



## **Executive Summary**

### **Elachee Nature Science Center**

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## **Introduction**

Every school has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school, and the kinds of programs and services that a school implements to support student learning.

The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the school community will have a more complete picture of how the school perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.

## **Description of the School**

**Describe the school's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school serves?**

Elachee Nature Science Center is a private nonprofit organization located in the 1500 - acre Chicopee Woods Nature Preserve 5 miles south of Gainesville, Georgia in Hall County. Our school serves a diverse community of made up of metropolitan Atlanta schools and suburban and rural schools in the northeast Georgia region. Many of these schools have a growing Hispanic influence. Our school serves 34,000 students yearly from 19 public school districts, a wide variety of private schools and a growing home school community. Elachee features a broad scope of programming and services for students with a multi disciplinary, standards-based approach to hands-on learning.

Our newest addition, a Bright from the Start licensed Nature Preschool, is in its second year of operation. It meets our goal of expanding our service to include preschool aged children and their families.

Our biggest challenge is growing the organization's capacity to provide environmental education needed in our growing and changing community today.

## **School's Purpose**

**Provide the school's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.**

Elachee Nature Science Center's mission is to promote environmental understanding through education and conservation. The school presents an innovative and exciting environmental education-based curriculum. Each class is correlated with the Georgia Performance Standard, the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, and Gwinnett County School's Academic Knowledge and Skills. Most classes combine a classroom presentation with an interpretive hike in the Chicopee Woods or other complementary outside activities. Others are taught entirely outdoors. Most can be brought to a school as an outreach program.

## **Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement**

**Describe the school's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school is striving to achieve in the next three years.**

In 2013 Elachee's Nature Preschool opened offering 3 - 5 year old children a specially-designed nature classroom, outdoor playscape, immersion in nature, children's garden and preparation for kindergarten. Students spend a portion of each day learning outside in nature. Elachee partnered with seven other community organizations to build an "E-House" that demonstrates energy conservation and sustainable building practices. It was visited by 1,286 students last year.

Elachee expanded access to our program offerings via our webpage and new mobile web site. We also have Twitter and Facebook accounts and an active blog.

The center is currently working to expand our technology offerings to include QR codes. These will allow students and visitors to access interpretive information as they tour the museums, view exhibits and hike the 13 miles of trails of the 1500-acre Chicopee Woods Nature Preserve. Improvements to the museum exhibits and gardens are also planned.

## **Additional Information**

**Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.**

In addition to children's programs, Elachee Nature Science Center offers adult programs and opportunities for environmental stewardship. Major ongoing conservation projects in the Chicopee Woods Nature Preserve include maintaining trails, testing and monitoring for stream quality, encouraging biodiversity and a Trail Steward program for volunteers. It also offers the Georgia Master Naturalist certification program for adults through the University of Georgia. "Brown Bag Lectures" and evening presentations provide additional learning opportunities.

Elachee hosts many community events including Snake Day and Raptor Fest. Trillium Trek attracts runners from throughout the region. Camp Elachee allows children an opportunity for a week of nature exploration. A complete list of events can be found on the website at [www.elachee.org](http://www.elachee.org).

This fall Elachee will be hosting the Association of Nature Center Administrators. The Nature-Based Preschool National Conference will be held in conjunction with this event. Visitors from across the United States will enjoy southern hospitality and the unique environment of the Chicopee Woods.