

▶ THOUGHTFUL CLASSROOM PARTNER PROFILE:

Cherokee Bluff Middle School | Hall County, Georgia



A Newly Established School Achieves High Levels of Success with a “Four Cornerstones” Approach

Cherokee Bluff Middle School is located in the southernmost portion of Hall County, Georgia. The school was formed in 2018 as a result of redistricting to accommodate the population growth of neighboring Gwinnett County, a district with 180,000 students. Drawing students not only from its immediate surrounding community, Cherokee Bluff also received a significant number of students from two other middle schools, creating a new demographic profile for the school comprised of roughly 60 percent White students, 30 percent Hispanic students, and 10 percent Black students. Currently, 31 percent of Cherokee Bluff’s students receive free or reduced lunch.

From the day Cherokee Bluff Middle School opened its doors, Principal Robert Wilson has been guiding its journey. Robert came to Cherokee Bluff with a strong track record of raising student achievement, first as a Georgia Department of Education Instructional Specialist who helped turn around four middle schools in Atlanta, and then as the principal of an elementary school in Gainesville, Georgia that served a 99% Hispanic population.

At Cherokee Bluff, Robert made it his and his team’s first goal to create a strong school culture where all students would feel proud to attend. And to achieve this goal, Robert relied on what had worked for him and his schools in the past: Thoughtful Classroom tools and principles and, in particular, the Four Cornerstones of Effective Classrooms. According to Robert, “Because

the Four Cornerstones represent the universal elements found in all successful learning environments, and because I had seen from my own experiences how positively teachers and students responded to this approach, I knew that the Four Cornerstones would help lay the foundations for Cherokee Bluff’s success.”

“For our first two years, we placed a heavy focus on building the Four Cornerstones in every single classroom. In fact, for our entire first semester, we focused nearly all our professional learning efforts on just two cornerstones: Positive Relationships and Organization, Rules, & Procedures. Over that entire first semester—

▼ The Four Cornerstones of Effective Classrooms

Organization,
Rules, and
Procedures

Positive
Relationships

A Culture of
Thinking and
Learning

Engagement
and
Enjoyment



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Robert Wilson, Principal, Cherokee Bluff Middle School

our school’s first semester in existence—we didn’t have one in-school suspension because our teachers were able to establish these two foundational cornerstones in their classrooms.”

From there, Robert and his team turned their attention to Cornerstones Three and Four: Engagement & Enjoyment and A Culture of Thinking & Learning, with teachers learning new tools and strategies for promoting active learning and deep understanding from the Thoughtful Classroom team as part of their schoolwide professional development. As Robert puts it, “Not only did we give our teachers a simple framework to help them establish organized and engaging classrooms, we also provided them with the tools to make all of this work. And our teachers have been so appreciative of that. It’s not just telling them general ideas about how to make the learning deep, it’s giving them proven and practical ways to do it.”

Today, the Four Cornerstones and Thoughtful Classroom tools remain at the heart of Cherokee Bluff’s commitment to creating a high-quality learning culture for all of its students. And Robert credits the strength of these foundations with helping Cherokee Bluff’s teachers and students continue to succeed, even through the disruptions of the pandemic. “The proof of the power of this approach,” says Robert, “is in the results.”

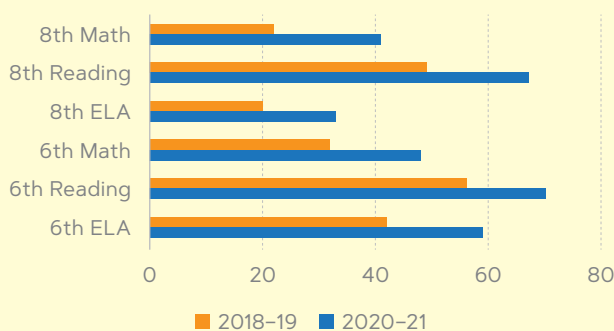
In 2021, Cherokee Bluff was one of the highest-performing middle schools in Hall County, with Cherokee Bluff’s students achieving the top in-county scores in the following subject areas: sixth-grade reading, seventh-grade ELA, seventh-grade math, eighth-grade math, coordinate algebra, and physical science. Even more impressive, the school has seen consistent growth in student achievement since its inception in 2018, as the charts below demonstrate.

▶ Looking at the Data

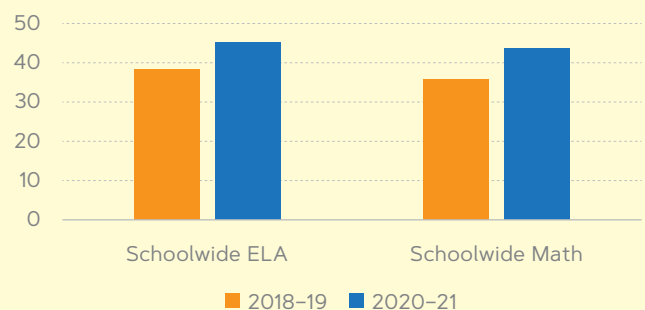
The data below shows improvements in student test scores between 2018, the year Cherokee Bluff was established, and 2021, when students took their state

tests during the height of the pandemic. The gains are particularly striking among the sixth-grade and eighth-grade students.

Cherokee Bluff MS – % of Students Proficient



Cherokee Bluff MS – % of Students Proficient



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