</i>
Choose a Tier 2a intervention with the Grade Level Team <i>“mini-SST”</i>
Track Progress Using CBM <i>CBM’s are quick assessments to help track a specific skill</i> <i>Remember to start with baseline data</i>
Bring to SST <i>Sign Up for a SST date on the Google Drive Sign Up</i> <i>Give SPED teacher SST Team Request form at least the Friday before your SST date</i> <i>Invite parents to this meeting</i>
SST Team <i>Here we will figure out new school wide interventions for your student</i>
Track progress <i>6 weeks</i>
Next SST Meeting <i>6 Weeks After Initial Meeting</i>

Plan to Collect Data to Determine Intervention Needs and Evaluate Intervention Effectiveness		
STEP	Terra Nova/SUPERA	Intervention Program Placement Assessments
1. Who needs to be tested All Students 2. Who will prepare/order testing materials? Designated classroom assistants and interventionists will prepare (copy, collate, and organize) all	Who needs to be tested? All Students 2. Who will prepare/order testing materials? Designated classroom assistants and interventionists will prepare (copy, collate, and organize) all	Who needs to be tested? Core small-group assessments administered based on identified student need using universal screen data. 2. Who will prepare/order testing materials?

<p>testing materials during the week prior to school starting</p> <p>Who will give the assessments? Classroom teachers</p> <p>When? First two weeks of August</p> <p>Scheduling Plan? Created by school administrators</p> <p>Who will score assessments? Teachers will score assessments as a grade level during Friday professional development session</p> <p>Which data system will be used? DIBELS and school created data system</p> <p>Who will enter the data in to the system? Classroom teachers</p> <p>9. How (who) will the data be compiled and analyzed? Data will be analyzed and debriefed during first month job-embedded (cluster) PDs in order to establish SMART Goals and refine student groups</p> <p>10. When will it be published/ viewed by staff? Data Wall will be created as a part of cluster meetings during the second week of school and maintained throughout the school year.</p>	<p>testing materials during the week prior to school starting</p> <p>Who will give the assessments? Classroom teachers</p> <p>When? Fall – First week of school Winter – Week after Holiday Break Spring – Third Week of May</p> <p>Scheduling Plan? Created by school administrators</p> <p>Who will score assessments? Assessments will be scored as administered.</p> <p>Which data system will be used? School created data system</p> <p>Who will enter the data in to the system? School administrators, intervention team</p> <p>9. How (who) will the data be compiled and analyzed? Data will be analyzed and debriefed during first month job-embedded (cluster) PDs in order to establish SMART Goals and refine student groups</p> <p>10. When will it be published/ viewed by staff? Data Wall will be created as a part of cluster meetings during the second week of school and maintained throughout the school year.</p>	<p>Interventionists and classroom assistants</p> <p>Who will give the assessments? Classroom Interventionists</p> <p>When? Fall – First week of school</p> <p>Scheduling Plan? Created by school administrators</p> <p>Who will score assessments? Intervention Team</p> <p>Which data system will be used? Excel</p> <p>Who will enter the data in to the system? Teachers and Interventionist</p> <p>9. How (who) will the data be compiled and analyzed? Data will be compiled by interventionist to establish and design the intervention block groupings and schedule</p> <p>10. When will it be published/ viewed by staff? Intervention and small group instructional data and grouping plan will be updated every 6-8 weeks. The updates and progress of students will be shared with grade-level teams, support staff, and school administration. Data Wall will be created as a part of cluster meetings during the second week of school and maintained throughout the school year.</p>
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Identification of Students with Special Education Needs

If a child continues to struggle in the classroom after receiving increasing targeted interventions with increasing intensity through Tier 2 and Tier 3, the student’s classroom teacher must then notify the

Student Support Team (SST). It is the job of the student's teacher to explain student learning gaps and detail the interventions that have been used using documentation kept during each tier of intervention.

To determine eligibility for special education services, special education laws require the child to have an initial evaluation in the areas of concern. An evaluation is a careful look at a child's abilities, strengths and weaknesses, by the Special Education and the child's parent or a designated family member. An evaluation is based on a formal review of assessment data in area(s) of concern, information from parents, observations by Special Educators, school and classroom level assessments, and state annual assessments, and students (when appropriate). This is to determine whether a child has a disability under ECEA which requires special education instruction and related services.

The evaluation guides the IEP team in determining the disability, developing an IEP and determining the nature and extent of the special education, and related services and accommodations required to meet the student's needs. The identified disability must have an educational impact. For Serious Emotional Disability (SED) the eligibility can be determined by either an inability to learn (educational impact) and/or inability to build and maintain interpersonal relationships which significantly interferes with the child's social development. SED is the only disability where a student can qualify without showing an educational impact.

All decisions about special education are made through the IEP team process. The IEP team includes parent(s), not less than one special education teacher, not less than one general education teacher, a school administrator, any special service provider based on the area(s) of concern, and the student (if appropriate).

There is a difference between an evaluation and an assessment. Evaluation is the process of determining if a child has a disability. Assessments are individualized for each student. These can include observations, information from parents, standardized tests, and functional behavioral assessments.

IEP Development

Once it is determined that a child has a disability under ECEA", the IEP team, including parents, develops an IEP for the student. The IEP is:

- A written, individualized plan that supports and directs a child's education through a team driven process
- A written document that outlines the "who" "what" "when" "why" "where" and "how" of instruction and related services that is provided to students with disabilities.
- A document and a process

The IEP defines the type and amount of services needed, and where the services will be delivered. When the members of a child's IEP team come together to consider how to create a plan that involves the student and empowers them to actively engage in school life, they must include several key requirements:

- A statement of the child's **present levels of academic achievement and functional performance**, including how the child's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum;

- A statement of measurable **annual goals**, including academic and functional goals;
- A description of how the **child's progress** toward meeting the annual goals will be measured, and when periodic progress reports will be provided;
- A statement of the **special education and related services and supplementary aids and services** to be provided to the child, or on behalf of the child;
- A statement of the **program modifications or supports** that will be provided to enable the child to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals; to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum; to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and to be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children;
- An explanation of the **extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with non-disabled children** in the regular class and in extra-curricular and non-academic activities;
- A statement of any **individual accommodations** that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the child on classroom, school-wide, state assessments, classroom assignments, homework, grading, behavior contracting, breaks, assistive technology, etc.;
- The **projected date** for the beginning of the services and modifications, and the anticipated **frequency, location, and duration** of those services and modifications.

The following meetings should take place to support a child's IEP:

- **Annual Review** – the IEP team meets to develop, review, and revise, as appropriate, a student's IEP at least annually;
- **Special Request Meeting** – A Special Request team meeting can occur at any time when requested by parent(s) or the IEP team
- **Reevaluation Meeting** – At least every three years, or earlier upon request of the parent, the IEP team must re-evaluate the child to determine whether he/she continues to be eligible as a student with a disability and in need of special education and related services;
- **Exit**- the school must conduct an exit evaluation before determining that a child is no longer a child with that requires special education and related services. If the IEP team finds the child is no longer in need of special education and related services, then the child will be dismissed and no longer have an IEP.

Plan for Behavior Intervention:

A similar tiered system will be utilized for social/emotional instructions of students. All students will participate in the Peace 4 Kids core curriculum and the school-wide Positive Behavior Support Intervention System (PBIS). Students who need additional supports for behavior will participate in small groups using the Peace 4 Kids program for more intensive, small-group instructions several times a week. The frequency of group sessions will be based on individual student need. Groups will be supported by social worker, psychologist, and/or the school counselor. Students in need of intensive support will receive individualized behavior contracts and/or behavior plans to be monitored by teachers, student advisor, and special education staff.

Fluid Systems for Intervention

STAR Academy staff will employ fluid systems for intervention. Student's progress will be monitored on a regular basis. Whenever a student demonstrates the need to be moved to a different group for either more intensive intervention or for less intensity (acceleration), students will be moved accordingly. This system will ensure that students spend little or no time in a group that is working at a level that is either too hard or too easy. By delivering intervention using a flooding model, fluidity of student grouping is both more feasible and provides a wider base of potential group in which to place students.

Serving Students with Speech/Language Concerns

Speech problems, such as stuttering and mispronunciations can be very frustrating for students. Language has to do with meanings, rather than sounds. Language is a measure of intelligence and language delays are more serious than speech problems. Language delay is when a child's language is developing in the right sequence, but at a slower rate. Speech and language disorders describe abnormal language development and can affect the way children talk, understand, analyze, or process information.

Communication skills are at the heart of life's experiences, particularly for children who are developing language critical to cognitive development and learning. Reading, writing, gesturing, listening, and speaking are all forms of language; a code we learn to use in order to communicate ideas. Assessment and treatment of children's communication problems involve cooperative efforts between parents, classroom teachers, school administration, special education teachers, psychologists, and other school-based support staff. Speech-language pathologists work with diagnostic and educational evaluation teams to provide comprehensive language and speech assessments for children.

Because academic delays can be the result of speech and language delays, STAR Academy will work quickly to identify these in students while in early grades. All students will be pre-screened for oral language proficiency when entering our school. After identification, students will receive services to close the identified gaps. Students will be exited from receiving Speech/Language services once they score within the age-appropriate level on standardized tests or once their skills are at a level that is within the "no disability" to "mild" range on the Severity Rating Scale for the affected area (including fluency, articulation, social language, receptive language, expressive language, and voice).

Students presenting speech/language deficiencies will receive support from the Special Education team and be placed on an IEP.

Serving Intellectually Gifted Learners

STAR Academy's gifted and talented plan is one way it seeks to support the needs of exceptional students. Our STEAM educational framework is structured in a way to deliver accelerated, rigorous, and specialized instruction to all students, including our gifted students. According to the Alabama Department of Education definition of intellectually gifted children and youth are *those who perform at high levels of academic or creative fields when compared with others of their age, experience, or*

*environment. These children and youth require services not ordinarily provided by the regular school program. Children and youth possessing these abilities can be found in all populations, across all economic status, and in all areas of human endeavor.*³⁹

Based on national data regarding the Gifted Education Program Plan, there is a disproportionate representation of Hispanic and African American students (underrepresented) versus that of Caucasian students (over-represented) in the gifted and talented program. In order to ensure all STAR Academy's students are provided access for giftedness screening, students will be evaluated each year based on teacher evaluation, parent recommendation, production of exceptional work, and literacy levels. Students who perform or show potential for performing at exceptional levels when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment can be recommended for the intellectually gifted program. English-language learners will be evaluated for eligibility based on modified criteria. All second graders will be universally screened in the fall using NNAT 2. Students with scores of 90% or higher will be eligible to proceed in the identification process.

Student nominations can be received from any knowledgeable school staff member or parent/guardian. Once a student has been nominated and parents have been notified, a body of evidence is gathered to determine students' strengths, needs, and services. This evidence will include student scores on the CogAT 7 cognitive test, ACT Aspire Assessment data, school-based assessment data, aptitude tests, student work samples, behavioral characteristics, parent/teacher questionnaire, and student interest/motivation surveys.

In order for students to qualify for gifted services, a child must have at least three of the following mandatory indicators and one of the other qualifiers:

Mandatory Indicator:

- Assessment data from ACT Aspire Assessment demonstrating 2-years above grade-level
- Scores of 90% or her on the NNT-2 (2nd and 4th grades)
- Score gifted on Creativity Test
- Score as gifted or above on any of the CogAT evaluation areas (verbal, non-verbal, quantitative)

Other Qualifiers:

- Parent questionnaire
- Teacher questionnaire
- Exceptional student work

A variety of research-based, instructional strategies and programs will be utilized to support the growth of our intellectually gifted students. The integrated, STEAM model (which utilizes inquiry and project-based learning) will be individualized to provide our intellectually gifted students with opportunities to extend their learning and creativity. The STEAM integrated model is foundationally structured to provide the kinds of strategies that support intellectually gifted learners and the differentiation required to meet

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<https://www.alsde.edu/sec/ses/gifted/Scope%20and%20Sequence/Alabama%20Gifted%20Education%20Programs--Standards%20and%20Student%20Outcomes%20Manual.pdf>

their individual needs. Additionally, our personalized learning structure allows for teachers to have an accurate picture of student proficiency and ability as well as providing accelerated learning moments. The project-based activities will be highly individualized for this group of students to ensure opportunities to expand and develop their particular areas of giftedness. We will also incorporate instructional best practices based on the work of Renzullie and Tomlinson when designing instructional opportunities for our gifted and talented students. Teachers will receive specific professional development and feedback on their use of Bloom's Taxonomy oriented, higher-order thinking through questioning, assessment, and instructional activity design. The Director of Academic Success and Innovation along with external partners will provide ongoing support and professional development for classroom teachers to ensure that the needs of the gifted and talented students are being met.

Intellectually gifted students will receive daily, small group reading instruction at their reading level, providing opportunities for challenge and extension. Classroom teachers will utilize the extension resources that exist within the core reading, writing, and mathematic curricula to provide students with additional opportunities for instruction. The gifted and talented teacher will support students one day per week during the Friday Project-based Learning Extension Study block. Services will be provided in either a push-in or pull-out model based on what best meets the needs of students. Additionally, this teacher will work to develop and administer students' Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs).

Student's progress will be closely monitored using our school-wide data tracking system and data walls. All students identified as gifted and talented will be expected to make adequate yearly progress. This particular subgroup will be closely monitored. If necessary, students will be administered up-level assessments through the core curriculum to ensure that they are making progress.

Serving English Language Learners

National demographic projections indicate that English-Language Learners (ELLs) will make up a large percent of the school-age population in the years to come. Currently, 700 of Birmingham City School's student population is classified as English-Language Learners. Historically, ELL academic performance has lagged behind that of non-ELLs. However, STAR Academy aims to innovatively and creatively provide a high-quality education to all students, using various cultural experiences of our students to prepare them to work and live in a 21st Century economy that is becoming more global. STAR Academy will have a full-time English Language Development (ELD) coordinator/teacher that will both conduct language support to students in a 40-minute ELD block and oversee the recruitment identification, and progress monitoring of identified ELL students. The ELD block will ensure students do not miss out on core subject classes or project-based learning experiences. The ELD coordinator will also facilitate home support for ELLs and targeted professional development for staff. As the student population grows, an additional ELD teacher will be added to the staff.

Recruitment

STAR Academy’s project-based, STEAM (STEM and arts integration) approach is one that will benefit students from all backgrounds. As a result, we will ensure our recruitment efforts do not have the unintended effect of excluding ELLs and their families. As part of our overall recruiting strategy, a broad and inclusive outreach strategy to ensure that ELLs and their families, who themselves may be Limited English Proficient (LEP), can understand our program and the process for applying. We will develop marketing materials in both English and Spanish to ensure families have access to information about our school. Additionally, at least one of our secretaries will be able to communicate to families in Spanish and English.

Identification

WIDA: World-class Instructional Design and Assessment

ACCESS: Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners

First, STAR’s staff will determine which students qualify for ELL services by having every student’s parent or guardian complete a Home Language Survey (HLS). A HLS is the preliminary screen that will be completed for all entering students (even those who appear to be fluent English speakers) to decide whether or not further assessment will be needed. The HLS will be translated into the language spoken by the family to help insure accurate answers. If the parents answered “yes” to any of the questions on the HLQ

form, the parents will receive program information. We will ensure that parents are informed relative to the school ELA programs in the language or manner that they can understand when registering their child. School personnel will give parents a brochure and the opportunity to speak to staff if they have questions. Providing parents with multiple sources of information will ensure they are well informed prior to making a decision for how their child will participate in the ELA programs and services. Based on the HLQ, students are given a temporary placement and assessed within ten days of registration. Parents will be notified of a final placement decision no later than 30-days after the start of the school year.

Assessment and Placement

If the Home Language Survey indicates a student’s primary, or home, language is not English or that a student’s first language is not English, then the ELD teacher will administer the W-APT (WIDA ACCESS Placement Test) as a screener to determine whether or not a child is in need of ELL services. The WIDA ACCESS assessment will be given annually to monitor students’ progress in acquiring academic English and to evaluate the success of our program in supporting linguistic development of our students. The W-APT will be administered to K-8th grade students within ten days of the student starting school. Upon entry, we will determine an assessment to assess student’s proficiency levels within 10 days of registration. After testing, students will receive a provisional placement in ELA services within 30 days of arrival.

Based on the initial assessment data, the ELD coordinator, teachers, and administrators will meet to determine if changes to provisional placement are necessary. If any changes are made to the provisional placement, a letter will be sent home to parents informing them of the change. At this time, parents

have the option to agree to the placement recommendations or to decline ELA program services. Parent program refusal will be documented.

At STAR Academy, parents/guardians will be fully informed about student's identification and program placement through a face-to-face meeting. The student's instructional progress, placement data, and all other sources of data will be shared with parent. The school's recommendations for best meeting the child's needs will be clearly outline for the parent. Even if the parent has decided to opt out of all ELA Services, the school will review a body of evidence for each student by monitoring them twice a year (fall and spring). We will inform the parents of the student's academic language development progress when progress reports are sent out, and at parent- teacher conferences. STAR Academy will use the WIDA-ACCESS to assess ongoing progress on English Language proficiency levels for speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Parents will receive their child's ACCESS test scores and are invited to participate in a meeting to share with parents how to interpret the test results. This meeting will also include strategies and resources for parents to access to support their child's language development. All ELLs at STAR will fully participate in the school-wide assessment plan to ensure students are making adequate yearly progress in all content areas.

The student's score on the assessments determine the level of services and the specific strategies used with students during the ELD block and included in the ELD plan. The student's ELD plan will be development and shared with the student's family within 30 days of the start of the school year.

Program Design and Curriculum

Students who are identified having limited English proficiency will receive a minimum of 40 minutes of pull-out support from the ELD teacher four days a week, with additional push-in (classroom) support from the ELD teacher for a minimum of 20 additional minutes four days a week or during the Friday Project-based Learning Extension Study block. Identified ELA students will be strategically grouped across a given grade level based on student data and ELA designation documentation. This identified group of students will rotate together through the ELD/Response to Intervention block each day. To ensure high-quality ELD instruction, the ESL teacher will plan and occasionally team-teach with the teachers. Prior to the start of each thematic unit, the PBL coordinator and the ELD coordinator/ESL teacher will plan the unit together with an intentional design to address the language development needs of each of the identified ELA students at the given grade level. Their team planning will utilize a team planning protocol to intentionally plan for language development for each PBL unit of study. These plans will be created using the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Standards Frameworks and tools. Each of the WIDA standards will be visited through the continuum of levels of English language acquisition (Level 1: Entering to Level 6: Reaching). The team will plan for how students will listen, speak, write, and read in the academic language of each of the PBL units.

In addition, each expanded standard will encompass Discourse Level, Sentence Level, and Word/Phrase Level considerations. STAR Academy will use the recommended WIDA Template for drafting strands of Model Performance Indicator's (MPI) to plan out the specific frameworks for the focal standards of a given unit. Through the use of the WIDA template the team is able to identify how the domains of speaking and writing will be leveraged and supported for students at each level of the continuum (Level 1: Entering to Level 6: Reaching). This planning template will guide the daily ELD lesson plans for

students as they acquire the academic English language skills they will need to be successful in school. The PBL units will include additional assessment of language skill development for this group of identified students in order to track their growth along the WIDA continuum.

At STAR Academy we believe that our students will be most successful with their acquisition of English if all teachers are supporting their language development throughout the day. This will provide our students with an effective language development model that has been identified by a strong body of research, teaching language through the content. If the instruction is focused on academic content, then students can acquire English, and develop the knowledge and skills of the different content areas at the same time (Freeman & Freeman, 2007). This model will ensure that students have access to rigorous, grade-level content. Students will receive the ELA supports and scaffolds they need to engage in cognitively demanding, yet meaningful learning. With the intensive and purposeful professional development plan outlined in the Professional Development and Evaluation section below, staff will use a team-planning protocol to intentionally plan for language development within each of their content area units of study. These plans will be created using the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Standards Frameworks and tools. To support this program design, teachers will study and utilize the tools provided by WIDA. The Can Do descriptors for each content area and grade level will support staff in creating effective, linguistically-differentiated lesson plans in each content area, set language goals and closely monitor the progress of each student's language acquisition.

Assessment of the progress of our ELLs, as well as all students, is an integral component of the overall instructional plan for STAR Academy. All ELLs will fully participate in the school-wide assessment plan outlined in this document. Students will be assessed in their language of instructions. Students participating in native language (Spanish) instruction will also have their literacy skills monitored in English to determine progress towards transition and to determine when a shift to English only instruction is appropriate. As a part of our school-wide data systems, a review of student progress data will occur every six weeks. During these six-week reviews, the ELL population will be disaggregated and analyzed to determine if students are making the gains needed to be academically and linguistically successful. We will explore additional progress monitoring tools like the WIDA Measure of Developing English Language (MODEL) to determine the best methods to progress monitor student growth in language acquisition. An initial goal of a median growth percentile of 70% has been set for WIDA-ACCESS. This goal will be closely monitored using our historical ACCESS data, language acquisition progress monitoring data, student data collected within the various content areas and annual performance goals.

Based on the current demographics in East Birmingham, STAR Academy expects to provide a program that aligns with the guidelines and procedures that are outlined by the Birmingham City School's ELL department. Student growth in Spanish literacy and mathematics concepts, as well as their acquisition of English language will be closely monitored. Students will be monitored to determine when they have reached high levels of academic achievement in all content areas.

We will use a sheltered instruction model, designed to achieve English proficiency as quickly as possible while promoting deep respect for the native language and culture of every student at the school. The school leader will be responsible for the oversight of the ELA programming ensuring that all teachers are

appropriately designated and have completed all required district ELA classes and certifications. The EDL Coordinator will be designated to manage the ELA program in close collaboration with the school leader. The individual hired for the position of ELD Coordinator must possess:

- A working knowledge of the history, culture, and core beliefs of the APS consent decree and ELA programming
- All required certifications to be considered highly-qualified for the position
- Language proficiency in the predominate language of the school's ELL population (based on current projections this language will most likely be Spanish)
- Organizational skills to maintain and organize the required paperwork to ensure total compliance with our ELA programming
- Strong working relationship with our parent community
- A strong sense of efficacy for the ELL students at our school, relentlessly monitoring their progress and advocating for the best programming for each child
- Support and manage the ELA teacher

Sheltered Instruction (SI)

The Sheltered Instruction model is a research-based and validated model of sheltered instruction that has been widely and successfully used to help teachers plan and deliver lessons that allow English learners to acquire the academic skills and skills they need to develop English language proficiency and succeed in the classroom and beyond.

Sheltered Instruction is designed to provide second language learners with the same high-quality, academically challenging content that native English speakers receive.

The purpose of sheltered instruction is to deliver grade-level subject matter content in a manner that is accessible to all learners. Sheltered instruction strategies enable regular classroom teachers to incorporate strategies in their instructions that lowers the linguistic demand of the lesson without compromising the integrity or rigor of the subject matter. The benefits are for ELL students as well as English speakers with a variety of learning styles.

Teachers adjust the language demands of the lesson in many ways, such as modifying speech rate and tone, using context clues and models extensively, relating instruction to student experience, adapting methods familiar to teachers (e.g., demonstrations, visuals, graphic organizers, or group work) to make academic instruction more accessible to students of different English proficiency levels.

Features of sheltered instruction include:

- Use of cooperative learning activities with appropriately designed heterogeneously grouping of students
- A focus on academic language as well as content vocabulary
- Use of ELL's first language as a tool to provide comprehensibility
- Use of hands-on activities using authentic materials, demonstrations, and modeling.

- Explicit teaching and implementation of learning strategies
- Incorporating students' background knowledge into classroom lessons; and
- Use of critical thinking skills

Teachers at STAR will use sheltered instruction in classrooms with both ELLs and native English speakers and ELD teachers will incorporate Sheltered Instruction strategies during the ELD block.

STEAM and Sheltered Instruction

By virtue of its motivating, interactive, hands-on nature, science is a course in which English language learners are often successful.

Classes such as mathematics and science are relatively more comprehensible for English-language learners.

Coincidentally, both math and science use teaching practices that form part of the repertoire of sheltered instruction. In many science classes, students work in pairs or small groups on interesting, motivating tasks that require students to

engage in learning by doing. Implementation of interesting content, investigations, and demonstrations can help provide the assistance ELLs need to be successful.

The STEAM Model, which values cooperative learning, discovery, and process learning over concept memorization takes into account the needs of diverse learners by emphasizing academic language, group interaction, and culturally relevant instruction.

Academic Support and Intervention

It is the expectation that all STAR Academy scholars achieve mastery of identified standards, skills, concepts and academically perform at high levels. Our instructional model utilizes a research-based approach to quickly identifying student learning gaps and implementing individualized instructional strategies (early on) to struggling learners that will accelerate their rate of learning. A 45-minute long remediation block is built into the daily schedule four days a week for all students. All core content teachers will teach an Academic Support class. For students who are meeting standards or have been identified as gifted and talented, this time be used strategically to accelerate their learning and master standards for the next grade level. For students who are struggling, this is an opportunity to receive small group tutoring and support on identified skill deficits. For students who have additional needs (e.g. English Language Learners, students with IEPs), this period of time allows for the special education and English Language development (ELD) teams to provide appropriate interventions and individual support.

Hiring, certification, and evaluation of Special Population Teachers

Hiring a new person to join the collegial, productive team already established at STAR Academy is a critical responsibility. Our success in maintaining the current quality and dedication of our professional team will drive our future success. STAR Academy believes that the best way to ensure the quality of incoming team members is through a standards-based hiring process that screens candidates not only for skills, but as importantly, for mission and culture fit. Through a detailed hiring rubric, we articulate

clear and explicit criteria that guide us to objectively assess each candidate. Our standards-based process is designed to provide information about each candidate’s knowledge, skills and commitments as they relate to the job. In addition, through the hiring process, STAR Academy want to provide a learning experience for each candidate so that candidates can experience fully what it is like to work on a STAR Academy team. In this way, both we—and the candidate—can make the right choices about working at STAR Academy.

STAR’s rigorous standards-based hiring process ensures an extensive review of each candidate’s qualifications and certifications. As a charter school, STAR Academy has to comply with the teacher quality requirements of No Child Left Behind. Accordingly, all teachers must be able to demonstrate compliance with “highly qualified” requirements, within the meaning of the No Child Left Behind Act, prior to their employment and/or agreement renewal. Employees are responsible to remain, at all times, in compliance with these requirements.

The Alabama State Department of Education, in compliance with Section 1119 of the No Child Left Behind Act, has defined “highly qualified” teachers as:

1. Those who are licensed and endorsed in each/all core academic content area(s) in which they are teaching;
2. Alabama teachers teaching outside of their licensed and endorsed core academic content area who provide documented evidence of having completed 24 semester hours, or its equivalent, in the core academic content area(s) being taught;
3. Alabama teachers teaching outside of their licensed endorsed core academic content area who have passed the adopted or a national certification core content area tests, including the PRAXIS, in the content area(s) being taught.

STAR Academy believes that all employees are in a constant state of learning and developing. In order to continuously improve teaching and learning as well as the organization’s overall sustainability, it is necessary to provide moments of reflection and evaluation that encourage each employee to build on his/her strengths and mediate his/her areas of refinement. To truly improve teaching and learning, employees must work collaboratively and continuously to improve their practice through consistent coaching and feedback, informal evaluations, and formal evaluations.

Additionally, it is imperative that “special population” teachers receive external training from content experts. STAR will partner with such organizations, including Birmingham City Schools’ district personnel.

Student Recruitment and Enrollment

Community Outreach: To ensure that we recruit the student population we propose to serve, we have engaged in expansive and intensive outreach efforts. We have connected with residents and families throughout Birmingham, engaging in conversations about what families want for their children and how that aligns with our proposal. These neighborhoods are demanding better schools and has been welcoming to the STAR Academy's application. Due to the growing number of interested families and supporters, we have created the STAR Academy social media pages and website www.starsteamacademy.org.

Parents, families, residents, businesses, churches, and private organizations of Birmingham have been exceptionally supportive of all of the outreach efforts STAR Academy has engaged in thus far. Many community members have signed letters of support and parents have already begun signing letters of interest in STAR Academy. We expect many more following the public forums, events, and outreach scheduled in August, September, and October.

To date, we have conducted several community events including meetings with faith, business, and community leaders, as well as, families who have demonstrated their enthusiasm to enroll, and other community members. As listed below, the following outreach events have been conducted to engage our families:

- Attendance at many community events, including religious services, neighborhood association meetings, and meetings with arts organizations, non-profits, and community based organizations, and community events.
- Presentations to area colleges and universities
- Over 50 "Friends of STAR Academy" volunteered at community events on behalf of STAR Academy, culminating in critical and informative conversations with community members.
- Flyers and postcards, both in Spanish and English, distributed widely throughout the community.
- Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram updates.
- Website information at www.starsteamacademy.org

We are excited to continue engaging deeply with our community to provide an excellent education to the students and families of East Birmingham. Our intention is to spend hundreds of hours more, before opening our doors, working with families and community members to provide an excellent educational option for students and a trusted community relationship for families and other key stakeholders.



We have begun circulating and tabulating Intent to Enroll forms and brochures relaying our school mission, vision, and purpose. In addition, we have received letters of support from individual community stakeholders and organizations. We have included letters of support as an additional attachment to this proposal. We currently have several organizations and community members that have committed to continue providing letters of support on our behalf, even after the official application submission date. Outreach in the form of town meetings, power point presentations to organizations include but are not limited to the following:

Event Date	Location	Description
April 28, 2016	Social Ventures Office	Meeting with Goodrich Foundation and Purpose Built Communities to discuss financial support
May 15, 2016	Community Location	95.7 Jamz Car & Bike Show to and families through our intent to enroll form
May 23, 2016	New Rising Star	Community Interest Meeting to promote STAR Academy's mission, vision, and school model for prospective students and families
June 23, 2016	United Way of Birmingham	Meeting with Caroline Harris and Rachel Leonard to discuss funding and Success by Six programing
June 23, 2016	New Rising Star	Community Interest Meeting to promote STAR Academy's mission, vision, and school model for prospective students and families
July 7, 2016	Daniel Foundation of Alabama	Meeting to promote STAR Academy's mission, vision, and school model for possible funding
July 26, 2016	State House in Montgomery	The purpose of the meeting is to give Senator Marsh a sense of what vision STAR Academy is bringing to the Commission
August 3, 2016	Community location	Meeting with Jason Williams from Aspire Movement-a local mentor program that partners with schools in the Birmingham community

August 29, 2016	Better Basics	Meet with Dr. Ammie Akin from Better Basics for potential programming collaboration

STAR Academy (STAR) is a public charter school and opened to all students and families. STAR Academy does not discriminate against students or families on the bases of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, political affiliation, or any other protected status. To enroll in its early childhood education program, students must be at least 4 years of age and potty-trained. All communications regarding enrollment will be provided to families in languages that represent the student population.

Recruitment Strategy: Recruiting drives have taken place at local grocery stores, day care centers, city-sponsored events, churches, parent and youth advocacy events, and through neighborhood canvassing STAR has been careful to target neighborhoods and events where diverse members of the community are represented. Additionally, notices have been posted in neighborhood newsletters, businesses throughout East Birmingham, on our website and social media pages, via electronic newsletters, and through mass mailings to individuals in our target zip codes. Families that have completed Intent to Enroll forms also receive monthly personalized notes from our school founder and phone calls of support from the Champions of STAR Academy volunteer team.

Enrollment Procedure: Each year STAR will establish an open-enrollment window in which the school will accept applications for the coming school year. The application deadline is the last Friday in January. Enrollment packets, however, will be available at the school’s main office all year round. If the number of applications received by the last Friday in January exceeds the number of available seats at any grade level, a lottery will be used to determine the placement of students at that grade level. All applicants are randomly assigned a number which is then drawn randomly during the lottery. Should there be more lottery applicants than available seats, students are randomly assigned waitlist numbers. STAR does not carry its waitlist from year to year. Wait list numbers are cleared and students are bumped up one grade level for the lottery the following year. The enrollment lottery will be held in public at the school, following Open Meeting laws, on the first Monday in February. Only students meeting appropriate age requirements and who submit their applications before the last Friday in January will be eligible for the lottery. Offers of enrollment, scholarship, or waitlist placement will be made via phone, email, or mail by the last Friday in February.

All qualified students who are not admitted will be placed on the waiting list and may be offered admission throughout the year as vacancies become available. STAR reserves the right to determine its capacity at each grade level, and to reserve spaces within a grade level for, among other things, students that may not be promoted to the next grade level or for students who may be returning in a subsequent

year. If during any open-enrollment window insufficient enrollment applications are received, offers of admission shall be made to qualified applicants on a first-come, first-served basis. Another enrollment window shall be advertised and established.

Priority Enrollment: Select groups of students and families will not participate in the enrollment lottery but will be granted priority enrollment. These groups include:

- **Priority 1: *Founder/Board Policy:*** Those children whose parents, guardians, or family members were active in the planning process by serving as Founding Board, Design Team, or Advisory Committee members, Founding Teachers, or Founding School Leaders will not participate in the lottery. These are board members and design team members who are listed on the charter application submitted to Birmingham City Schools on August 1, 2016 or who provided a minimum of 40 hours of service prior to the opening of the school. Founding Teachers are teachers who were the founding teacher in their respective classroom and who taught at STAR for at least three consecutive years. Founding School Leaders include all members of the administrative team in the 2017-2018 school years who work for the school for at least two years (which may include the 2016-2017 planning year). Founding families may also be exempt from the lottery if they meet the requirements to qualify as a founding family by volunteering for 40 hours between January 2016 and August 2017. A complete list of eligible families (deemed as STAR’s “Founding Families”) will be approved at the STAR Board meeting in January 2017 and kept on record at the school.
- **Priority 2: *School Employee Policy***—Children of school employees will be exempted from the lottery and given priority admission provided that the parent who is employed at STAR has full or joint custody of the child and the application was received by the designated deadline. This includes Teachers, Administrators, Custodial Staff, Office Staff, and Classroom Assistants. Employees include anyone who works at least half-time for STAR and who started work on or before the first day of school of the year in which they are submitting their application.

The total number of children enrolled under the Founder/Board/Staff policies will not exceed 20% of the school’s population. In the case that more than 20% of the enrollment is founding/employee children, preference will be given to number of years of service to the school. If there are fewer spots than the number of priority applicants, then a separate lottery is held for these applicants with priority status. Founding/employee children not given priority enrollment will be included in the general enrollment lottery.

- **Priority 3: *Sibling/Household Policy***— It is the intent of STAR to support whole families and create a cohesive and inclusive school community. Siblings of enrolled students will receive priority for admission if their applications are received by the designated deadline. Siblings includes children whose primary guardians are also the primary guardians of other children already enrolled in the school (in the case of joint custody, primary guardians must have custody at least 50% of the time). This could include: ½ siblings, step-siblings, adopted siblings, cousins, nieces or nephews being cared for by grandparents, etc. If a child is drawn during the enrollment lottery for an enrollment spot at STAR and they have eligible siblings, those siblings



will be automatically granted enrollment if there is space at their grade-level. Siblings of students already in attendance at STAR will be exempt from the lottery process and automatically granted a space if there is one available at their grade level.

General Enrollment Lottery: The lottery for all age-eligible students who submitted a complete application prior to the last Friday in January deadline will take place on the first Monday of February each year at the school and will be opened to the public. Seats will be assigned randomly.

Withdrawal policy: Students withdrawing from the school will be asked to complete the withdrawal packet which includes a parent survey/questionnaire regarding reasons for withdrawal from the school, the contact information for the new school, and a release form so that STAR can send any pertinent academic records and all legally required documents such as IEPs to the new school. Students withdrawing from the tuition-based preschool or Kindergarten program after the 15th of the month will be expected to pay the entire month's tuition.

Out of District Policy: STAR will prioritize students who live within the Birmingham City Schools' boundaries during both the annual lottery and the ongoing enrollment process. If a non-BCS student seeks, that student will be enrolled pending there are no BCS students on the waiting list. It is the goal, however, that the majority of the school's students will reside within district boundaries or neighboring school districts.

Transfer policy: Parents of students transferring to STAR mid-year will be required to submit/sign transfer paperwork and meet with their child's new teacher at least one day before the child can start school. Teachers must make time to meet with transfer parents in order to build relationship with the new family, complete Personalized Student Achievement Plans, convey mission, vision, school-wide and classroom expectations, and to schedule diagnostic assessment completion. STAR will request academic records, including IEPs, from the student's previous school. Parents must provide IEP documentation or inform the office that an IEP exists at the time of submission of the transfer paperwork. A detailed enrollment plan can be found in **Attachment 7**.

Student Discipline

STAR Academy is committed to ensuring that our school provides a safe, structured, and nurturing environment that safeguards the well-being of our staff and students, and creates an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. All our students are guaranteed the right and privilege to learn, grow, and mature in an academic and social environment of mutual respect.

We believe that discipline policies and procedures should be primarily focused on providing students with an opportunity to develop the skills and strategies to make positive behavior choices.

General Philosophy on Discipline

STAR Academy is a place where children, parents, and educators work together to create an atmosphere that encourages and promotes learning. We believe effective disciplines comes from building strong relationships and teaching students to take responsibility for their actions rather than simply enforcing rules. It is our goal to provide a positive, engaging, and safe learning environment with

fewer opportunities for distraction. Our commitment as educators is to ensure that every student is prepared academically, but we also take responsibility for instilling in them the behaviors that are required to sustain society by identifying what is and is not acceptable behavior. This, however, would be incomplete without also specifying any forthcoming consequences. Because we believe students rise or fall to the level of expectations that are presented, we have developed a discipline protocol that is rooted in a growth mindset that supports a climate of high expectations, joyful teaching and learning, and maximized instruction.

Our discipline policy is based on the following beliefs:

- The maintaining of a positive school culture is the shared responsibility of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community at large
- The school's job is to provide academic instruction, while helping to develop the emotional and psychological aspects of all children
- Schools must discipline with dignity, consistency, love, and with an understanding of the development levels and needs of students
- The overall goal of student discipline measures is to result in the desired behavioral change that will allow a student to remain actively engaged in the school community and learning environment not distributing punishment
- Adults should model behavior expectations and school core values
- Discipline must be enforced to maintain the student's self-esteem and dignity, and enhance their intrinsic motivation to do the right thing, show pride, and be their very best
- All students, staff, parents, and community members should be aware of the school's expectations for student behavior and the consequences if these expectations are not met. These expectations will be disclosed in the student and family handbook.
- Students should be encouraged to work toward their potential and greater attention and acknowledgement should be given to those who uphold appropriate behaviors than those who do not
- Parents are key! The student must realize that the home and school are partners in helping s/he to become accountable in work habits and behavior

- We believe that every student has the right to learn and that every teacher has the right to teach

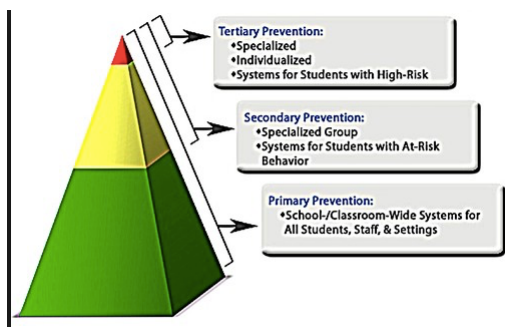
We believe that discipline policies and procedures should be primarily focused on providing students with an opportunity to develop the skills and strategies to make positive behavior choices. This will be accomplished through the proactive efforts of the direct instruction of social skills through the Peace 4 Kids curriculum, it will be reinforced through a strong PBIS system that provides students with a clear understanding of what specific behaviors are expected of them in the classroom and common areas of the school. Students will be given positive verbal recognition, the “school teacher” system, and recognition at STAR POWER and Tribe assemblies.

STAR Academy Positive Behavior Support and Intervention Program

The culture of STAR Academy is built upon the idea that strong classrooms are places where students work hard, have fun, and are kind. Our school community model the mission and core beliefs of our school, follow expectations, and do their personal best. The culture is reinforced with a student discipline system executed through the Positive Behavior Support Framework. Since Congress amended the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), PBIS has held a unique place in special education law. PBIS is the only approach to addressing behavior that is specifically mentioned in the law. This emphasis on using functional assessment and positive approached to encourage good behavior remains in the current version of the law as amended in 2004.

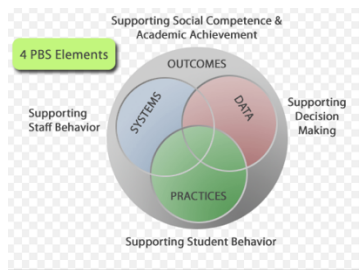
STAR Academy will use a continuum of positive behavior support for all students in areas including the classroom and non-classroom settings (such as hallways, buses, and restrooms). Positive behavior support id an application of behaviorally-based systems approach to enhance the capacity of schools, families, and communities to design effective environments that improve the link between research-validated practices and environments in which teaching and learning occurs. Attention is focused on creating and sustaining primary (school-wide), secondary (classroom), and tertiary (individual) systems of support that improve lifestyle results (personal, health, social, family, work, recreation) for all youth by making targeted behaviors less effective, efficient, and relevant, and desired behavior more functional. See **attachment 8** for more details regarding the discipline policy.

The following diagram illustrates the multi-level approach offered to all students in our school. These group depictions represent systems of support not children:



In the past, school-wide discipline has focused mainly on reacting to specific student misbehavior by implementing punishment-based strategies including reprimands, loss of privileges, office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. Research has shown that the implementation of punishment, especially when it is used inconsistently and in the absence of other positive strategies, is ineffective. Introducing, modeling, and reinforcing positive behavior is an important step of a student’s educational experience. Teaching behavioral expectations and rewarding students for following them is a much better positive approach than waiting for misbehavior to occur before responding. The purpose of school-wide PBIS is to establish a climate in which appropriate behavior is the norm.

The school-wide PBIS process emphasizes the creation of systems that support the adoption and durable implementation of evidence-based practices and procedures, and fit within ongoing school reform efforts. An interactive approach that includes opportunities to correct and improve four key elements is used in school-wide PBIS focusing on: 1) Outcomes, 2) Data, 3) Practices, and 4) Systems. The diagram below illustrates how these key elements work together to build a sustainable system:



With the help of PBIS and community buy-in, we hope to build a strong social dynamic in our building. We will adopt the mindset, “We are a village.” We will make a point to ensure our students and families feel they are an integral part of our school and out of school lives. This begins from the moment students and parents enter the doors. First and foremost, we start with a positive connection. STAR’s administrators, teachers, and staff make introductory phone calls and home visits to students and families throughout the summer, letting them know who they are and how excited they are to teach them in the upcoming school year. It will also be an opportunity for parents to tell us their hopes and dreams for their child. We want our students and families to know we care about them.

STAR Academy will institute a PBIS leadership team/Culture & Equity team, which will ensure students receive the support they need to be productive members of our school family. We assure that our teachers are trained yearly in research-based approaches to discipline, classroom management and culturally responsive pedagogy. We begin each day with Morning Meeting, a school-wide classroom morning meeting reminding our students (and staff) of the school expectations and build community through activities and conversations in the classroom. Those expectations exist in everything we do and are celebrated throughout each day. On Mondays, all staff and students come together for “Launch” (a whole school community meeting), where continued celebrations and motivational moments take place. Once a month, there is a STAR POWER celebration scheduled for our students to shout each other out for academic and behavioral growth, share a chant or song, etc. Family members are also welcome to come.

Rocketship and Classroom Dojo

The Rocketship program is used to reinforce observed positive behaviors. Rockets are given to students any time during the day at school by any adult in the community. Rockets can be redeemed by students for a variety of different rewards, used at Star store, and monthly PBIS events.

ClassDojo is a classroom tool (downloadable as an app) that helps teachers improve behavior in their classroom quickly and easily. Teachers can easily reward feedback points for student behavior in real-time. The app provides behavior-tracking analytics and reports that can be shared with parents and administrators as often as daily or weekly.

Restorative Practices

Restorative Practices are a set of principles and practices centered on promoting respect, taking responsibility, and strengthening relationships. Rather than simply punishing students for wrongdoing, Restorative Practices encourages them to repair harm and prevent the reoccurrence of unacceptable behaviors. The core belief of Restorative Practices is that children will make positive change when people in authority do things with them rather than to them or for them. Therefore, a successful restorative system:

- Acknowledges that relationships are central to building community
- Builds systems that address misbehavior and harm in a way that strengthens relationships
- Focuses on the harm done rather than only relying on rule breaking
- Gives voice to the person harmed
- Engages in collaborative problem-solving

The restorative circle will be used to emphasize our sense of family, belonging, purposeful relationships, and maintaining safety and trust. Teachers and students form a physical circle in their classrooms, ensuring everyone in the circle can be seen and heard. A circle is used because it represents no respective beginning, end, or head. In other words, everyone in the circle is on the same level of respect. As circle discussion begins, either the teacher or an appointed student will make introductory comments, including a discussion about the POWER values and positive agreements that will govern the circle. Within the circle, a star will be used as the talking piece. Only the person holding the star has the right to speak. Each person in the circle has the right to “check-in” to talk about how they are feeling physically, mentally, or emotionally and “check-out” to discuss how they are feeling as the circle ends.

The restorative circle is used to work together with students and families when setting personal achievement plan goals and in student discipline conversations with families.

The following table details how the Restorative Practices approach differs from traditional school discipline methods:

Traditional Approach	Restorative Approach
School rules are broken.	People and relationships are harmed
Justice focuses on establishing guilt	Justice identifies need and responsibility
Accountability = Punishment	Accountability = understanding impact and repairing harm

Justice directed at the offender; the victim is ignored	Offender, victim, and school community all have direct roles in the justice process
Rules and intent outweigh whether outcome is positive or negative	Offender is responsible for harmful behavior, repairing harm, and working towards positive outcomes
Limited opportunity for expressing remorse or making amends	Opportunity given to make amends and express remorse

Research shows that restorative practices not only reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, but the actual incidents of harm to the school community, making it a safer place for all students, teachers, and school community members.

STAR Academy Commitments

By choosing STAR Academy, students make a commitment to excellence with themselves, their parents, and their teachers. All three parties sign a learning pledge called the “Commitment to Excellence,” which ensures that each will do whatever it takes to help the student learn and reach their personal best while at school.

Parent and Community Engagement

When schools and families work together to support learning, everyone benefits. Researchers have evidence for the positive effects of parental and family involvement on children, families, and school when schools and parents continuously support and encourage their children’s learning and development.⁴⁰ According to Henderson and Berla (1994), “the most accurate predictor of a student’s achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent to which that student’s family is able to: (1) create a home environment that encourages learning; (2) express high (but not unrealistic)

⁴⁰ <http://www.education.com/reference/article/benefits-parent-involvement-research/>

expectations for their children’s achievement and future careers; and (3) become involved in their children’s education at school and in the community.

Establishing welcome is key to successful family and community engagement, and is especially essential for families from groups that have traditionally felt disenfranchised by institutions in the United States. Welcoming and nurturing membership may be the critical link between family engagement and student achievement. With membership comes ownership; with ownership comes shared responsibility and accountability.

Invitational Theory: Emphasizes deliberate dialogue and mutual respect; People work together to construct practices that promote the idea that all people matter and can meaningfully contribute

In order to establish a culture of shared goals and networks of support, STAR Academy staff will receive professional development training based on cultural competence, effective two-way communication, and Invitational Theory. Invitational Education provides a framework for making schools more exciting, satisfying, and enriching, helping discern what physical and behavioral traits are perceived as inviting or disinviting.⁴¹ Invitational Theory centers on four

guiding principles: respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. The “Five P’s” of this concept—people, places, policies, programs, and processes—provide the means to address the total spirit in a school. It is not only concerned with grades, attendance, academic achievement, discipline, and assessment, but also the skills of becoming a decent and productive citizen in a democratic society.

Academic family workshops and social school-wide events will also welcome family members to the STAR Academy community. Such events include but will not be limited to:

- STAR Academy Parent/Teacher Organization
- Participation as a Board Member of the school
- Membership on board committees including the school accountability committee and the Family Leadership Council
- Beginning of the year Board Member, Advisory Council, and Family Pie Social: “Meet and Greet”
- STAR Academy Family Social: A back-to-school evening to acquaint families with STEAM PBL learning, student expectations, logistics, and general “housekeeping”
- Collab Saturdays: Mornings set aside as needed for staff and families to collaborate on classroom and/or school-wide projects; community service projects
- STEAM Gallery Nights: Showcasing STEM articulated by visual arts
- STEAM Plays and Productions: Theater, dance, and other performances; STEM articulated by performing arts
- Presentations of Learning (POLs): Presentations to community partner panels and family members

⁴¹ Purkey, W. (1999). Creating safe schools through invitational education. ERIC Digest. Greensboro, NC. ERIC Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

- Family Literacy Nights: Introducing families to literacy concepts in an interactive, social setting
- Family Math Nights: Introducing families to math concepts (and games) in an interactive, social setting.
- Engineering and robotics events
- Science Fair
- Coffee & Conversations: Informal chats with family members
- Community & Family Liaison (STAR staff member whose sole purpose is to engage, empower, and support our families and community)
- Family lounge in STAR for families to connect and support

Family and community engagement is not always visible, but can, in fact, be behind the scenes. STAR’s parent organization will publish a list of ways to become involved, allowing for a wide range of skill sets and work schedules. These will be posted in the entry-way to the school, in a school newsletter, and on the school website.

At the start of the year, families will be asked to complete a questionnaire asking what they would like to contribute to the school, as well as, what information they need from the school staff to support learning in the home. STAR Academy has begun community outreach and will continue its mission to leverage partnerships with community organizations and businesses, as well as, with institutions of higher learning and other virtual partners. A similar survey will be issued to community partners, artists, scientists, and technology organizations to gather meaningful ways in which they can contribute to our school as well.

Parent and community volunteers offer a huge resource and support base for the school community, while showing the students of our school the importance of actively participating in the larger community. By interacting with teachers, administrators, and other parents and community members on a regular basis, parents and community members will get a first-hand experience of our school’s mission, vision, and educational model. This will assist the school in spreading the word and building support for our program throughout the community.

Community Engagement: STAR Academy made significant effort to build relationships with local leaders and families who have demonstrated strong support for the school. Letters of endorsement from local organizations, politicians, local, state, and national education reform groups, signatures from Birmingham community members and business owners, and partnership interests from STEM and arts based organizations in the Birmingham area can be found in **Attachment 27** of this proposal. There are also school leader letters of support found in **Attachment 27**.

Among individual meetings with community partners, there were two major community interest meetings that occurred throughout the application process, specifically for parents and families. These events were advertised on local radio stations, social media pages, and event promoters. There were over 200 attendees at each meeting. The agenda was as follows:

ITEM	PRESENTER
Brief overview of evening	Thomas Beavers

Parent Story	Current parent of BCS
Leadership Story	Jonta Morris
All About Charter Schools	Jonta Morris
All About STAR Who we are How we're different What we will accomplish Our commitments	Thomas & Jonta
Appeals #1: "If I could get each of you to take 5 flyers and pass them out to friends and family. #2: Complete an intent to enroll form if you have a child/children who will be entering preschool, kindergarten, or 1 st grade in the Fall of 2017. #3: Complete a volunteer card	Thomas & Jonta
Audience Q&A	All
Sign up (intent to enroll & volunteer)	At least 5 volunteers to be at the tables

Educational Program Capacity

Board Members: STAR Academy currently has eight board members and is interviewing for one additional board opening.

Name	Current Professional Title and Organization	Board Role	Focus/Expertise
Jonta Morris	School Administration Fellow	Founder (Non-member of the board)	Organizational and Instructional Leadership, Curriculum Design,
Dr. Thomas	Pastor; New Rising Star Church	Voting member	Community Organizing,

Beavers			Community Outreach
Iris Fisher, CPA	Certified Public Accountant	Voting member	Finance
Dr. Lameka Tolliver-Fisher	Owner, Fisher Chiropractic Wellness Center	Secretary	Small Business Owner; Non-profit board experience
Oliver Robinson	State Representative	Voting member	Finance; Project Management; Business Management
Agnes J. Chappell	Judge	President	Legal
Robert J. Heath, Jr.	Director of Radiation Safety; University of Alabama at Birmingham	Voting member	Human Resources; Staff Management
Jerome Freeman Bell	Minister; Educator	Voting member	Community Advocacy; Education
Carmen Bender	Management; Wells Fargo	Voting member	Bilingual Communication; Business Management
Anita Smith	Accountant; Southern Research Institute	Treasurer	Fiscal Management
Robert Record	Physician; Christ Health Center	Voting Member	Medical

STAR Academy’s founder and board members have been actively engaging the community in their charter school development. Community partners include: The Goodrich Foundation (financial support), Better Basics (programming support), Summer Adventures in Learning (programming support), Samford University (programming support and teacher fellows), United Way (programming support), and the Daniel Foundation (financial support). The board has also engaged Farrah Nicole Martin, a nationally recognized educator, charter developer, and educational consultant to assist in start-up operations and board development. Several members of the board work and reside in the community in which STAR Academy will be located. Members continue to engage community members and organizations as partners in the work of building a community school with innovative practice.

Leadership: STAR Academy’s development efforts are being led by Founder and proposed Executive Director, Jonta Morris. Jonta Morris, the school’s future founder and executive director, is leading STAR Academy’s development efforts. Mrs. Morris’ passion to create lives of choice of opportunity for children is fueled by the more than one thousand students that she has had the privilege to impact throughout her journey as an educator, but more importantly who have had a greater impact on her. These children have not come from affluent zip codes nor statistically speaking, are expected to excel in America. Mrs. Morris believes that she must be the change agent who will help students defy the odds stacked against them because their zip code or skin color will not limit their potential.

A Teach for America alumna, she taught first grade to 23 shining stars in Atlanta, Georgia. After two years in a traditional classroom, Jonta joined KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) as a kindergarten

teacher in Bronx, NY. It is here where Jonta began to hone her instructional abilities and witness a village contributing to growing children’s dreams. Mrs. Morris then had a wonderful opportunity to relocate to Denver, Colorado to aid in opening the first KIPP school in the Montbello community. It is here where Jonta taught middle school reading and became the school’s first assistant principal. She transitioned to Denver Public Schools to help transform a priority turnaround school.

Jonta has also participated in two Denver Public Schools’ principal residency programs: AP Ascent and Learn to Lead. Mrs. Morris holds a Masters of Educational Supervision and Leadership from National Louis University. Jonta is currently completing a year-long Fisher fellowship with KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program), which is the largest and one of the most reputable charter management organizations in the country.

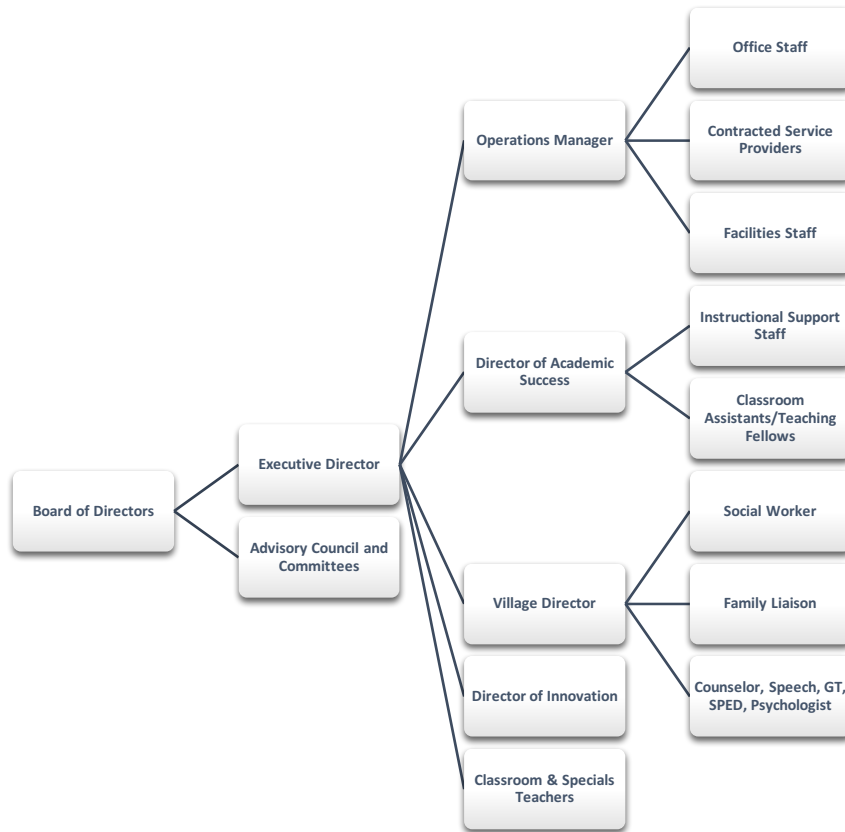
Other members of the school’s leadership team include an Operations Manager/Director of Development, a Director of Academic Success and Innovation, and the Village Director. The Operations Manager/Director of Development will manage all day to day operations, facilities, and vendor duties in addition to actively identifying ways in which STAR Academy can expand its services to students, East Birmingham, and a broader community, state, and national reach. The Director of Academic Success and Innovation will focus their efforts on the academic advancement of students, curriculum design and analysis, student and teacher data analysis, coaching and feedback support to instructional staff, and the evaluation and re-evaluation of school practices to ensure STAR remains on the cutting edge of 21st century teaching and learning. Finally, the Village Director is responsible for building relationships with students and their families, upholding school, student, and staff culture expectations, and supporting staff in exhibiting all culture expectations throughout their work. Each of these individuals will be hired following the staffing model represented in the budget accompanying this proposal.

Section 2: Operations Plan and Capacity

Legal Status and Governing Documents

STAR Academy has filed Articles of Incorporation (found in **Attachment 13**) with the Alabama Secretary of State as a non-profit corporation and have begun to apply for federal 501c3 Status with the Internal Revenue Service.

Organizational Chart



Governing Board

STAR Academy was created to serve students and families and is governed by a board of directors, which is the legal governing board responsible for entering into the charter contract with Birmingham

Productivity is never an accident. It is always the result of a commitment to excellence, intelligent planning, and focused effort.

~ Paul Meyer

City Schools, and providing academic, financial, and operational oversight of the school. All decisions made by the board of directors and school administration will be made with the school mission, vision, and student best interests in mind.

In building a highly functioning and sustainable school, board members are effective in communicating and promoting the school's mission and vision, strategically planning for the future, setting sound policies, and overseeing and ensuring that the school's programs and operation comply with the terms of its charter. Strategic planning includes assurance that the school is financially solvent, complies with statutory and regulatory requirements, has a successful academic program (as measured by internal and external assessments), and building sustainable relationships with the community.

Members of the STAR Academy founding board include: Jonta Morris, Dr. Thomas Beavers, Iris Fisher, CPA, Dr. Lameka Tolliver-Fisher, State Representative Oliver Robinson, Judge Agness J. Chappell, Robert J. Heath, Jr., Jerome Freeman Bell, Robert Record, and Carmen Bender. We are in the process of developing the formal governing board, whose roles will begin in summer 2017.

The STAR Academy board emphasizes the distinction between school governance and management. Governance deals with major policy-making decisions or setting the overall direction of the school. Management deals with the allocation and deployment of the school's resources on a daily basis to achieve the school's goals. The board has established procedures that focus on making major governance decisions (such as budget approval and school leader performance reviews) and delegate administrative matters to the school's staff. In order to keep its focus on the big picture, the board will allow the school leader decision-making autonomy for the school's educational programs and support services on a daily basis.

Addressing Potential Conflicts

STAR Academy expects all board members, faculty and staff to scrupulously avoid conflicts between the interests of the school on the one hand, and the personal, professional, and business interests of employees, on the other. This includes avoiding potential and actual conflicts of interest, as well as perceptions of conflicts of interest.

In order to protect the integrity of STAR's decision-making process, to enable our constituencies to have confidence in our integrity, and to protect the integrity and reputations of our employees, STAR Academy requires that all staff disclose in writing any interests, relationships, and holdings that could potentially result in a conflict of interest. Any employee who has a conflict of interest should see the Executive Director to procure and complete a disclosure form. Written disclosure will be kept on file. It is the employee's obligation to update it as necessary.

All employees are responsible for ensuring that they do not place themselves in any position that will conflict with their responsibilities to STAR Academy. No employee of STAR Academy shall serve on a governing board or committee of any agency contracting with, making grants to, or receiving grants from STAR Academy, except under special circumstances and with the express approval of the STAR Academy Executive Director. In no such case shall a STAR Academy employee vote or take an active part in discussion of a grant or agreement between STAR Academy and an organization of which he or she is a member or in which he or she has an interest.

Division of Governance and Administrative Roles

Responsibility	Board of Directors	School Leader
Legal	Exercises fiduciary role to ensure the charter school is properly managed; Maintains legal status; ensures paperwork is submitted to governmental agencies; Review financial & business dealings; exercises proper judgment to avoid conflict of interest.	Provides information to the board to demonstrate that the school is well managed; Compiles information for annual filing requirements; Alerts board if conflict of interest situation is likely to occur.
Finance & Accounting	Approves annual budget; Review periodic financial reports (balance sheet, income statement); Ensure proper internal controls are in place.	Prepares annual budget; Oversees preparation of periodic financial statements; Implements proper financial controls.
Planning	Establishes mission and program direction; approves goals/objectives to meet those ends; Reviews strategic plan and progress; Assesses compliance/progress in achieving educational outcomes agreed to in charter; Assesses program evaluation plan.	Participates in establishing mission and program direction; Assists board in keep focus and momentum; Develops specific program goals & objectives based on the board's specific mission; Develops/oversees progress reports.
Policy	Develops and adopts written policies; Responsible for reviewing policies periodically.	Identifies need for new policies; Assures implementation of policies and assists in analyzing policy options.
Personnel	Sets and reviews personnel policies; Hires school leader and evaluates their performance.	Implements personnel policies; Recommends changes to personnel policies; Hires staff and evaluates performance.

Resource Development	Assures long-range commitment of resources; Establishes/implements fund development plan; Reviews/approves all major grant proposals.	Conducts research and maintain database; Assists in fund development efforts; Develops grant and other funding applications, plans fundraising events.
Board Accountability	Establishes and communicates expectations of board membership; Assures effective board participation.	Facilitates training and info exchange in preparation for board selection; Facilitates effective communication among board.
Decision-making	Defines and communicates board's role; Assures appropriate board involvement in decision-making.	Makes action decisions within parameters set by the board.
Community Relations	Promotes school to parents and the public; Serves as emissary to broader community; Promotes activities with other charter schools, such as coalitions, shared programs, etc.	Interprets the charter school mission to the community via direct involvement, PR, personal contact, working with the media, etc.; Works closely with the board for an effective division of labor.
Contracts	Approves contracts	Manages contracts

STAR Academy's board consists of a minimum of five and maximum of nine members. Recruiting highly-engaged board members with specific skill sets and professional backgrounds are vital to the success of our school. Members wield a wide range of backgrounds, including education, law, finance, organizational management, politics, informational technology, STEM and arts education, non-profit management, community organizing, fundraising, and marketing. We also seek diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, age, and community, reflecting the composition of the school population and, therefore, the community. Members will serve a three-year term and may serve up to two consecutive terms. Board terms will start in August of each year with terms staggered to ensure that no more than one-third of the board is new each year.

The Role of the Board and School Leader: It is easy for school boards to confuse governance with management in the oversight of the academic program. The board focus should be on results rather than implementation.

Each year the board will work with the school leader to set high but attainable goals for the academic program. A system must then be put in place for the school leader to report on the progress toward the stated goals. It is the school leader's responsibility to keep the board informed about student achievement. Because board members will need to assist the school leader in translating academic goals and results to all of the school's important stakeholders- parents, students, the community at large, and funders- the goals and reporting mechanisms should be clear, straightforward, and as free from jargon

as possible. This system will include the use of data dashboard, an instrument that concisely communicates to the board important student achievement and financial information. This dashboard will guide discussions between the school leader and the board during monthly board meetings.

Ultimately, it is the instructional leader’s responsibility to develop and implement the instructional program of the school. However, it is the board’s responsibility to understand what the academic assessments and student outcomes are as a result of the instructional program.

Board Officers and Functions

Board Position	Term of Office	Responsibilities
President	One year; renewable for three consecutive years with the approval of a majority vote of the board.	Presides over and develops agendas for all board meetings; Ex officio member of all committees; Oversees implementation of board and organizational policies; Ensures administrative practices are established and maintained; Hiring and evaluation of school leader; Works with committee chairs to ensure that committees have the resources needed to do their job.
Vice President	One year; renewable for three consecutive years with the approval of a majority vote of the board.	In president’s absence, presides at board meetings; Works with the president in developing the agendas for board meetings; Other duties as delegated by the president.
Treasurer	One year; renewable for three consecutive years.	Chair of the Finance Committee; Provides direction for the oversight of the school’s record keeping and accounting policies; Ensures the presentation of timely and meaningful financial reports to the board; Ensures the development of an annual budget and its submission to the board for its approval; Oversees development and board review of financial policies and procedures; Leads the board in assuring compliance with federal, state,

		and other financial reporting requirements.
Secretary	One year; renewable for three consecutive terms.	Provides direction for the keeping of legal documents including minutes of meetings of the board; Present for approval by the board copies of all minutes of board meetings; Serves as the protocol officer, ensuring that the keeping and posting of meeting minutes, meeting notifications, adherence to open meeting laws, and other procedural requirements are followed legally and ethically.

Board Committees/Advisory Bodies

In efforts to make board work more efficient, the board will assign its members to serve on committees. Effective committees are indispensable as they do the bulk of the work of the charter school board. An effective committee structure plays the following crucial roles: increases the involvement of the board members by providing an opportunity to use their skills and experience, provides a training ground for future leaders for both current board members and non-board members who may be asked to serve on the board in the future, enhances the visibility and outreach of the charter school by including non-board members in committee membership, channels information from the parents, students, community and school staff to the board, and provides a forum for board members to discuss emerging issues in-depth.

All committees will be chaired by a designated board member, but may include other board members, parents, community members, or others with interest in the work of the committee.

Each committee shall have its own meeting schedule and will follow the rules of transparency and open meetings. The chair of each committee will report on its work during board meetings when applicable. Committees will include but not be limited to:

- **The Executive Committee:** The executive committee will consist of the president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer; plans the board meeting agenda, makes decisions on behalf of the full board, and serves as a communication link with other board members.
- **The Finance Committee:** The finance committee will coordinate the board's financial oversight responsibilities; work with the school leader and administrative team to create the upcoming fiscal year budget, presents budget recommendations to the board, monitors implementation of approved budget on a regular basis.

- **The Governance Committee:** The governance committee is primarily responsible for board recruitment, nominations, orientation, training, and evaluation in accordance with school by-laws, policies, and practices.
- **The Academic Achievement Committee** (membership will adhere to statutory requirement): The academic achievement committee works with the school leader to define academic excellence, ensure that all board members know the charter promises that were made to the community and the authorizer, and to devise clear and consistent measures to monitor these goals; also conducts annual survey of staff and family satisfaction and reports findings to the board.

Task forces and workgroups, which operate like ad hoc committees, will be used for important, time-sensitive assignments and issue-specific tasks that don't require a standing committee. Task forces and special workgroups will include staff, students, parents and other community leaders, in addition to members of the board itself.

Family Leadership Council (FLC): STAR Academy believes strongly in parent participation and involvement in every child's education. To that end, STAR will endeavor to create convenient opportunities for parent involvement in the school and will make such involvement as meaningful as possible. The FLC serves as the ears and voice of the parent body to the staff, school leader, and board. They bring the thoughts, ideas, concerns, and opinions of the parents to the forefront so that family viewpoints may be included in the decision-making process.

Additionally, the FLC serves the school community through its sponsorship of such activities as parent education, outreach, festivals, all-school fundraising, school gatherings, and oversight of various school-based committees (ad hoc committees for such activities as Teacher Appreciation Day, reviewing bylaws or the parent handbook, fundraising activity, organizing refreshments for an event, etc.).

The FLC consists of ten members who are elected by and from any STAR parent/guardian with at least one child enrolled at the school. FLC members act as representatives to their child's classroom and grade level families. Each FLC member will keep class families informed of what is happening in the school. At least one board member of STAR Academy will maintain membership in the FLC. Members are elected each year and fulfill a one-year term, running from May to June of the following year. FLC members may serve more than one term if approved by class parents.

STAR Advisory Council

The STAR Advisory Council is an informal, voluntary council that is composed of representatives from public and private organizations and community members. This council will meet at least quarterly to offer insights, personal experiences, and comments on organizational goals and work. Members may be asked to provide support in extending the reach and networking potential of the board of directors, advising in areas of expertise where the board is lacking. We are in the process of recruiting council members.

Board Development Stages

As STAR Academy evolves into an approved-operating entity, the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders will evolve, as well. The following stages clarify the evolution of the school's governing board through the pre- and post-authorization process:

- **The Founding Board:** Small and homogenous group of individuals committed to the school's mission. The founding board will oversee the development of the school's charter, application and accountability plan. The founding board will lead the school's authorization and start-up efforts.
- **The Governing Board:** The official charter school governing board will accept the responsibility of overseeing the fulfillment of the charter school's accountability plan and for ensuring the school has the resources it needs to operate successfully post authorization. The governing board will share more of the responsibility with the school leader, work more through committees and task forces than the board acting as a whole, and outreach to other groups, including parents, for more diverse points of view. Members from the founding board have first priority in filling governing board positions if they so choose to make the transition. We are in the process of developing a body of qualified Birmingham citizens who will serve as the governing board development team.
- **The Sustaining Board:** As the school grows, the sustaining board will develop the success and stability of the school by embarking upon fundraising becomes a major role for the board as they secure the funds needed for the school to continue operations, attract new members with the capacity or access to key funders and donors, and adding these individuals to advisory committees, rather than appointing them as board members. Although the foundation of various advisory committees has been laid, more intentional effort will be placed in building these committees around year three of STAR's operations and beyond.

Board Member Recruitment Process: The following recruitment process enables the board to assess its leadership needs and establish an organized procedure to identify, contact and secure commitments from the best qualified candidates to fill those needs.

Step 1. Establish a board development committee.

Step 2. Prepare for active board member recruitment:

- Review of the charter school's bylaws, contract, strategic plan and job description.
- Charter school bylaws identify who is eligible to serve on the board and explains requirements to include parents, community members and others.
- Charter school contract explains the terms for governance and the specific roles and responsibilities of the charter school board.

- Strategic plan can impact the board recruitment; for example, charter school may want the board to be more diverse or to strengthen its relationship with key segments of the outside community.
- Job descriptions clearly detail the responsibilities and expectations of board member performance.

Step 3. Develop a profile of the current board based on key criteria including age, race, ethnicity, specific skills, community contacts, parent of children enrolled in the school, etc.; Creates a set of priorities to guide recruitment efforts for review and approval by the school board.

Step 4. Develop an initial list of prospective board members; Prepare and rank the list of candidates who best fit the established recruiting priorities.

Step 5. Contact the top prospects; Prospective board members also can be asked to visit the school to observe it in action, talk with the school leader and other staff, and attend a board meeting to see how business is conducted.

Step 6. Schedule and conduct orientation with interested board candidates.

Step 7. Selection/Appointment of New Board Members.

Board Member Accountability: While motivation is a key factor in the success of a charter school board, accountability is what provides the basis for continual performance assessment and improvement. STAR Academy's board President will invest a great deal of time and energy in keeping board members engaged and well-informed, particularly as it relates to expectations for their role. Accountability is what provides the basis for continual performance assessment and improvement. Written job descriptions will be given to candidates during recruitment, providing a full picture of what they are expected to do when elected or selected to serve on the board. The board will also engage in an annual self-evaluation process in efforts to lead to measureable improvements in board performance. The board will conduct a self-evaluation at the middle and end of the board year, allowing time to take corrective action towards goal attainment. The board will also maintain ongoing individual accountability by assuring members are present for meetings, are not micromanaging the school leader, carrying out critical board responsibilities, and behave in accordance to the board's agreed-upon norms for conduct.

An effective, future-focused board should have an ongoing, multi-year commitment to continuing leadership development. The failure to nurture board leaders can leave charter schools too dependent on a small number of board members, which can lead to stagnation and board member burnout. The STAR Academy board will work to have board leaders ready, as the needs arise, to chair the board, committees, task forces and workgroups in the event current leadership resigns, or is dismissed from the board. The governance committee will regularly assess the current board leadership. In collaboration with the board president and the Executive Director, the governance committee will provide project assignments, committee rotations and educational opportunities to prepare leaders for greater responsibility in the future. The board will also assign mentors to aspiring board members and leaders to further support their development.

Key Expectations for Board Members: Board members are expected to adhere to the following expectations:

- Commit 2 hours monthly to attending board meetings
- Commit 1-2 hours monthly to committee meetings
- Be ambassadors for STAR Academy in the community
- Assist in fundraising
- Understand the difference between governance and management
- Use skills and expertise on behalf of the school

Directors will be removed from the board if they have three or more unexcused absences from board meetings in a year. A director may also be removed for other reasons, including violation of the board's code of conduct, or by a three-fourths vote of the remaining directors. Any director may resign at any time by delivering written notice (which may be electronic mail) of his or her resignation to the Executive Director, board secretary, or board president.

Governance Board Training: In collaboration with the Executive Director, the board will establish a systematic approach to annual member training. This will include an orientation process for new members. All board members will complete the Online Charter School Governing Board Training Modules within the first few months of their term. These modules provide a comprehensive range of topics and an in-depth look at governance and charter school oversight.

In the first three years of school operation, board members will visit other charter schools with high-performing boards. Observing board meetings, board members will debrief on the best practices they viewed and determine a strategic plan on how their observations will inform their governance of STAR Academy. Annually, the board will work with a charter school board governance consultant, evaluating the results of the board self-evaluation, creating a strategic plan with specific goals and objectives, making adjustments to their practice in alignment with the school's mission and vision.

Establishing Policies: Guided by the school's mission and vision, the STAR Academy board sets policies regarding finances, enrollment, program evaluation, and other operational aspects. These policies provide direction on implementing the school's goals and ensure the school meets legal requirements. Adopted policies will include those required by the articles of incorporation, charter school application, charter contract, and Alabama law, as well as those that further the school's mission and vision. Designated board members will research policies established at other schools, craft the policy language, and bring before the board for a first reading. After amendments and edits have been made, a second draft of the policy will be brought before the board. Once a policy has been adopted by the board, the board will note the date it was adopted. A draft of the STAR Academy board by-laws can be found in **Attachment 16**.

A written copy of school policies will be kept in the main office and on the school's website.

Staff Structure

Position	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Administration and Support								
Executive Director	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Principal	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	2.0
Operations Manager	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Director of Innovation/Academic Success	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Village Director	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Secretary I	0.0	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Counselor/Family Liaison	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Cafeteria Manager	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Cafeteria Worker	1.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Media Specialist	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Nurse	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
K-8 Speech/OT/PT/Lang	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Total Admin & Support	5.5	10.5	12.0	13.0	13.0	15.0	15.0	16.0
Teaching Staff								
Pre-K Full Day Teacher	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Teaching Fellows	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Pre-K SPED Teacher	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
K-8 Classroom Teachers	8.0	12.0	16.0	20.0	28.0	32.0	36.0	40.0
K-8 SPED Teachers	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
K-8 ELD/ESL Teacher	0.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Paraprofessionals	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Pre-K/Elementary Interventionist	0.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Intermediate Interventionist	0.0	0.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Middle School Interventionist	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Art Teacher	0.25	0.25	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Music Teacher	0.25	0.25	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Spanish Teacher	0.25	0.25	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Physical Education	0.25	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Total Teaching Staff	22.0	29.75	37.0	45.0	57.0	62.0	66.0	70.0
TOTAL STAFF	27.5	40.25	49.0	58.0	70.0	77.0	81.0	86.0

Staff Plans, Hiring, Management, and Evaluation

Excellent teaching and administration will be central to the mission of STAR Academy. It is the people who are charged with implementing our programs and who interact with students, parents and other community members on a daily basis that will largely determine our school's success. Indeed, our staff is by far our most important asset. Employee policies and practices can go a long way toward facilitating a collegial and respectful environment where ideas are encouraged and staff has a sense of ownership for the success of the school. Our administrative team will work toward encouraging this type of environment since the positive attitudes fostered in the process certainly filter down to the students.

STAR Academy is interested in hiring, retaining, and rewarding teachers who are master teachers, proficient in their subject areas, effective contributors to the overall success and operation of the school, and strongly committed to fully implement the STAR Academy mission and vision. To accomplish this ambitious objective, STAR Academy will hire teachers and other employees under "at-will" employment terms, which means the school or the employee can terminate the employee relationship at any time, with or without notice or cause. No one is authorized to alter or modify the at-will relationship in any written or oral, express or implied agreement. This information will be fully disclosed in any offers of employment.

STAR Academy's personnel policies and practices will be freely available for review by all teachers who apply to teach at STAR and for all teachers who are hired. These policies will be published on the school's website and in both the policy and employee handbook (**Attachment 18**).

Hiring of Teachers: The literature on effective schools emphasizes the importance of a quality teaching force in improving educational outcomes for students. Hiring a teacher can either maintain and improve the course of the overall success of a school or derail it. Teachers at STAR Academy will not be the typical teacher, needing to be willing to take innovative risks in order to implement lessons in our unique integrated STEAM, inquiry and project-based way. The ideal candidate must:

1. Possess the belief that all students are capable of high performance and the ability to connect that belief to their teaching practice
2. Possess a passion for integrated STEAM, student-centered, collaborative, and inquiry-based education
3. View learning as the development of independent thinking skill and an actionable knowledge base rather than acquisition of a list of facts and procedures
4. Appreciate the belief that subject matter is continuously evolving and that higher-order cognitive skills and lifelong learning orientation should be modeled to students rather than the belief that subject matter is fixed
5. Consider teaching as an essential opportunity to guide students as they acquire knowledge through thought and struggle
6. Recognize energy, innovation, and personal enthusiasm in teaching is just as critical as content knowledge
7. Maintain adequate and appropriate content knowledge and the ability to use this knowledge to create innovative teaching and learning opportunities

8. Believe learning is a collaborative process and be flexible and willing to encounter and solve problems of student development in collaboration with a broader professional community
9. Continually reflect on classroom practices and to enhance or update their techniques
10. NCLB highly-qualified designation through having passed the appropriate content area tests, having a major equivalent in the content area, having an advanced degree in the content area, or having National Board Certification in the content area

We believe teachers with the above core requirements will be able to make the necessary adjustments to working in a school community that embraces 21st century teaching and learning, as well as inquiry and project-based instruction. Through targeted and appropriate professional development and classroom support, organizational, data analysis, classroom management, and lesson planning/implementation skills can be nurtured in our ideal candidate.

Public Notice of Opening: To ensure equal opportunity for open positions and eliminate any concerns of discrimination, it is important that job opportunities be posted in a central area and made available to the public (this will be on the school's website). The job posting and advertising will include a summary of the job description including the key elements of job title, essential functions, required experience and/or education and a description of primary job duties. The job posting will also specify where resumes and/or applications should be forwarded and indicate a closing date for accepting applications if a specific deadline for the interviewing and hiring process has been established. Additionally, openings will be posted on websites of local and state organizations such as the Teach for America and other job websites (e.g., Indeed, college and university websites, etc.).

Salary range and benefits:

STAR Academy has designed a compensation package (salary and benefits) that is consistent with its philosophy and that is intended to promote learning and excellence in its employees—full time, part time, and agreement workers alike. The compensation package provided to employees is dependent upon the status of their work with the school.

All faculty and staff receive an hourly or salaried base compensation determined by two factors: 1) the type and amount of work detailed in a specific job description or work profile; and 2) prevailing market rates.

Adjustments to base salaries will be determined annually by the Executive Director and will take into consideration inflation, changes in job descriptions and professional levels, as well as the school's operating budget. Agreement renewals and changes will be extended to employees after the Board has approved the forthcoming year's operating budget.

Rewards, incentives, reward structures, and retention:

Educator longevity and retention is correlated with several positive outcomes, including instructional growth and greater student achievement gains. There are a set of structures that make STAR Academy a magical place to learn, grow, and stay:

- Targeted, differentiated, and impactful professional development
- Renewal structures (e.g. increased planning time, adjusted hours, and flex events)
- Lifelines-community where colleagues can honor, encourage, and push to grow.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

~Margaret Mead

Interview Process: We will be using the Blueprint Teacher Selection Toolkit (Blueprint Schools Network, 2013) as the guiding tool for our hiring processes. The selection and hiring process at STAR Academy will occur in five stages:

Stage One: Initial Screen of Resume and Cover Letter- Applicants will be asked to submit a school-specific cover letter and resume, which should include information on the candidate’s education and experiences as well as certification to ensure they are highly-qualified for the position.

Stage Two: Phone Interview- The hiring committee will utilize the Behavior Event Interview techniques, interview questions, and scoring protocols. The Behavior Event Interview (BEI) technique requires candidates to detail actions and thinking in past work events. Interviewers using BEI should ask questions that encourage candidates to reflect on concrete, past actions, rather than hypothetical responses.

Stage Three: Reference Check- Candidates will be required to provide at least two references with one reference coming from an immediate supervisor who has evaluated the candidate in the past. STAR will use a reference check document based on best practice charter school hiring processes and templates to collect and document feedback from references.

Stage Four: 5-part School-based Interview

- *Lesson Plan Scenario* – Candidates will be given a lesson plan scenario with student pre-test data and demographics (i.e., IEP status, EL status, etc.) in order to create a personalized lesson plan based on the data. All lesson plans will be evaluated using a rubric.
- *Lesson Observation* – Candidates will be shown a short video clip of a teacher providing a lesson to a group of diverse learners. Candidates will be given key teacher evaluation rubric frameworks to observe for (i.e., Differentiated Instruction, Standards Implementation). They will be asked to note what characteristics the teacher and students demonstrate and align their observations to the identified evaluation frameworks. Their video notes will be evaluated using a rubric.
- *Data Team Scenario* – Candidates will be placed in small groups to interact with one another to analyze a set of student data. They will be asked to identify areas of strength and need. Based

on the identified areas of need, candidates will have to collaborate on possible —next steps instructionally for the hypothetical student group. Their data notes and collaboration within the group will be evaluated using a rubric.

- *Multi-Cultural Awareness Essay:* Candidates will be given a quote concerning the need for teacher awareness and sensitivity to the diverse student population of STAR Academy and asked to respond to the quote in writing. Essays will be evaluated using a rubric.
- *Model Lesson:* Candidates will be asked to prepare and teach a model lesson to be observed by the school administration and interview committee (whenever possible). Candidates' lessons will be evaluated using a rubric. Students participating in the lesson will also be interviewed using a specific toolkit protocol.

Stage Five: Follow-up and Final Selection- Leadership team will work collaboratively to review candidate application documentation and make final selections. The offer of employment will define the position, salary and other benefits, start date, employment status (exempt or non-exempt), reporting relationships, basis for performance reviews, evaluation schedule, and the employer's at-will statement.

The school leadership is committed to ensuring that once hired, staff will receive a high level of support, professional development, and ongoing feedback that will ensure their desire to remain as a staff member of STAR Academy. STAR Academy will comply with applicable federal laws, rules, and regulations regarding the qualifications of teachers and other instructional staff in accordance with Act 2015-3, Section 9. (e)(1). STAR Academy will also comply with Act 2015-3, Section 9(d)(1) which states all public charter schools shall be subject to the same civil rights, health, and safety requirements, including but not limited to, state and local public health and building codes, employee fingerprinting, and criminal background checks applicable to other public schools in the state except as otherwise specifically provided in this Act.

Teacher Evaluation Process: Teachers at STAR Academy will undergo an annual evaluation process, including formal and informal evaluations and observations, coaching, and feedback throughout the year.

At the beginning of each year, all employees will go through a goal setting process, identifying at least three professional goals for themselves over the course of the academic year. This process becomes a key component of the Personalized Teacher Achievement Plan (PTAP) and the support, coaching, and feedback that is provided.

The STAR Academy team has developed a teacher evaluation framework that encompasses the major components of our model (e.g., inquiry and project-based learning, thematic instruction, and STEAM integration) as well as the foundations of high-quality teaching. **Please see Attachment 20.**

School Leader Evaluation Process: Similarly, to STAR Academy teachers, the school leader will undergo an annual evaluation process, including formal and information evaluations and observations by members of the board or their designee(s). The school leader will be evaluated based on agreed upon metrics by February of each year, with a formal evaluation from the Board of Directors taking place no later than March 15th of each year. The Executive Director should be notified no later than March 15th of

their expected return or departure for the upcoming school year. A preliminary evaluation tool can be found in **Attachment 19**.

Professional Development

According to the Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) program (an arts-integration organization that partners with 48 Chicago Public Schools and 4,000 students), a critical factor in the success of an arts-integration program is the ability for teachers, teaching artists, and arts partners to collaborate with one another in planning sessions.⁴² Teaching is often an isolated profession with little chance for dialogue around issues of pedagogy and student learning. Regular professional development meetings allow teachers and teaching artists to come together regularly for professional development meetings where they can examine others' work and ideas, share their own successes and questions, and explore new possibilities for teaching and learning using arts integration and the STEM framework.

STAR Academy takes pride in being a learning community. From staff to students and administrators to parents, we uphold our shared institutional and core values to continue to grow and seek opportunities for improvement. In order to fully implement the STEAM model and realize our mission and vision, we will invest in building the capacity of our teachers. Through consistent, data-driven professional development, we believe teachers will be empowered to facilitate instructions in an innovative, efficient, and effective way. Because our school believes enduring learning happens when it is connected to real-life experiences. Our approach to professional development is parallel to our educational approach; authentic professional learning experiences that allow staff to actively engage and connect to their practice. Every professional learning session will end with teachers possessing tangible product they can use the next day.

Professional development will also be used to build school culture, as it allows us to place our focus on the shared vision and shared goals of STAR Academy, creating common language, common expectation, and common practice around those goals. Professional development sessions provide teachers the platform to learn, but also to share best practice and instructional strategies. Again, this creates a culture of growth and learning, allowing teachers at varying level to both "give" and "get". Ultimately, professional development at our school is a chance for teachers to grow, share, and learn, returning to the classroom better equipped to facilitate learning in such a way that student learning outcomes are achieved, mastered, and surpassed.

A review of literature identifies teachers as the primary, school-based drivers of student achievement.⁴³ As a result, STAR Academy strategically devotes time and resources into developing our instructional staff. This includes two weeks of professional development before school, early dismissal on Fridays to accommodate professional development, job-embedded professional development, and ongoing, differentiated support in the classroom following the TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Achievement model.

⁴² <http://www.capeweb.org>

⁴³ <http://www.tapsystem.org/what/what.taf>

Before School Summer Institute: Each year, all staff members are required to attend an eight day before-school summer institute (the founding year will be three weeks long). Three of these will be half-day sessions, allowing teacher teams to make home visits with families and setting student goals in the first iteration of the Personalized Student Achievement Plan (PSAP). The remaining five days will be full-day professional development sessions. The Institute will focus on staff and culture building, data analysis, and instructional planning for the upcoming school year. Professional development will address activities such as:

- Developing effective classroom procedures and daily routines.
- Develop understanding of the STEAM Philosophy, review and revise year---long scope and sequence, and complete their first quarter unit plan with their various content teams.
- Observe, plan, practice, receive feedback on the implementation of a lesson using the STEAM/Project-based learning and thematic planning instructional model.
- Learn school technology, software systems, and assessments.
- Review staff handbook, contract, expectations, and school policies.
- Attend trainings in teaching English language learners, Special Education students, Response to Intervention, and Gifted and Talented Students.
- Attend training and practice data analysis process.
- Practice Morning Meeting procedures.
- Complete pre-reading, attends training on, and discusses foundational concepts of school's cultural and linguistic competency.
- Complete diagnostic professional development assessment, detailing areas in which they require the greatest and most immediate professional development and supports.

Friday Afternoon Professional Development: On Fridays, STAR Academy will have an early dismissal (12:30 pm) to allow teachers time for professional development and planning. Friday sessions are from 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm. Friday professional development will be driven by conversations surrounding school-wide goals, self-identified teacher need, and data obtained from classroom evaluations. Goals set in the school's improvement plan will consistently be analyzed, determining if the school is on track to meeting those goals and what adjustments the data suggests are necessary. Additionally, the Director of Academic Success and Innovation will meet with teams of teachers, providing coaching and feedback from classroom observations. Classroom management, lesson planning and execution, and strategy implementation are examples of these need-based sessions. Also on Fridays, the Student Support Team (SST) will meet to discuss student performance concerns and teacher data. Intervention plans will be developed and assessed by this team with input from classroom teachers, student families, and other school-based staff that can best inform support for students. Friday professional development is also a time in which teachers will engage in book studies, participate in STEM and arts trainings conducted by partner organizations. Our goal is to develop the capacity of our teachers so that marked student achievement gains can be achieved. Because our Fridays professional development sessions are data-driven, it is difficult to create a professional development calendar at this time. However, at the beginning of the year, teachers will complete professional development surveys where they share topics of interest they feel will not only enhance their practice, but ultimately lead to school-wide success. Due to our teachers having varying experiences and backgrounds, we will also allow them to identify subjects

they would like to present during our “Master’s Class” professional development held once a month. This empowers teachers and promotes collaboration and collegiality in our school.

Peer Observations: Throughout the day, there are chunks of time in which teachers in the grade-level loop are not actively instructing students. These blocks of time are listed as “planning” on their schedule. Each quarter, teachers will use one of their planning times to observe another teacher in a different grade level and content area than they. These observations are meant to improve teacher practice. During peer visits, teachers will have opportunity to view best practice strategies used by their colleagues and how they are making impact on student learning. Visiting teachers can also offer formative feedback to assist in the development of reflective practices within our teaching staff, as specific observation rubrics and tools will be used to ensure common language and practice throughout the school. Teachers will have scheduled follow-up discussions with one another after each visit. Notes from those conversations will be submitted to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

Personalized Teacher Achievement Plans (PTAPs): It is the goal of STAR Academy and the duty of both the Director of Academic Success and Innovation and school leader, to provide all educators with regular, meaningful feedback on their performance and aligned supports to foster continuous improvement. Every teacher and administrator will be evaluated annually. For teachers, half of this evaluation is based on student growth and half of the evaluation is based on observations by administration. We also want our teachers to remain current in their instructional practice and educational pedagogy. As a result, every teacher must develop and implement an annual plan for professional growth that outlines professional activities the teacher intends to undertake in the coming year. This plan is the Personalized Teacher Achievement Plan and is similar to the Personalized Student Achievement Plan that is a tool of reflection and goal setting for teachers that mirrors the process of our students.

The objectives for PTAPs and the evaluation system are:

- To enhance the professional skills so they may more effectively meet the needs of all students.
- To provide feedback that motivates personal and professional growth.
- To facilitate communication and collaboration among educators to improve teaching and learning.
- To provide assistance to educators for their continuous improvement.
- To acknowledge and recognize educators’ growth, improvement, and contributions promoting professional growth.
- To provide differentiated professional growth opportunities that acknowledge and are responsive to differences in skills, experience, and learning needs.

Goal Setting and Planning

Step 1: Orientation on Process—To begin the evaluation process, administrators will meet with teachers, in a group or individually, to discuss the evaluation process and their roles and responsibilities within it. In this meeting, they will discuss any school priorities that should be reflected in teacher goals and student learning objectives (SLOs), and they will commit to set time aside for the types of collaboration

required by the evaluation process. These meetings will take place during the Before School Summer Institute.

Step 2: Teacher Reflection and Goal-Setting – After beginning of the year diagnostic assessments have been given to students, teachers will examine student data and prior year evaluation (if applicable) to draft a Personalized Teacher Achievement Plan (PTAP), including proposed performance and practice goal(s), a parent feedback goal, student learning objectives, and indicators of academic growth and development. The teacher may collaborate in grade-level/content teams to support the goal-setting process.

Step 3: Goal-Setting Conference–The administrator and teacher meet to discuss the teacher’s proposed goals and action plan to arrive at a mutual agreed-upon PTAP. The administrator may request revisions to the proposed goals and action plan. The PTAP completion target is October 15th. By this time, both the teacher and administrator should have signed off on approved instructional goals.

Mid-Year Check-In: Timeframe: January and February; must be completed by March 1.

Step 1: Reflection and Preparation–The teacher and administrator collect and reflect on evidence to date about the teacher’s practice and student learning in preparation for the check-in. The teacher can make updates to their PTAP at this time.

Step 2: Mid-Year Check-In–The administrator and teacher complete a mid-year check-in during which they review progress on teacher goals, student indicators of academic growth, and performance on each to date. Administrators may deliver mid-year formative feedback on components of the evaluation framework for which evidence has been gathered and analyzed. If needed, teachers and administrators can mutually agree to revisions on the PTAP and student growth measures.

End-of-Year Summative Review: Timeframe: May and June; must be completed and signed by the last student day of the school year.

Step 1: Teacher Self-Assessment–The teacher self-assesses using information and data collected during the year. The self-assessment is due one week before the scheduled end-of-year conference. The administrator may request revisions to the teacher self-assessment if sufficient data and/or reflection is not provided.

Step 2: End-of-Year Conference–The administrator and the teacher meet to discuss all evidence collected to date and to discuss evaluation ratings.

Performance Management

STAR Academy seeks to provide a high-quality, rigorous integrated science, technology, and arts education to our students using the STEAM educational framework. Our utmost priority is to lead students to high levels of academic achievement, closing existing gaps to bring students up to or beyond grade level expectations. This is why 80% of school time (approximately 29.8 hours weekly) is devoted to academic instruction (literacy, math, STEAM, and the intervention block).

At STAR, we set high goals and expectations for student performance and, in many cases these are higher than district averages. The goals and objectives of STAR Academy are derived from our mission, vision, and beliefs. It is our belief the foundation for students obtaining careers in the STEAM fields begins the first day of pre-kindergarten. Our expectations are higher because we envision a greater capacity for 21st Century STEAM professionals and therefore a re-envisioned approach to their educational and performance needs.

Progress made in meeting our goals will be analyzed annually. Parents, students, faculty, administrators, the board of directors, and Accountability committee will re-evaluate these goals regularly to update them in response to emerging needs. Such needs will be identified through careful examination of information including annual satisfaction surveys, performance on various formative and summative assessments, and baseline data gathered on incoming students each year.

Academic Achievement

1. At least 60% of students who attend STAR Academy for two or more years will score Level III or Level IV on the ACT Aspire Reading and Math assessments. At least 70% of students will score Level III or Level IV in English Language Arts and Math after their third year at STAR, and at least 80% of students in their fourth year will score Level III or Level IV. In all years, 100% of the students identified as Gifted and Talented will score either Level III or Level IV.
2. At least 70% of all students who have attended the school for two or more years will score Level III and Level IV on the ACT Aspire Assessment, including 100% of all students labeled as Gifted and Talented. At least 80% of students will score Level III and Level IV on Science after their third year, and at least 90% in their fourth year.
3. 100% of K-2nd and 3rd grade students will complete one project-based learning unit with a passing score on both content and the presentation of learning as measured by a teacher-created rubric by June 2018 and June 2019 respectively.
4. 100% of K-2nd and 3rd grade students will be able to articulate science, engineering, technology, and mathematics concepts using the engineering design process and the visual and performing arts as the vehicle as measured by STEAM portfolios and presentations of learning by June 2018 and June 2019 respectively.

Comparative Measures

5. All students who have attended the school for two or more years, on average, attain proficiency rates in English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies 5% higher than the surrounding district average, similar school average, and state average as measured by ACT Aspire Assessment. For tested grade levels, all students who have attended the school for two or more years, on

average, attain proficiency rates in Science 5% higher than the surrounding district average, similar school average, and state average as measured by ACT Aspire Assessment.

6. All students who have attended the school for two or more years, on average, attain proficiency rates in English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies 5% higher than the surrounding district average, similar school average, and state average as measured by ACT Aspire Assessment.

Academic Growth

- By June 2018, all K-2 students will demonstrate 1.2 years of growth in reading comprehension and decoding or more as measured by STEP and Terra Nova.
- By June 2018, all K-2 students will demonstrate a minimum of 1.2 years of growth in numeracy as measured by Terra Nova.
- By June 2019, all 3rd grade students will demonstrate 1.2 years of growth in reading comprehension and decoding or more as measured by STEP and Terra Nova.
- By June 2019, all 3rd grade students will demonstrate a minimum of 1.2 years of growth in numeracy as measured by Terra Nova.

Organizational Goals

- STAR will provide an exemplary STEAM education from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade:
 - a. **Objective:** Meet or exceed the Birmingham City Schools district and State of Alabama content standards:
 - i. **Measurement:** At least 60% of STAR Academy's students will meet or exceed district and state standards in Language Arts and Mathematics and at least 70% of students will meet or exceed district and state standards in Science and Social Studies.
 - b. **Objective:** Provide an excellent and engaging integrated, inquiry and problem-based learning curriculum which builds student knowledge base and critical thinking skills beginning at the elementary level, through a STEAM education:
 - i. **Measurement:** Students, staff, and families will be involved in the development and implementation of a comprehensive STAR educational program by:
 1. Electing at least one parent representative to participate on the STAR Academy Board
 2. Instituting a Family Leadership Council that meets at least quarterly to discuss program implementation. The Family Leadership Council will report their concerns, comments, and suggestions to the STAR Academy Board parent representative after each meeting to ensure parent voice is evident in school decision-making.
 - c. **Objective:** Provide appropriate placement for students needing additional support or challenge by conducting quantitative and qualitative assessments as needed:
 - i. **Measurement:** Summative and formative assessments and student placement in MTSS tiered academic and behavior support, language development intervention, gifted and talented programs, and special education services will be quantified and reviewed annually by the SAC. Initial screenings will be completed within 30 days of the student's first day of school.
 - ii. **Measurement:** STAR Academy SIT team will meet once quarterly to discuss academic, health, and social emotional indicators of each enrolled students. Students with identified needs of interest will have support plans listing three

- objectives for support developed and implemented. Each plan will include three-week assessment checkpoints to determine progress to specified goals.
2. Encourage the enrollment, retention, and continuation of students from all economic and ethnic backgrounds:
 - a. **Objective:** Meet or exceed BCS's average daily attendance rates:
 - i. **Measurement:** Each year the school will improve its average daily attendance rate until it reaches 95%+. The average daily attendance rate of the first year of the school will serve as the baseline measure; each year the school's average daily student attendance rate will meet or exceed the state's average daily attendance rate for elementary and middle schools.
 - ii. **Measurement:** 93% of students who begin the school year remain throughout the year.
 - iii. **Measurement:** 93% of students completing the school year will re-enroll the following year.
 3. Promote a safe, positive, and respectful environment:
 - a. **Objective:** Value students and families as customers and be responsive to their concerns in a manner that is consistent with the school's mission, vision, and goals:
 - i. **Measurement:** Family satisfaction with clear, open communication by staff, as measured by annual survey at end of school year, on average exceeds 85% with a minimum of 80% of families responding.
 - ii. **Measurement:** Family satisfaction with academic program, as measured by annual survey conducted at end of school year, on average exceeds 85% with a minimum of 80% of families responding.
 - iii. **Measurement:** Referral and suspension data will be analyzed and reviewed annually during STAR's end of year board retreat. Trends from this data will be analyzed and recommendations made to school administration on ways in which to support a positive environment and social emotional supports for students with high risk behaviors.
 - b. **Objective:** Model and foster respect and support among the students, faculty, staff, and administration.
 - i. **Measurement:** 100% of STAR's students, families, staff, and administration will display the school's core values, uphold the STAR Essentials, and adhere to the community code of conduct.
 - c. **Objective:** Promote respectful relationships among all members of the school community by means of the school's institutional and core values:
 - i. **Measurement:** 100% of teachers will be expected to participate in weekly professional learning curriculum, instruction, data analysis, technology, and culture and climate activities throughout the year.
 4. Demonstrate fiscal responsibility:
 - a. **Objective:** Maintain records and conduct business in accordance with customary procedures for financial accountability:
 - i. **Measurement:** External audits will be clean with no significant financial concerns and will show that the school meets or exceeds professional accounting standards.

come to Professional Development days with tests graded and prepared for analysis and action planning. These Data Days will equip staff to determine what standards need to be re-taught and identify which students need additional support. Every student receives a progress report that is sent home to families, signed, and returned to school.

STEP Assessments: The STEP Assessment System has gained significant support from high performing charter schools because it provides accessible formative assessment data, identifies struggling readers early, offers clear intervention strategies, high-quality professional development, and safeguards against bias, and includes a data management system that can inform teachers about student strengths and weaknesses. The test will be administered every eight weeks in grades K-3 to gauge students’ reading progress.

State Mandated Assessments. We will administer annual state mandated assessments beginning in grade three to measure students’ mastery of grade-level standards and to assess annual progress. We will follow Alabama’s current adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards. All state assessments will be administered in accordance with district and state regulations, following all state and district procedures to ensure accountability and fairness. An overview of our assessment program is explained below:

Assessment	Grade Level	Subjects Tested	Frequency	Purpose
Terra Nova	K-8	Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	3 times a year (beginning, middle, and end)	Diagnostic and Summative Assessment
SUPERA (Spanish version of Terra Nova)	K-8	Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	3 times per year; All ELL Level 3 students will take instead of Terra Nova	Diagnostic and Summative Assessment; Check for GT
STEP Assessment System	K-5	Reading	3 times per year	Diagnostic; Progress Monitoring
ACT Aspire Assessment	3 rd -8 th	Reading, Writing, Math, Science (5 th)	Once per year	Annual Norm Assessment
WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test	K-8	English Language Acquisition/Proficiency	Once upon entry; Once per year for students identified as ELL	Benchmark and Summative Assessment
Interim Standards-based Assessments	3 rd -8 th	Reading, Writing, Math, Science, and Social Studies	Approximately 6 times per year	Diagnostic, Progress Monitoring

To facilitate effective data collection and reporting, STAR Academy has established a clear reporting and responsibility framework that is aligned with the following draft Data and Collection Reporting and Responsibilities matrix:

Executive Director	Manager of Operations	Dean of Academic Achievement	Teachers
<p>Sets dates for assessment creation, revision, approval, facilitation, analysis.</p> <p>Develops interim assessments in year 1 and 2.</p> <p>Analyzes results for school-wide trends.</p> <p>Reviews plans for data days.</p> <p>Uses action plans to set school goals and inform observational data.</p> <p>Shares data, analyses, and school goals with Board of Directors.</p>	<p>Creates copies of all assessments and puts student supplies in rooms.</p> <p>Collects tests and enters data.</p> <p>Produces reports for data days.</p> <p>Organizes action plans to encourage collaboration.</p>	<p>Writes, reviews, revises, and approves all assessments during Summer PD after year 2.</p> <p>Reviews Unit and Lesson Plans to look for trends.</p> <p>Creates plans for data days.</p> <p>Reviews and assists teachers as they write action plans.</p>	<p>Serve on an assessment advisory board.</p> <p>Edits and differentiates lesson and unit plans aligned to assessments.</p> <p>Participates in data days.</p> <p>Create action plans during data days and implement action steps in classroom.</p>
Dean of Student Supports			
<p>Ensures all teachers have the information for modifications and accommodations</p> <p>Provides all accommodations to students who require separate location, questions read aloud, etc.</p>			

Note: The Dean of Academic Achievement is reflected in STAR Academy’s Director of Academic Success and Innovation and the Dean of Student Supports is the Village Dean.

Data Concerns: If any students are not on-track to meet the accountability measures set out in this charter document, the following steps will be taken:

- The Executive Director, in collaboration with the leadership team, will consider the needs of individual students and examine any trends occurring in sub-sections, specific classrooms, by grade level, or school-wide. If accountability measures are not being met by individual students, we will begin the MTSS process as appropriate to ensure students have access to appropriate training for individual teachers or school-wide staff, inform small group supports as well as begin a process to analyze our curriculum and alignment to assessments.
- The Executive Director, with support from the Board of Directors, will analyze student data trends to inform next steps for training, instructional staff support, or purchasing of additional resources.
- The Executive Director will plan professional development, hire additional staff, and/or oversee the purchasing and implementation of additional programs and school-wide interventions.
- The Executive Director will re-assess student achievement to determine improvement and implement additional interventions as necessary.

- The Executive Director and Board of Directors will determine if additional outside support and auditing would benefit the student body to ensure appropriate use of intervention strategies.

Interventions: Teachers will develop individual action plans for any student scoring 70% or below on end-of-unit exams, and we will work school-wide to develop intervention plans for students scoring 70% or below on school-wide interim assessments. Our intervention strategies will ensure that all students are on or above grade level by the end of third grade or after two consecutive years of instruction at STAR Academy. Interventions might include small group tutoring during Sustained Silent Reading, after-school tutoring, small group pull-out during independent practice during class, or adaptive computer-based intervention program. Money has been set aside in the budget for hourly staff if we see a marked increase in the need for small group intervention or additional development of curriculum to meet deficiencies in the academic program.

Facilities

STAR Academy is currently in lease negotiations with New Rising Star Church (located at 7400 London Ave. Birmingham, AL 35206) for a shared occupancy use of their church facility. A Memorandum of Understanding and other facility documents have been included in **Attachment 21**. There were a number of factors that were considered in our search for a facility. These include:

- Location. The ideal location for our school is in East Birmingham.
- Access to public transportation. The school location needs to be within safe walking distance of a significant low-income population and have driveway access to families that will personally transport their children to and from school and adequate driveway space for the passing of cars and buses. It is also ideal if our school is in the vicinity of public transportation bus lines, as some of our students may be using this service to get to and from school.
- Cost. Based on the guidance of the national charter school facility research, STAR Academy has allocated funds for its facility assuming \$9 per square foot in years 1 and 2. In years 3 and beyond, 90 square feet per child at \$11 per square foot.

STAR board and planning committee members are working with Billy Eyster of Eyster Properties as a primary facility representation in exploring Century Plaza as a permanent location for the school.

Facility Needs Assessment: STAR Academy has projected the amount of space needed per year based on a temporary facility use in years 1 and 2 at the New Rising Star Church. The requirements for the first seven years are listed below. Charter school facility best practice states the recommended square footage for schools to be 70-110 square feet per child (this includes non-classroom space such as hallways, offices, bathrooms, cafeteria, etc.).

Building Spaces	Quantity of Spaces	Square Feet per Each Space	Programmed Area (Square Feet)	Notes
Instructional				
Preschool Program (48 months or older)				
Classroom for 20 children max	2	600	1,200	Pre-Kindergarten; 30 sf/child (min)
Teacher Offices/Collaboration Space	1	750	750	Accommodates Pre-K and K Teacher Team
Classroom for 26 children max	4	780	3,120	Kindergarten
Storage	1	150	150	
Toilet Rooms	4	65	195	Pre-K and Kinder will share
TOTAL			5,865	
Year 1: (Grade 1)				
General Classrooms	4	750	3,000	

STEAM Classroom (Lab)	1	750	750	2 sinks each
Teacher Offices/Collaboration Space	1	750	750	Accommodates 1 st & 2 nd Teacher Team
Storage	1	150	150	
TOTAL			4,650	
TOTAL (Year 1)			10,515	
Year 2 Add-on: (Grade 2)				
General Classrooms	4	750	3,000	
Storage	1	150	150	
TOTAL			3,150	
TOTAL (Years 1-2)			13,665	
Year 3 Add-on: (Grade 3)				
General Classrooms	4	750	3,000	
Teacher Offices/Collaboration Space	1	750	750	Shares with 3 rd grade Teacher Team
Storage	--	--	--	Shares with 2 nd grade
TOTAL (Year 3 Add-on)			3,750	
TOTAL (Years 1-3)			14,595	
Year 4 Add-on: Intermediate Program (Grade 5)				
General Classrooms	2	700	1,400	
STEAM Classroom	1	700	700	2 sinks
Teacher Offices/Collaboration Space	1	750	750	Accommodates 5 th grade Teacher Team
Storage	1	150	150	
TOTAL (Year 4 Add-on)			3,000	
TOTAL (Years 1-4)			17,595	
Year 5 Add-on: Intermediate Program (Grade 6)				
General Classrooms	2	700	1,400	
STEAM Classroom	1	700	700	2 sinks
Teacher Offices/Collaboration Space	--	--	--	Shares with 5 th grade Teacher Team
Storage	--	--	--	Shares with 5 th grade Teacher Team
TOTAL (Year 5 Add-on)			2,100	
TOTAL (Years 1-5)			19,695	
Year 6 Add-on: Middle School Program (Grade 7)				
General Classrooms	2	700	1,400	

STEAM Classroom	1	700	700	2 sinks
Teacher Offices/Collaboration Space	1	750	750	Accommodates 7 th grade Teacher Team
Storage	1	150	150	
TOTAL (Year 6 Add-on)			3,000	
TOTAL (Years 1-6)			22,695	
Year 7 Add-on: Middle School Program (Grade 8)				
General Classrooms	2	700	1,400	
STEAM Classroom	1	700	700	2 sinks
Teacher Offices/Collaboration Space	--	--	--	Shares with 7 th grade Teacher Team
Storage	--	--	--	Shares with 7 th grade Teacher Team
TOTAL (Year 7 Add-on)			2,100	
TOTAL (Years 1-7)			24,795	

Building Spaces	Quantity of Spaces	Square Feet per Each Space	Programmed Area (Square Feet)	Notes
Enrichment Program (Elementary and Intermediate Programs)				
Music/Dance Class	1	800	800	Year 1; Add 1-800 sf in Year 5
Art Class	1	800	800	1 sink; Year 1; Add 1-800 sf in Year 5
Teacher Offices/Collaboration Space	1	750	750	P.E. Coaches, World Language, Music, & Art: Year 1; Add 1 -750 sf in Year 5
Media Center	1	900	900	Year 1
Special Education Classroom	1	600	600	Year 1
Common Spaces				
Multi-Purpose Cafeteria/Gym	1	2,250	2,250	Also used for student performances
Unisex Restroom	2	65	130	Signage should not have anything that says female or male
Large Storage Closet	1	800	800	Holds cafeteria tables, chairs, etc.
Kitchen	1	1,100	1,100	Full Kitchen
"Think Tanks" Small Group Space	2	400	800	5-10 students; Year 1; Add 3-400 sf in Year 5
Total			8,930	

Building Spaces	Quantity of Spaces	Square Feet per Each Space	Programmed Area (Square Feet)	Notes
Non-Instructional				
Administrative Suite				
Reception	1	400	400	2 secretaries/Waiting Area
Principal	1	350	350	
Operations Manager/Director of Academics and Innovation	1	200	200	
Village Director	1	200	200	
SPED Director, ELD Teacher, SPED Teachers	2	200	400	
Family Liaison	1	200	200	
Conference Room	2	450	900	Years 1-3:1, Add additional in year 4
Student Records Room	1	150	150	
Clinic	1	150	150	
Flex Space: District Support Staff	1	180	180	
Staff Toilets	2	65	130	
Administrative Lounge/Workroom	1	200	200	
Community Room	1	200	200	Used for parents and community members that would like to use schools services to support the community (e.g., computers, soft seating)
TOTAL			3,210(Year 1)/3,660(Year 4)	
Facility Maintenance				
Building Storage	1	150	150	
Custodial Closet	2	65	130	
Data Room/Servers	1	200	200	
Electrical Room	1	200	200	
TOTAL			680	

Overall Facility Needs (Square Footage Requirements)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Instructional Space	10,515	13,665	14,595	17,595	19,695	22,695	24,795
Non-Instructional Space	8,930	8,930	8,930	8,930	10,880	10,880	10,880
Building Sub-total	23,335	26,485	27,415	30,865	34,915	37,915	40,015
Building Circulation, Public Toilet Areas (28% of total S.F.)	6,534	7,416	7,676	8,642	9,776	10,616	11,204
Building Total	29,869	33,901	35,091	39,507	44,691	48,531	51,519

Our ideal goal is to obtain a space that provides approximately 90 square feet per student. However, we can work within a space that can accommodate 70-80 square feet per child in our initial years. All of the projections above are based on a 90 square foot estimate and would be the expectation in our search for a facility after year 2 at the 7400 London Ave. location. It would be preferred to have a grassy area for play as well as instructional purposes in the vicinity of the school, however, if this is not currently available in a pre-existing building we can creatively infuse this space into our school building.

- ADA Accessibility
- A building that is currently zoned or could be zoned for a school (zoned as at least “Conditional Use” for a charter school; zone A, OR, OC, PBC, C-5, C-6, PIP-1, PIP-2, or M-1)
- Meets all applicable federal, state, and local building codes
- 20-30 on-site parking spaces (minimum)
- Adequate space and traffic flow for drop-off and pick-up

It would be *ideal* to have a facility with the following amenities:

- Close to a city bus stop to help facilitate transportation of lower income students
- Zoned as “Permitted” for a charter school (zones type A, OR, OC, or TND)

Start-Up and Ongoing Operations

STAR Academy will open in August of 2017 with 248 students in Pre-Kindergarten-1st grade; at full enrollment the school will serve 1044 students in Pre-Kindergarten-8th grade. This slow implementation model has become the accepted best practice for new start-up schools.⁴⁴ Because of the values in our school culture and rigorous academic programming, it is difficult to integrate new students into the program at higher grade levels; therefore our enrollment structure is designed to accommodate a certain amount of attrition. We anticipate higher levels of attrition as the school is establishing itself and anticipate that these numbers will even out over time.⁴⁵ A detailed start-up plan for our school can be found in **Attachment 23**.

At STAR Academy, we insist on equity and believe that access to authentic academic experiences is a matter of equity. Equity also includes access to school for diverse populations. We believe that daily transportation would greatly increase access for low-income families to our school. While we do not currently have funding to support daily transportation, we are seeking foundation funding or alternate funding that would help us support such a program. A complete transportation plan can be found in **Attachment 24**.

STAR Academy is committed to creating safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environments where all community members work together to promote academic excellence, civil behaviors, and social competence. All staff, students, and parents help create safe schools. This emphasis has resulted in a Comprehensive Safe Schools Plan that includes purposeful connection between physical safety/security and the “psychological safety” of our students. Physical safety includes measures such as visitor check-in and identification badges, video surveillance, preparedness planning, and practice drills to prepare for a variety of potential incidents. We have devised crisis plans that are aligned with the Standard Response Protocol.

Safety and Security Plan: Procedures to adequately protect students, faculty, staff, and school property, shall include, but not be limited to:

- Controlling the issuance of building keys and master keys and access cards and security cards
- Permitting access to classrooms, laboratories, gymnasiums or other school facilities or equipment only to times when there is appropriate faculty supervision
- Procedure for securing teacher work areas when being left unattended or at the end of the day

1.

The School Leader will secure assistance from law enforcement officials when deemed necessary in order to maintain order or security during the school day or during extracurricular activities at school. The School Leader shall call the Denver Police Department in cases involving illegal entry, theft or

⁴⁴ Other schools using this implementation process include: Rocky Mountain Prep, University Prep, and Sims Fayola in Denver Public Schools.

⁴⁵ Enrollment and attrition calculations are based on the design team’s experience in founding schools and conversations with Montessori school leaders in Colorado.

vandalism. The School Leader shall also notify the Board of Trustees within 24 hours after each case of vandalism, theft, building damage and illegal entry. The Board of Trustees is authorized to sign a criminal complaint and to press charges against perpetrators of vandalism against school property.

The Standard Response Protocol: A critical ingredient in the safe school recipe is the uniform classroom response to any incident. Weather events, fires, accidents, intruders and other threats to student safety are scenarios that are planned and trained for by school and district administration and staff. The Standard Response Protocol (SRP) is based not on individual scenarios but on the response to any given situation. Like the Incident Command System (ICS), SRP demands a specific vocabulary but also allows for great flexibility. The premise is simple - there are four specific actions that can be performed during an incident. When communicating these, the action is labeled with a "Term of Art" and is then followed by a "Directive." Execution of the action is performed by active participants, including students, staff, teachers and first responders.



- Lockout is followed by the Directive: "Secure the Perimeter" and is the protocol used to safeguard students and staff within the building
- Lockdown is followed by "Locks, Lights, Out of Sight" and is the protocol used to secure individual rooms and keep students quiet and in place
- Evacuate is always followed by a location, and is used to move students and staff from one location to a different location in or out of the building
- Shelter is always followed by a type and a method and is the protocol for group and self-protection

These specific actions can act as both a verb and a noun. If the action is Lockdown, it would be announced on public address as "Lockdown! Locks, Lights, Out of Sight." Communication to local Law Enforcement Agency would then be "We are under Lockdown." Each response has specific student and staff action. The Evacuate response is always followed by a location: "Evacuate to the Bus Zone." Responses can also be combined: "Evacuate to Hallway; Shelter for Tornado; Drop, Cover and Hold."

Benefits: The benefits of SRP become quickly apparent. By standardizing the vocabulary, all stakeholders can understand the response and status of the event. For students, this provides continuity of expectations and actions throughout their educational career. For teachers, this becomes a simpler process to train and drill. For first responders, the common vocabulary and protocols establish a greater predictability that persists through the duration of an incident. Parents can easily understand the practices and can reinforce the protocol. Additionally, this protocol enables rapid response determination when an unforeseen event occurs.



The protocol also allows for a more predictable series of actions as an event unfolds. An intruder event may start as a Lockdown, but as the intruder is isolated, first responders might transition parts of the school to an "Evacuate to the Gym and Lockdown," and later "Evacuate to the Bus Zone."

Lockout vs. Lockdown: The differentiation between Lockout and Lockdown is a critical element in SRP. A Lockout recovers all students from outside the building, secures the building perimeter and locks all outside doors. This would be implemented when there is a threat or hazard outside of the building. Criminal activity, dangerous events in the community, or even a vicious dog on the playground would be examples of a Lockout response. While the Lockout response encourages greater staff situational awareness, it allows for educational practices to continue with little classroom interruption or distraction.

Lockdown is a classroom-based protocol that requires locking the classroom door, turning off the lights and placing students out of sight of any corridor windows. Student action during Lockdown is to remain quiet. It does not mandate locking outside doors. There are several reasons for not locking perimeter doors during a Lockdown. Risk is increased to students or staff in exposed areas attempting to lock outside doors. Locking outside doors inhibits entry of first responders and increases risk as responders attempt to breach doors.

There may be situations where both Lockdown and Lockout need to be performed, but in this case they are identified individually. "Lockout! Secure the Perimeter. Lockdown! Locks, Lights, out of Sight." would be announced on public address. We are in "Lockdown and Lockout" would be conveyed to emergency services or 911.

Tactical Responses: SRP also acknowledges that some school incidents involve a tactical response from law enforcement, and suggests consulting with local law enforcement for specific simple actions in that event.

Psychological safety provides for the social-emotional well-being of students and works to create positive school climates through measures such as asset development, bullying prevention, Positive Behavior Supports, and early identification and intervention for at-risk students.

STAR Academy safety team will continually update the school's planning and resources to reflect current needs and world events.

Each school has a functioning school safety team that monitors the building plan for both psychological and physical safety, and a crisis response & recovery team that oversees and implements the school's crisis response plan when needed. Major components of the district [Comprehensive Safe Schools Plan](#) and school safety plans as recommended by the US Department of Education (2004) are conceptualized as a continuum of efforts represented by the district safety triangle.

Intervention Response: STAR has response protocols for situations and/or students who are at-risk, in crisis or potentially dangerous. As needed teams assess students and interventions are designed for students who do not respond to prevention efforts. This also includes implementing a threat assessment process and using the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (also called RTI) process when needed.

Crisis Response Recovery: Recovery includes the steps the school community uses to respond appropriately during and after a crisis situation for the care and recovery of students and staff. The goal is to return the school to a caring and supportive learning environment as efficiently as possible.

Food Services: Clearly, quality food choices for all of our students are also necessitated by our drive for equity. We will be providing lunch and breakfast for full-day students, as well as a snack for all students. Any parent-provided snacks will meet all health and safety requirements as outlined in the student handbook. Support will be provided for families for whom providing such a snack would be a financial burden.

In order to provide these meals to students we will expand on a current food service program existing at New Rising Star Church. We will seek to offer food with a higher nutritional standard than typically seen in the lunchroom. It is important to us that all meals are compliant with USDA regulations and that supporting documents and audit support are available upon request. These nutritious meals will ideally not include artificial colors, sweeteners (such as HFCS), flavors, or trans-fat. The meals will include fresh fruit and vegetables, whole grains, and hormone free milk. Additionally, meals must meet federal guidelines for reimbursement for FRL students so that we can provide meals to our low-income students at no cost to them. We have currently included food services fees into our budget in order to cover costs should we need to use our own food program instead of district services.

Insurance: STAR Academy will carry any authorizer or state mandated insurance coverage at the limits recommended by the Alabama Department of Education. This will include but may not be limited to:

- Directors and Officers Insurance
- General Liability Insurance
- Property Insurance (unless this is covered by our landlord)
- Business Personnel Coverage
- Educator's Legal Liability Coverage
- Abuse and Molestation Coverage
- Worker's Compensation

A detailed description of our insurance coverage plan can be found in **Attachment 25**.

Operations Capacity

The Planning Board is a diverse, passionate group of committed community members, both from East Birmingham and the city at large, who have dedicated their professional experience and credibility to this endeavor. It is comprised of a high capacity group of professionals, including individuals with specific skills and experiences in Education, Business, Finance, Community Engagement, Governance, Fundraising, Marketing, Real Estate, Healthcare Systems, Non-Profit and For-Profit Management, and Law. Many board members from the Planning Board will transition to the Governing Board, which governs the school and is responsible for ensuring that the school fulfills its mission, is faithful to the terms of its charter, and remains operationally viable. One of the first acts of the Board upon chartering will be to formally hire the School Leader to whom it will delegate all school management. The School Leader, identified and evaluated by the Board, will be ultimately responsible for the implementation of all school operations at a demanding, high standard. All additional school hires will be delegated to the School Leader. The School Leader will supervise all employees of the school, and may delegate these duties to other senior leadership staff.

There are two critical elements to establishing and sustaining a high performing urban charter school – academic performance and organizational viability. We intend to achieve excellence in both areas. The collective qualifications and motivations of our Board place us in a tremendous position to achieve our mission of educating every student for college.

Senator Oliver Robinson, Voting Member-Oliver Robinson is a retired NBA basketball player who played shooting guard for the San Antonio Spurs. He was the first player to sign a basketball scholarship with the University Of Alabama Birmingham. Oliver Robinson currently represents the 58th District in the Alabama House of Representatives. Oliver Robinson was formerly the Vice President and manager of Community Affairs for AmSouth Bank Corporation.

Mr. Robert Heath, Voting Member-Robert Heath, Jr. is currently the Director of Radiation Safety for the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). He has served all of the twenty-three years with in the Radiation Safety Program of the UAB Department of Occupational Health & Safety. In addition to his love for people, he has developed an increasing appreciation for the many aspects of the Healing Arts. He has found great satisfaction in helping people and training development, as this helps him to target and actively address key areas of safety, compliance and personal growth.

Dr. Robert Record, Voting Member- Dr. Robert Record is a licensed medical doctor in the state of Alabama who directs Christ Health Center in the Woodlawn community. Through his leadership, Christ Health has been able to open a 16,600 square foot medical, dental and pharmaceutical facility to providing high quality medical care to patients of all ages. Dr. Record also serves as one of the pastors of the Church Of The Highlands Dream Center. He helped coordinate, purchase, and manage the development of the Birmingham Dream Center. Dr. Record also organizes the Church Of The Highlands Serve Day which mobilizes of 10,000 volunteers.

Mrs. Anita Smith, Voting Member- Anita Smith serves as an advanced accountant for the Southern Research Institute in Birmingham, Alabama. Anita works directly with the controller in preparation of the monthly financial statements. Anita reconciles general ledger accounts, prepares journal entries, reviews bank reconciliations, and works with the payroll department in reconciling accounts.

Rev. Jerome Bell, Voting Member- Rev. Jerome Bell is currently the Minister of Evangelism and Outreach at the 6th Avenue Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. He develops plans to equip and mobilize people to share Christ. Formerly Rev. Jerome Bell served as an alternative school teacher as well as a 10th and 11th grade instructor. As an Alternative School teacher, Jerome Bell directed the Alternative School program for the Midfield City Schools.

Mrs. Iris Fisher, Voting Member- Iris Fisher is a senior level CPA for the Birmingham Water Works. Iris is responsible for the accurate and timely processing of all financial transactions. Iris supervises payroll, customer service, benefits, accounts payable, and accounts receivable.

Mrs. Carmen Bender, Voting Member- Carmen Bender is the manager of the Wells Fargo Bank Call Center in Birmingham, Alabama. Mrs. Bender also teaches, trains, and manages over 100 employees. Prior to being over the Wells Fargo Bank Call Center, Carmen was a Wells Fargo Branch Manager at several locations in the greater Birmingham area. As branch manager; Carmen created and managed activities for deposit volume, interviewed candidates for various positions, and helped retain current employees for a healthy work environment.

Judge Agnes Chappell, President/Board Chair- Judge Agnes Chappell is a Municipal Judge in the City Of Birmingham who presides over Domestic Violence Court. In court, she promotes and upholds the safety of victims and holds perpetrators accountable. Judge Chappell organized the Domestic Violence court in Birmingham and works closely with several agencies to reduce the instances of domestic violence. Because of Judge Chappell's work with religious communities through the education of domestic violence, she has the ear and the heart of the community.

Dr. Lameka Tolliver-Fisher, Secretary- Dr. Lameka Fisher is a licensed chiropractor in the state of Alabama. She's the CEO and owner of Fisher Chiropractic; currently one clinic in two locations. Dr. Fisher manages patients, gives consultations, reports findings, gives physical diagnosis, neurological, and orthopedic diagnosis.

Pastor Thomas Beavers, Voting Member- Dr. Thomas Beavers serves as the pastor of New Rising Star Church in East Birmingham. New Rising Star Church holds three weekend services with 1200 attendees per weekend. As Pastor of New Rising Star Church, Dr. Beavers casts the vision to empower people through community development via education, financial literacy, workforce development, housing, recreation, and the church. Dr. Beavers' outreach to the community has made his audible voice visible. The visible voice that Dr. Beavers has, has given him amazing influence in the community.

Section 3:

Financial Plan and Capacity

Financial Plan

The founder of STAR Academy is committed to developing and sharing an integrated, inquiry and project based STEAM approach to education that fosters creativity, promotes academic excellence, nurtures human relationships, and inspires a growing passion for learning. STAR Academy will strive to ensure that our budget closely supports and aligns to our mission, vision, and education plan.

Financial Systems and Processes

In Years 1, the School Leader, with the input of the Operations Manager, will work with the Treasurer to prepare and propose to the Finance Committee a detailed budget that shows line-item expenses and that includes an analysis of the budget's relation to the school's Accountability Plan. In Years 2 and beyond, the School Leader, with the assistance of the Operations Manager and the input of the Director of Academic Success and Innovation, will work with the Treasurer to prepare and propose to the Finance Committee a detailed budget that shows line-item expenses that includes an analysis of the budget's relation to the school's Accountability Plan. The budget will include a monthly cash-flow analysis to help manage cash flow and monitor progress towards outputs such as hiring, contracting of services, or procuring of equipment. The Finance Committee will present the proposed budget(s) to the Board for review and vote. The School Leader will present a variance report of spending in quarterly meetings with the Finance Committee. These reports will be sent to the entire Board quarterly.

Payments and Incoming Funds

The School Leader will sign all checks and have the responsibility for approved purchases. The operations manager will prepare all checks for signature and the Finance Committee will monitor approved expenditures. Checks in excess of \$5,000 will require the second signature of a Board member. Checks will be issued only when within the approved budget and with the approval of the School Leader. Voided checks will be retained to ensure proper maintenance of checking account records. Incoming receipts will be filed by the Operations Manager and entered by back office support, recording the name, date received, name(s) or donor, address (if available), amount, and type of receipt. All checks will be stamped "for deposit only" into STAR Academy's account, prepared with a deposit slip and deposited into the appropriate school account.

A copy of each check will be attached to a copy of the deposit slip and deposit receipt and will be filed and used for reconciliation of the bank statement by the School Leader in Year 1 and OM in Year 2 and beyond, with the School Leader always having financial oversight and management as a critical role in their position of maintaining the organizational viability of the school. The OM will receive the documentation related to the cash receipts deposit and record the activity to the accounting system. The Board of Trustees will review all cash receipts monthly, including a comparison of amounts received to the budget.

Record Keeping

STAR Academy will use a commercial accounting program such a Quick Books to keep its financial records. In Years 1 the School Leader, the operations manager, and the Board Treasurer will have sole

access to these records and will use a password system that is changed regularly. Each week all financial records will be backed up and stored off-site. The Finance Committee will review software needs annually.

Cash Flow Management Plan

STAR Academy's cash management plan includes processes and procedures that help signal a potential cash management problem and allow for immediate attention. The School Leader bears ultimate responsibility to ensure that all forms are completed and procedures are followed to ensure that all expected public and private dollars flow to the school without significant gaps in time. On a weekly basis, during the Operations Meetings, the contracted back office support will provide a cash flow update to the School Leader indicating any expected revenues to be received and budgeted expenses to be made. In Year 1 and beyond, this same task transitions to the OM who engages in weekly Operations Meetings with the School Leader. This ensures that the school maintains a positive cash flow and to the extent possible, a cash reserve each month. Over time, the School Leader with the Board Treasurer will produce budgets that include cash surpluses each year to help offset any potential shortfalls in revenue and to help meet any short term cash flow challenges. There will be financial management policies and procedures in place to help ensure that all purchases and other expenditures are approved and accounted for with an eye towards fiscal prudence and long-term value. These procedures for purchases and accounts payable will allow the School Leader to quickly curtail the rate of spending if necessary. The School Leader, with the Board's approval, will seek lines of credit with financial institutions to provide an extra layer of protection. In the event that revenues do not fully cover expenses, the School Leader and Board Treasurer will take necessary steps to protect payroll and facility's needs. Options would include how revenue through private donations and fundraising can be improved, how non-payroll and facilities expenses and purchases can be delayed, or seeing if the schedule for payments of contracts or services can be renegotiated.

Financial Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Trustees will bear responsibility for the financial oversight of the school. As such, the Board will select a Treasurer with professional experience in finance or accounting, and will convene a standing Finance Committee. The Treasurer and the Finance Committee will ensure that the Board monitors the school's finances. The Finance Committee will work with the School Leader to develop the annual budget and present it to the full Board for review and approval during the last month of the fiscal year. The Board will also ensure that quarterly financial reports with analyses of actual spending versus budgeted amounts are submitted to the Board, and will work with the School Leader to ensure that an annual audit is completed.

Internal Financial Controls

Internal Controls



STAR Academy will maintain appropriate internal controls to ensure protection of the school's financial resources. This includes separation of duties as much as possible, careful review of all credit card transactions, second signature on large checks, and tight processes for accounts payable and receivable. We also agree to engage and participate in an annual financial and administrative independent audit conducted by a third party certified public accountant. The results of the audit will be provided to the authorizer in written form within the statutory time limits or as defined by the authorizer in the charter contract.

While the Board will be responsible for financial oversight, the School Leader will be responsible for the day-to-day financial management of the school. The School Leader will work with an Operations Manager and Chief Financial Officer to ensure proper financial management, coordination of payroll services and benefits packages, cash-flow management and accounts payable, and monitoring of the budget and development of initial budgets and cash flow systems.

The School Leader will work with the Secretary to ensure procurement of supplies, equipment and services. The School Leader, working with the Board Treasurer and Finance Committee, will issue monthly financial reports to the Board, and the School Leader will hold no fewer than quarterly meetings with the Finance Committee, chaired by the Board's Treasurer.

Starting in Year 2, leadership in the duties outlined above will transition from the School Leader to an Operations Manager. At this time, the school will serve 392 students and employ over 20 staff members. At this size, it is critical that a full time person is in the building working solely on finance and operations. We will no longer utilize back office support staff upon the hiring of our OM as reflected in the accompanying budget.

Accounting and Auditing

STAR Academy agrees to maintain appropriate financial records in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, rules and regulations, and will make such records available to the authorizer as requested from time to time. STAR Academy will maintain a comparison of actual expenditures to budgeted expenses. Revenue and expenditures will be consistent with the Alabama Department of Education's Financial Policies and Procedures Handbook and Chart of Accounts.

Financial Transparency

STAR Academy intends to comply with all requirements of the Alabama Financial Transparency Act (H.R.2477) by posting all required documents on the school's website in a timely manner. This includes: the annual budget, annual audited financial statements, quarterly financial statements, salary schedules and/or policies, accounts payable check register, and credit, debit, and purchase card statements (in a downloadable format), and an "investment performance report" for any school investments.

Contracted Services

STAR Academy will contract with an independent certified public accountant (CPA), to provide support to the school in analyzing, reconciling and adjusting account balances, and to ensure the records are maintained in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). Such accounting firm may also assist in developing STAR Academy's Chart of Accounts and implementation of an accounting software system. We recognize that as a publicly supported entity, STAR Academy has additional responsibilities to ensure the public's confidence and the integrity of the school's activities. The Board will develop and approve financial policies and the School Leader will implement those policies, using approved internal financial controls that are aligned with the requirements of the Alabama State Department of Education and provide STAR Academy with the foundation to properly safeguard its assets, implement management's internal policies, provide compliance with District and federal laws and regulations, and produce timely and accurate financial information. The School Leader will develop, with the assistance of a CPA, a Financial Policies and Procedures Manual, which will be reviewed by the Finance Committee and approved by the Board. This manual will cover the roles and responsibilities of all financial management duties, including content, frequency, and process of reporting and reconciling bank accounts and ledger books for all financial transactions of the school. The manual will also include: procedures for banking and cash management; procurement; expenses and accounts payable; payroll and related liabilities; fixed assets; grants, donations and in-kind services; debt; investments; and security of financial data.

Liability Insurance

STAR Academy will carry any authorizer or state mandated insurance coverage at the limits recommended by Birmingham City Schools. We have begun to work with a local insurance company to determine costs of insurance coverage.

Budget Narrative

STAR Academy has created a conservative six-year budget (including "year 0") based primarily on state Per Pupil Revenue with minimal reliance on soft money raised from private sources. School revenue sources include: Alabama State Per Pupil Funding (grades Prekindergarten-8), Title 1 Funding, Public Charter Schools Startup and Implementation Grant, Foundation Grants, and Partnerships with local businesses and non-profits. The proposed six-year ("year zero" planning year and the first five years of operation) budget and budget assumptions for STAR Academy can be found in **Attachment 26**.

We will work to maintain a balanced budget from year to year, having our financial statements and budget sheets reviewed by the Board of Directors and Finance committee each month. Additionally, STAR Academy will have an annual financial audit conducted by an independent accountant/auditing firm to ensure there are no financial problems or exceptions with our budgetary management. STAR Academy will also stay in compliance with all authorizer financial reporting requirements and deadlines.

- The proposed six-year (“year zero” planning year and the first five years of operation) budget and budget assumptions for STAR Academy can be found in **Attachment 26**. Revenue and expenditure projections are based on the best information available to date. STAR Academy is in process of submitting grant applications to the to the state and private foundations who have a passion for supporting high-quality education options for students and their families.

It is our goal to continue to offer a high-quality educational program, regardless of fluctuations in per pupil funds or other revenues sources from year to year. As a result, STAR Academy has a goal of building a strong contingency budget beginning in year 3. We aim is to ensure the fidelity of implementation for our academic program regardless of economic variables.

The annual budget cycle is from July 1st to June 30th each year. The school leader develops a draft budget for the coming academic year based on actuals in the current year and identified strategic priorities. Key aspects of the draft budget (e.g. staffing plans, curricular areas that need investment, etc.) are then shared with the finance committee. Feedback is gathered, adjustments made, and the draft budget is given back to the Finance Committee for final review. This cycle continues until a financially viable budget is created. The finalized budget will be submitted to the board for review during the April monthly meeting. The school leader incorporates any board input and then a final version is presented to the board at the May meeting for approval. The process takes place this early so the school leader has a board- approved budget in hand prior to renewing offers of employment and making any new hires. The official budget will be approved in September once actual enrollment numbers are known and all hiring has been completed.

Financial Management Capacity

STAR Academy will implement financial policies and practices to ensure long-term viability, including maintaining a balanced budget and conducting annual financial audits. We will create and maintain a comprehensive budgeting process and system of checks and balances. The Governing Board will select and train individual members from the Board to form a Finance Committee which will work with the School Leader to develop and execute responsible fiscal policies and practices, and monthly will report to the Board on the fiscal health. The following Board members will make up the Financial Committee:

Mrs. Anita Smith- Anita Smith serves as an advanced accountant for the Southern Research Institute in Birmingham, Alabama. Anita works directly with the controller in preparation of the monthly financial statements. Anita reconciles general ledger accounts, prepares journal entries, reviews bank reconciliations, and works with the payroll department in reconciling accounts.

Mrs. Iris Fisher- Iris Fisher is a senior level CPA for the Birmingham Water Works. Iris is responsible for the accurate and timely processing of all financial transactions. Iris supervises payroll, customer service, benefits, accounts payable, and accounts receivable.

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Mrs. Carmen Bender- Carmen Bender is the manager of the Wells Fargo Bank Call Center in Birmingham, Alabama. Mrs. Bender also teaches, trains, and manages over 100 employees. Prior to being over the Wells Fargo Bank Call Center, Carmen was a Wells Fargo Branch Manager at several locations in the greater Birmingham area. As branch manager; Carmen created and managed activities for deposit volume, interviewed candidates for various positions, and helped retain current employees for a healthy work environment.

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