



## **Executive Summary**

**Maxwell AFB Elementary/Middle School**

**Georgia/Alabama District**

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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.

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## **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?**

It is 7:45 a.m. and the Maxwell community is alive! Students are walking and riding their bicycles to school. Maxwell evokes a sense of stepping back in time, but in reality we are a 21st century school. The Maxwell community strongly feels that our school is a safe and nurturing environment, especially in light of today's complex world. The thirty-three teachers, six paraprofessionals, five support personnel, and one administrator are busily preparing to do whatever it takes to help each of our 402 students reach their highest potential.

Maxwell Air Force Base Elementary School, a Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) was established in 1963 in Montgomery, Alabama. Since its inception, the school has provided superior education for Pre-Kindergarten through Sixth grade children of United States military personnel living in permanent housing on Maxwell Air Force Base. In 2002, students who resided at Gunter Air Base Annex (approximately eight miles away) were declared eligible to attend the school. Gunter Annex students are bused to our school.

Maxwell is part of the Department of Defense Domestic Dependents' Elementary and Secondary Schools (DDESS). The Georgia/Alabama DDESS / DoDEA district consists of ten schools: seven at Ft. Benning, GA, two at Ft. Rucker, AL, and one at Maxwell AFB, AL.

Located in Montgomery, Alabama, Maxwell Air Force Base is the intellectual and leadership center of the Air Force. Originally the Wright Brothers' first civilian flying school established in 1910 and later becoming Maxwell Field, today the installation is home to more than 12,500 active duty, reserve, civilian and contractor personnel providing a significant economic and cultural impact on the Montgomery area.

We have the honor and privilege to teach students whose parents serve our country. However, with military service comes a unique set of challenges. Our parents are frequently tasked with deployments and family separations for extended periods of time. This takes a toll on our young students who might not see a parent for several months and some for over a year. Our Guidance program offers a reassuring "Far and Away Club," providing an opportunity for children to deal with separation anxiety and other challenges they may face. Each student receives a special handmade pillow with a picture of his/her parent on it. Military life also means having to relocate frequently. Our student population is highly transient; 42% of our student population moves at the end of the school year.

The Maxwell community stakeholders worked for years with DoDEA and the local command on the need for quality educational opportunities on behalf of Maxwell students beyond 6th grade. In July of 2011, two weeks before school started, the 7th and 8th grades were added to Maxwell AFB Elementary! In the initial school year of 2011-2012, we added 75 middle school students to become Maxwell Elementary and Middle School (MEMS). In school year 2012-2013, Middle School enrollment increased and we also added three dynamic new teachers.

The physical plant at MEMS is a traditional building with 44 classrooms. The school also houses an Informational Center, cafeteria, gymnasium, music room, art room, early childhood center, two science labs, two computer labs, a health office, and an outdoor learning center and classroom. Additional facilities include an auditorium with sound system and three teacher preparation areas. All classrooms are equipped with student computers, SMART boards, student response "clickers" and ELMOs (document cameras). Many classrooms also have SMART slates; we have a SMART table for kindergarten and special education.

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Our student population is diverse, consisting of 20% Black/African American, 10% Hispanic/ Latino, 58% White/Caucasian, and 8% Multi-Racial. The student body is 46% male and 54% female. Fewer than 20% of our students receive free or reduced lunches, and we have less than 3% English as a Second Language Students (ESL).

A vital part of MEMS is the "spirit" of the school. We are a responsive, compassionate, and dynamic school. Many parents and visitors have commented on how everyone at our school strives to do whatever it takes to ensure that all children succeed. Activities abound at MEMS! The student-led morning announcements kick off each day and remind us of upcoming events, including Red Ribbon Week, Scholastic Book Fairs, Dances, SMART Day, Field day, Field Trips, Robotics Competitions, Choir and Band Concerts, Art Shows, Talent Show, and National Junior Honor Society activities. In order to create rapport between the elementary and middle schools, the middle school students have established a reading program, REAL (Reading to Encourage Aspiring Leaders) with their "Littles," which include Kindergarten - 2nd grade students. As you walk through our school, you will see students engaged in our outdoor classroom; you may see some students working in the garden. More often than not, visitors entering our school leave with the vivid impression of the handprints painted on the wall. As educators we are left with a lasting impression on our hearts. These handprints signify school spirit and individual personalities, as well as personal and educational achievements.

MEMS offers a comprehensive course of study for all students based on DODEA Curriculum Standards. Integrated special education services enable staff to focus on individual student needs. Additional support is provided through our gifted program, reading support services, and math intervention instruction, as well as our Preschool for Children with Disabilities (PSCD) for three- and four-year-old children. Speech Language, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy are available for those students who require them. MEMS also has a comprehensive health services program that partners with base medical clinics to provide vision and dental screenings and education on health-related issues. On a daily basis, students are able to have ongoing and acute health needs met in the health office, allowing them to focus on learning. Special area classes in art, music, Foreign Languages for English Speaking Students (FLES) and physical education help to ensure that our students are well rounded and reach their highest potential.

MEMS recognizes the importance of developing the whole child and offers a variety of support services to address the social and emotional needs of our students. The Guidance program includes a Student Support Team (SST), Case Study Committee (CSC), Accommodations Team, and programs sponsored by our 42nd ABW Family Advocacy Program (FAP). In addition, students receive direct instruction to support our beliefs and core values of integrity, service before self, and excellence in all we do. Maxwell students participate in individual and group counseling as needed.

Community involvement is evidenced through partnerships with Maxwell Youth Services (Sports Programs), Maxwell Fire Department, Maxwell Legal Office (Judge Advocate General), STARBASE, Civil Air Patrol, 42nd ABW Maxwell Environmental Branch (Civil Engineering), 42nd ABW Commanders Office, and the U.S. Space & Rocket Center. With the help of PTO, we established a partnership with Alabama Wildlife Federation to create an outdoor classroom complete with a pond and benches. Under the supervision of Michelle Tharpe, the teacher education department of Auburn University Montgomery has established teaching internships involving our K-2nd students. Interns work in small groups teaching language arts.

The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is the heartbeat of MEMS. Creativity is their middle name! This dedicated group of volunteers joins forces to do whatever it takes to support our instructional program, clubs, and school goals. Among the activities they sponsor are "Spirit Day", holiday meals, Scholastic Book Fairs and family nights, publishing the MEMS yearbook; they also support fieldtrips, field days, etc. Thanks to their expertise, we are all smiling on school picture day! The PTO has embraced our Continuous School Improvement process, encouraging parents to become an active part of the MEMS community. The CSI Leadership Team provides an update on our school improvement process at each PTO meeting. Parents have shared comments with us about our warm and nurturing environment where their children have the opportunity to learn. They feel that we offer a shared value system that compliments the military core values.

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The safety of our learning environment is crucial for student success. A Crisis Management Team (CMT) oversees the emergency plans and procedures to ensure safety of students in case of a disaster or traumatic event. This team coordinates drills, evacuation plans, and dissemination of information between district, school, and base personnel.

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## **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.**

The primary focus for Maxwell Elementary and Middle School (MEMS) is to provide an exemplary educational program to prepare students for success in the global environment. All stakeholders are committed to do whatever it takes to create a community atmosphere that will enable all children to fulfill dreams and reach their highest potential. We believe that all children should learn in a rigorous, innovative, and engaging environment taught by highly qualified teachers and supported by a professional staff. The majority of our teachers has achieved advanced degrees and participates in ongoing professional development beyond what is offered through the school.

MEMS Vision : Whatever it Takes!

MEMS Mission : A community partnership enabling students to fulfill dreams and reach their highest potential

DoDEA Vision: To be among the world's leaders in education, enriching the lives of military-connected students and the communities in which they live.

DoDEA Mission: Educate, Engage and Empower each student to succeed in a dynamic world.

### Core Values / Belief Statements

Maxwell Elementary and Middle School belief statements are based on the Air Force Core Values and tenets of 21st Century Learning:

- Integrity: We believe our Maxwell community strives to demonstrate courage, honesty, and responsibility holding us all accountable for our actions.

- Service before self: We believe that our Maxwell community strives to demonstrate respect for others while maintaining an atmosphere of discipline and self control.

- Excellence in all we do: We believe that our Maxwell community strives to demonstrate a sustained passion for continuous improvement and innovation that will guide us into reaching our highest potential.

- We believe that our Maxwell community strives to demonstrate the 4 C's of 21st Century Learning, Collaboration, Creativity and Innovation, Critical Thinking Skills, and Communication.

  - Every child needs these skills to be an effective citizen and participant in the 21st Century.

  - Teachers and education support personnel have a huge role to play to ensure that every student is adequately prepared for the 21st Century.

### School-Wide Goals

Problem Solving - All students will improve mathematical problem solving across the curriculum.

Writing - All students will improve written communication across the curriculum.

Grade Level SMART Goals are available in the School Improvement Plan, located on our Website.

## **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.**

Maxwell Elementary and Middle School increased in size from 300 to 400 pupils in the beginning of SY 2011-2012 with the addition of 7th and 8th grades. The building easily allowed us to establish separate middle school areas for the new classes and a lively middle school hallway was born! Administration, teachers, parents, and students worked as a dedicated collaborative team to get our middle school in place before the opening of school. Although funding for teachers, technology and curriculum created challenges for us, the determination to offer a quality education for this age group in our Maxwell community was tantamount. This year we hired three new teachers for the middle school, allowing us to offer advanced math courses via blended learning, and more elective classes. Our future goal is to offer a wider variety of electives, AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and advanced courses in other subject areas. We now have a middle school science lab, making more in-depth science experiments possible. The 7th and 8th grades have a one-to-one laptop computer program, integrating high-level technology in the classroom. This initiative allows students to receive new information through reading, researching, exploring websites, and viewing images, diagrams, and maps, and to share learned information in the form of presentations, projects, and demonstrations. These higher levels of technology integration provide MEMS students with a great number of opportunities to analyze, evaluate, and create. Our middle school teachers are moving from being the keepers and disseminators of knowledge to facilitators that support students as they construct their own knowledge. Middle school teachers received three days of intensive professional development, TPACK (Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge) targeting 21st Century learning and project based learning strategies. We are discussing a future partnership with the local Montgomery County schools to make MEMS a "feeder school" into the Montgomery Magnet high schools for students who qualify. The Maxwell community continues to be concerned about quality secondary educational opportunities beyond 8th grade. The majority of this age group attends private schools if they are not accepted into the Montgomery County magnet high school programs.

Especially with the addition of the middle school, the growth of our school required us to hire additional teachers. Transition is difficult in any school, but it is especially complex in the DoDEA system. As a result of shared concerns, the GA/AL DDESS district established a mentor program in 2012/2013 to provide support for new teachers. The goal is to help them adjust to the roles and responsibilities of the profession by developing a relationship with a seasoned DoDEA educator who is trained to guide and assist them through their entry year of service. There are two tiers of the mentoring program: Tier I mentees are "zero experienced" teachers and Tier II mentees are experienced teachers who are new to the DoDEA system. Using the Pathwise program, the mentoring program is a collaborative partnership between district administrators and teachers' association leaders. Mentors attended a Pathwise special training in May 2012 and are expected to meet regularly throughout the year with their mentee(s), in addition to attending quarterly district mentor/mentee meetings. The mentees and mentors participate in a new teacher orientation prior to the beginning of school.

In keeping with our values and beliefs statements, our Maxwell community demonstrates "a sustained passion for continuous improvement and innovation that will guide us into reaching our highest potential." In 2011/2012, a group of seven teachers participated in the initial MEMS Professional Learning Team (PLT). The primary focus was on differentiation based on Carol Ann Tomlinson's work. This year, we trained all teachers in the DuFour model of Professional Learning Communities/Teams, where teams collaborate to focus on data to drive student learning. They are committed to continuous improvement and results-oriented collaboration by focusing on the four key essential questions:

- 1.) What do we want students to know and do?
- 2.) How do we know they are learning?

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3.) What will we do when they're not learning?

4.) How do we respond when they've already learned the information?

PLTs are taking our collaboration efforts to a higher level of responsive teaching. Grade-level PLT's meet on a weekly basis to analyze data, set goals, determine interventions, and create differentiated plans with the continuous goal of maximizing student performance. Vertical PLT's collaborate to ensure student readiness and success at the current and next level. The Middle School PLT meets three times per week during collaboration planning time. In addition PLTs meet in vertical and horizontal teams twice a month on the early release Thursdays.

This year, the PLTs set grade level SMART goals that are short-term, manageable, and aligned with our school-wide Goal 1 and Goal 2. They determine their research based strategies, interventions, and action plans for achieving that goal. Teachers are provided with a formalized assessment schedule to monitor success and adjust their plans. This continuous improvement cycle is repeated throughout the school year. PLTs keep team/grade level notebooks to organize data, record SMART goals and action plans to ensure student learning.

Along with other schools in the GA/AL district, we use "Data Tracker" for collecting and storing data. Information gained from the Data Tracker allows PLTs to analyze and use the results to inform student learning, set SMART goals, and make intervention decisions. Teachers can access the data by class or by individual students. The faculty has been trained in the use of Data Tracker, data analysis, and using the data to drive their differentiated instruction.

Teachers and students have seen and celebrated their successes when they achieve their SMART Goals. Students have been given their data and have set their personal goals as they relate to our school-wide goals.

In December of 2012, our Continuous School Improvement Leadership Team realized the need for a Data Team to guide PLTs in using the data to drive instruction. The Data Team oversees and directs the assessment system and assists in the distribution and communication of school-wide data. In an effort to share the story of our continuous school improvement, the Data Team trained teachers and support staff in communicating our Continuous School Improvement Plan (Analyze Data, Set Goals, Plan, Implement, and Evaluate) to all stakeholders through data walls, data binders, websites, and other forms of communication. Training was conducted in the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data.

Further training is planned using the newly purchased and distributed professional development publications *Common Formative Assessments: A Toolkit for Professional Learning Communities at Work* by K. Bailey and C. Jakicic and *Data Teams: The Big Picture* by E. Allison, et. al.

MEMS was chosen to become a STE(A)M [Science, Technology, Engineering, (Arts) Math] School incorporating an inquiry-based program that enhances student learning by having students use the engineering design process and thinking skills to solve challenges. Pre-implementation began for SY 2012/2013. A STE(A)M team consisting of the gifted teacher, Math IS, Educational Technologist, STE(A)M Coordinator (classroom teacher) and an additional classroom teacher were provided professional development on STE(A)M and the engineering design process. In September 2012 the entire staff was provided professional development on STE(A)M and the engineering design process. Teachers were encouraged to incorporate a STE(A)M project based lesson this school year. We are in the process of establishing a school-wide robotics lab. Our goal for SY 2013-2014 is to fully implement a STE(A)M program across the school with two active STE(A)M labs and a robotics lab. Professional development will be provided as a 'Kick Off' to a STE(A)M Focus school in the August 2013. Teachers will be asked to implement STE(A)M as an active component of their curriculum. Ongoing professional development will be given quarterly. We are full "STEAM" ahead!

MEMS offers robotics classes and an after school robotics club using LEGO NXT Mindstorms robots and LEGO WeDo robots. Middle school students can take an elective class in which LEGO Mindstorms NXT robots are used with the Carnegie Mellon Robotics Engineering

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curriculum to program basic robot behaviors using motors and rotation, sound, light, touch and ultrasonic sensors. The gifted teacher provides enrichment opportunities for all classes, 1st-5th grades, to use the NXT and WeDo robots to incorporate technology and engineering concepts with core subjects. The after-school robotics club competes in the FIRST LEGO League, FLL (For Inspiration and Recognition in Science and Technology). This year the Maxwell Elementary/Middle School Eagles competed for the third year in the FLL competition, Senior Solutions. At the regional level, our teams won 1st Place in Project Presentation and 1st Place in Robot Design. For the second year in a row we also won an award at the State level competition (2nd Place "Gracious Professionalism" award and 2nd Place "Inspiration" award). In SY 2013/2014, as part of our full STE(A)M implementation, we will establish a robotics lab separate from the gifted resource classroom. Many teachers have already received training in robotics, and we will offer more training to assist teachers in order to maximize application of knowledge using our robotics resources.

The Visual Arts program at MEMS is phenomenal. All students in grades K-5 participate in this award winning program during school hours, and an after-school program is offered for enrichment. Our Visual Arts teacher has partnered with the Montgomery community in several ways to give our students authentic real-world opportunities for sharing their art:

- Students' art pieces are displayed with the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts.
- The Montgomery Zoo Jungle Drums calendar devoted two of the calendar pages for the MEMS student artwork this year!
- Students enter their art work for one dollar donation in the Montgomery Humane Society contest and support a good cause at the same time!
- Montgomery Academy, a local private school, sponsors a Mini-Art contest where our students contribute artwork no larger than a one dollar bill.
- Alabama Wildlife Federation hosts several art competitions that MEMS students participate in.
  - o The Ireland Wildlife,
  - o Alabama Fish and the Duck Stamp contest
- One of the biggest opportunities is through involvement with the Alabama National Fair. It is always exciting for an artist to see his or her work hanging at the Fair!

Our students have received countless awards for their achievement in our Visual Arts program.

Teachers, parents, support staff, and members of our community are the advocates for the students of MEMS. At the elementary level, classroom teachers are the primary advocates for their students. Classroom teachers are supported by the counselor, school nurse, and various family support programs provided by the base. Teachers build relationships with students through small groups, clubs, and individual conferences. Special populations of students have advocates through the special education services and gifted programs. Some of the special needs students have designated one-to-one aides. In 2011/2012 the middle school students had an advisory period, but scheduling this year did not allow for advisory. In 2012/2013 the middle school teachers have a structured program where small groups of students (3) are assigned to one adult in the building to address the social and emotional needs of their students through assistance from our Guidance Program and base family support services. We do plan to implement AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) for our middle school students in 2013-2014. We will do whatever it takes to ensure that each child at MEMS has an advocate.

## **Additional Information**

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

The beginning of SY 2012-2013 provided many challenges for MEMS. The principal for the past six years was reassigned to a DoDEA school in Aviano, Italy in July 2012. Our new principal arrived in July and resigned six weeks into the school year. The district office assigned an interim principal until our current principal arrived on November 5, 2012. Our incredible MEMS staff embraced the challenges of having multiple changes in leadership. The Continuous School Improvement Leadership Team (CSILT) encouraged the staff to move forward with our CSI plan, doing whatever it takes to keep morale high. The professionalism of our staff and the community support for Maxwell Elementary and Middle School was overwhelming.

We are proud Soaring Eagles. We are tenacious, courageous, steadfast, and will do whatever it takes to make a child succeed!

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