



# **Executive Summary**

## **Elmore County Board of Education**

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## **Introduction**

Every school system has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school system makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school system 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 system, and the kinds of programs and services that a school system implements to support student learning.

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

## **Description of the School System**

**Describe the school system'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 system serves?**

The Elmore County Public School System was the first district in the River Region to engage in the district process in 2008 and successfully earned accreditation. In 2010, the system submitted the Accreditation Progress Report outlining the system's efforts to address the recommendations presented in the initial visit. The Executive Summary will provide an update on the changes in the school system the previous five years, progress on the recommendations, and the current focus and initiatives.

According to the last 2014 U.S. Census, 80,977 people lived in Elmore County. The population is 76% white, 21% black, 2.7% Hispanic, and fewer than 1% of other origins. Of this total, 3.7% speak a language other than English in their home. Persons aged one year and older reported as living in the same house (85.4%) indicate a majority stable population. The median income in the county is \$54,766 with 13.4% of the population below the poverty level. The average home is worth \$144,600 with 2.62 persons per household. Of persons aged 25+, 86.6% had at least a high school diploma and 21% held a Bachelor's degree or higher. Elmore County has no major industries but many small businesses. A number of residents commute to work in Montgomery and surrounding areas.

The school system is comprised of fourteen schools in four communities, a technical center, and two alternative programs (ICARE and ECAP) for students with serious behavioral or social issues. Special Education (SPED) students comprise 10.8% (1198 students) of the school population not including 792 gifted students and 79 three- and four-year olds served by the system. There are ten multi-needs units. The SPED, Free and Reduced Lunch, and Black subgroups are the areas of concern on state-mandated testing. Elmore County has 393 EL (English Language) students who list a language other than English as primary; they comprise .035% of the population and speak 32 languages including Urdu, Pampanga, Tagalong, Cebuano, Marathi, Mien, and others. Of this number, 147 students (37%) will take the ACCESS for ELLs test this year. Spanish is the overwhelming second language with 289 students; Gujarati is second with 15, and 11 students speak Vietnamese. The population at the 20-day mark for the ADA/ADM Report was 11081 students comprised of White (68.3%), Black (25.4%), Hispanic (2.9%), Multi-Race (2.1%), Asian (.9%), Indian (.3%), and Pacific Islander (.0%). Of that number 6111 (55.1%) are on free and reduced lunch. This number has increased significantly due to the failing economy and lost jobs. As of the 20-day ADA/ADM Report on October 2, the daily attendance rate was 95.6%. The current high school completion rate is 76% (down from 89%) due in large part to the new four-year window for completion. Elmore County employs a certified staff of 777 administrators, teachers, and staff with 100% of its teachers highly qualified and 56% of this total having a Masters or higher degree.

Advanc-Ed Surveys were administered to parents, students, and staff. The staff surveys were positive at 4.0 or better with 3.37 as the lowest individual response and the lowest aggregate school response for all indicators at 3.93. Indicator 3.8 received the largest number of responses at the three level: The school engages families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keeps them informed of their children's learning progress with 3.9 related to a formal advocacy program for each student and 4.6 with the provision of services to meet the "physical, social, and emotional" needs of students receiving the next lowest numbers of three's. These responses indicate that the system must do more to meet the needs of students beyond the merely academic and must increase its parental involvement and communication on academic matters. Parent surveys (2147) were again in the 3 and 4 level with the lowest school aggregate response at 3.23 and the highest at 4.5. The largest number of parent responses ranging from 3.16-to 4.36 was for indicator 2.3 "The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively." The perception of parents appears to be that schools do not have sufficient authority; however, this indicator is contradicted by the teacher

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response which ranged from a low of 3.82 to a high of 4.72 for the same indicator. The district surveyed 7271 students in grades 2-12. The indicator with the most significant negative response was 4.3 related to maintenance of facilities and a "safe, clean, and healthy environment." In upper middle and high schools, scores ranged from a low of 2.3 (eleven scores rated at 2.3-2.94) to a high of 4.14 at the newest school and 2.94 at the oldest school.

The district did not make AYP in 2010 or 2011 but achieved AYP in 2012 under Delay status as two years of improvement are required to be rated clear. Performance in the SPED, Free and Reduced lunch, and Black subgroups have been the chief factor in the system not achieving AYP although all subgroups have shown growth as revealed in longitudinal data. The system has rededicated itself to ensuring that all subgroups make significant progress; has hired a graduation coach; converted reading coaches to instructional coaches assigned to individual schools to improve instruction and assist teachers; and in an effort to serve all students, the system has intensified its efforts to expand AP opportunities and offer other classes in a more rigorous standards-based curriculum. The Superintendent and his staff are currently engaged in an effort to evaluate policies, practices, and utilization of staff and other resources.

## **System's Purpose**

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

During the 2008 District Accreditation process, Elmore County Public School System engaged in extensive system-wide processes to select a mission and vision. When reaccreditation approached and the system began intensive preparation in the spring of 2012, the district and schools reexamined the previous mission and vision statements and elected to continue with the focus embodied in the unchanged purpose outlined in the statement: Elmore County Public School System strives to prepare students to be responsible and productive citizens in an ever-changing world. This guiding principle is displayed in the BOE meeting room, on school and system websites, in correspondence, and posted throughout all buildings countywide. It is a recurring theme when leaders and their stakeholders engage in discussions prior to making decisions. The system continues to adapt its programs to the changing needs of students. To that end, there is a much greater emphasis on using technology; expanding course offerings; revamping, expanding, and replacing existing programs; intensifying the Response to Intervention (RtI) program; requiring team reviews of selected Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) on a semester rather than annual basis; soliciting the input of all stakeholders; instilling leadership in students, staff, teacher leaders, and aspiring administrators; expanding embedded and online professional development opportunities; and adapting to meet state and national mandates and everchanging foci. The unifying goal of the district is to ensure that our students are competitive and have the skills to be successful in whatever endeavors they attempt.

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

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

The Elmore County School System is justifiably proud of its administrators, teachers, and students. Dr. Andre' Harrison is the current State Superintendent of the Year. The number of personnel with advanced degrees including doctorates continues to rise with one hundred percent of teachers highly qualified. In the past three years, numerous teachers and other personnel have received state recognition for their individual achievements (Gifted Coordinator of the Year, national board designation, runner-up for state teacher of the year, WAKA Golden Apple WAKA, WSFA Class Act Award, etc.). Students continue to excel in the robotics competitions at the state and national level and in state fine arts competitions. ACT performance shows gains, and AP enrollment is on the rise with additional course offerings. The system initiated an energy conservation program that has resulted in savings of \$2.6 million. District representatives frequently assist the ALSDE with the norming of existing and new tests, participate in projects (the safety study on bus seatbelts, for example), and serve on state committees for the development of curriculum and other initiatives. At the elementary level, parents and grandparents volunteer frequently and are valued participants in activities during the day and afterward. At upper grades, parents attend extracurricular events such as pageants, concerts, plays, and competitions. Elmore County enjoys close interaction with its legislative representatives who provide financial support and personal interaction. Local political bodies and community partners also support the system's art, science, and other competitions as well as contribute significantly to educational endeavors such as the Wetumpka Project. The system has a Strategic Plan in place that is revisited on an annual basis.

The fourteen schools, technical center, and two programs that comprise the Elmore County Public School System are striving to empower students to be the best they can be. As a district, we are proud of our successes but know we must work hard every day to achieve our mission. Like most school districts, we have challenges that must be addressed. Students in three of our subgroups (SPED, free and reduced lunch, and Black) are not scoring at the same level as other students on state-mandated tests. Their needs must be addressed earlier and more comprehensively through a formal advisory program and utilization of all available school and community services. Regular education and special needs staff must plan, instruct, and evaluate student progress collaboratively. We feel we must instill more academic rigor and improve our graduation rate by teaching to mastery and utilizing strategies that foster student engagement. Sufficient funding is essential to ensure adequate technology. Accelerated Reader, Global Scholar, pre- and post-test assessments, etc. increase the need for more and up-to-date technology, and students with complex disabilities require sophisticated technical equipment to achieve at a higher level. Delivery of instruction, assessment, and data analysis are more effective and current with the programs and tools that are on the market. If we expect educators to adjust their instruction, they must have access to innovations in technology and timely and precise data to enable them to do so most effectively. We recognize the need for a more formal and systematic approach to data analysis throughout all grade levels. When data analysis shows increased achievement, teachers must have opportunities to share successful teaching techniques and programs with colleagues. Both certified and instructional support staff must receive more in-depth training in data analysis. Teachers must be trained in effective disciplinary techniques and encouraged to reward appropriate behavior more often. Such an approach will increase positive interactions among students and teachers, foster a feeling of mutual respect, and motivate students to do their best. Leadership opportunities must continue to be offered to students, teachers, and aspiring administrators while promoting the continued growth of current administrators in ever-expanding programs. And, as always, parents must be made aware of initiatives and be invited to participate as partners. Parents, teachers, and age-appropriate students must be afforded the opportunity to refine mission and vision statements and contribute to the development of school cultures. We recognize that we must revisit our mission and vision on a scheduled and formal basis to ensure relevance. Of utmost importance is that we have the strategies and resources in place to assure a safe learning environment.

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The Elmore County Public School System recognizes these concerns and will continue to address the deficiencies that exist.

## **Additional Information**

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

At the conclusion of the initial district accreditation visit in 2008, the district received four recommendations which the system has sought to address with varying degrees of success. The first recommendation was to expand the budgeting process in order to involve the administrative team and coordinators more actively in the prioritization of programs. Superintendent Langham has responded by holding financial meetings with department heads and administrators. In addition, both he and the Technology Coordinator have given principals latitude in determining how various funds provided to individual schools and technology money may be spent on individual campuses. The Superintendent has written articles and conducted community meetings in order to keep stakeholders informed about the district's financial status and plans for expenditures. School requests are given serious consideration. For example, middle schools at Holtville and Eclectic requested a band instructor. This request was honored with a teacher unit split between the two schools. Although funding has been severely cut due to repeated proration, the Superintendent endeavors to find funding to meet school needs. He and his staff help to guide the schools and employees in securing grants and completing applications for funding of specific projects. The Senior Coordinator for Teaching and Learning has also expanded communication with K-8 principals by involving them in pre-planning and conferring with them monthly. Principals are provided with the exact amount of funding for their individual schools, and their input is sought to determine the expenditures. The Poarch Creek Indians provided the system with a gift of one million dollars. All schools were presented with checks in significant amounts where they were allowed discretion as to the expenditures with Superintendent approval. The bulk of this money went directly to the schools with minor appropriations to the transportation, technology, and curriculum departments. Much progress with greater inclusion has been achieved in this area.

The second recommendation was to develop and implement an effective vertical articulation process. Although progress has been made in this area, more work must be done. At the beginning of the 2011-12 school year, the district initiated K-12 meetings in the core subjects by communities, but there was no follow-up from the discussions although teachers developed more awareness as to what was expected of colleagues at all grade levels, worthwhile information was exchanged, and productive recommendations offered. Individually communities and schools have initiated more contact such as shared data meetings, joint special education and faculty meetings, and placement meetings for specific courses and programs. But there is no coherent program district-wide. More articulation occurs among feeder schools in some communities. Greater benefit would be derived from a specific program with predetermined expectations and a series of options.

The third recommendation was to increase district-level support and resources for schools that fail to meet AYP. The district has provided additional personnel as reading and later instructional coaches at the school level and utilized central office personnel to assist school administrators and teacher leaders to develop appropriate Continuous Improvement Plans. Under the leadership of the School Improvement Specialist, the LEA Accountability Roundtable and school administrators monitor implementation of the plans. Personnel within the system, parents, community leaders, and board members are familiar with this process. As the district moves to provide teachers with more current data within classrooms and the state requires the demonstration of progress annually for each student, it is expected that areas of weakness will show gains and subgroup performance will improve.

The fourth recommendation was to incorporate higher-order thinking skills in a performance-based curriculum to ensure rigor and relevance for all students. The system has made progress in this area by initiating a standards-based curriculum, adding more Advanced Placement and pre-Advanced Placement classes in grades six through eight, increasing enrollment significantly in AP classes, ensuring full inclusion for special needs students with a semester IEP review for those students experiencing problems, providing extensive professional development

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to increase instructional effectiveness, and working to implement the EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT assessments in alignment with state initiatives.

The Superintendent is currently engaged in an evaluation of personnel and fiscal resources in order to ensure the greatest benefits for students. Parents indicate satisfaction with our school system, but he believes it is wise to assess our approaches, programs, and allocation of resources to ensure that we are accomplishing to the level that we should. The District Accreditation process provides an appropriate time for serious introspection.