



PANTHER PROFILES

Spotlights on the People & Programs of Pelham City Schools



WHAT IS “THE PELHAM WAY”?

The Pelham Way is much more than a tagline or a hashtag on social media. The Pelham Way is the attitude and drive to achieve, to be resilient and to value others while fostering a sense of family in our school community.

“In 2014 Pelham City Schools was established, and we had the unique opportunity to develop our mission and define our identity,” Pelham High School principal, Kim Kiel said.

Kiel and other system leaders pondered, “What sets us apart? How do we define and distinguish ourselves from the others? Who do we want to be? What is the character of a Pelham Panther?”

Kiel recalled, “After numerous conversations about the culture of Pelham, we finally coined the phrase ‘The Pelham Way’ to capture the essence of the vision and values of our school system.”

“In an area like Birmingham where we are surrounded by so many great school systems, it seems completely natural to be compared to others,” Kiel said. “We are alike in many ways, but in Pelham, we embrace the things that make us different. We find purpose in setting high standards and being the best version of ourselves.”

Kiel said that this differentiation is none other than The Pelham Way. It is synonymous with attitude, effort, pride and care for others.

“In the process of discovering what makes us unique, one thing became quite obvious,” Kiel said. “We realized it is much easier to see The Pelham Way than to actually define it.” In other words, The Pelham Way is recognizable in certain actions or gestures that exhibit character, values and mindset.

Kiel said that you’ll certainly know The Pelham Way when you see it. It is something that can be seen and felt without boundaries.

“Teachers, staff, coaches and our community all do great things that constitute The Pelham Way,” Kiel said. **“But most importantly, we found, our STUDENTS, the actual foundation of the Pelham Panthers, are the ones who literally define what it takes to be a Pelham Panther and do things ‘The Pelham Way!’”**

STEM

IN OUR CLASSROOMS

Through a vertically-aligned curriculum, Pelham City Schools focuses on building students' skills, content knowledge and literacy in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math). Shannon Bogert, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction at Pelham City Schools, spoke about the role of incorporating STEM into the classrooms and introducing students to STEM at a young age.

“STEM education prepares students for the workforce and for many jobs that haven't even been created yet,” Bogert said. “STEM education allows for project-based learning that teaches research, critical thinking, organization and teamwork.”

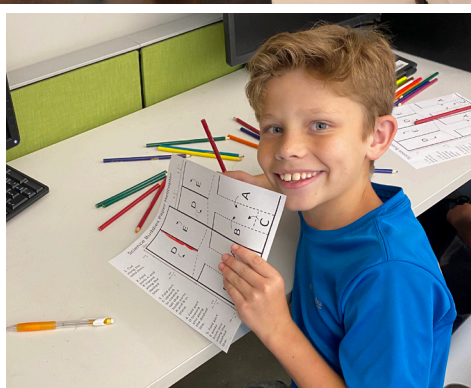
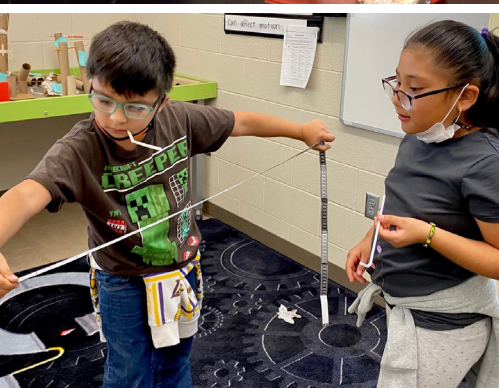


Bogert said all students in K-12 have opportunities to participate in a STEM curriculum. K-5 students have weekly STEM classes with a dedicated STEM teacher who uses hands-on, project based learning to incorporate computer science and digital literacy standards. Then, students in grades 6-12 have opportunities to participate in robotics, computer science, health science and engineering.

“Students in grades K-8 utilize a similar coding curriculum,” Bogert said. “So, each year, students learn a little more, even designing websites and games. Eventually, they participate in advanced coding in our high school CTE (career and technical education) programs which lead to students earning industry-level credentials.”

“The implementation of STEM classes at our elementary schools has been an amazing way to provide exposure to STEM topics for our students,” Bogert said. “Students now come to middle school with background knowledge of various STEM topics and fields that they may not otherwise have known about. We also provide our students many opportunities to visit businesses and industries in the STEM fields and participate in STEM competitions.”

Students benefit from increased exposure to STEM initiatives in many aspects of their education. By empowering students with the foundation to gather and evaluate information, collaborate, and identify solutions to the complex challenges of today, they will be more prepared to meet the demands of a dynamic and evolving workforce in the future.



THE IMPACT OF GREAT EDUCATORS

Pelham City Schools' mission to inspire, empower and achieve starts with a focus on supporting students and making connections in the classroom and beyond.

Nearly ten years ago, the Pelham High School football team began a trend that has carried on through the years, touching the hearts of many. During football season, players are given an opportunity to write a letter to a staff member or teacher who has truly impacted them.

These letters are then delivered to the teachers along with the jersey of the player who wrote it. In turn, teachers wear the player's jersey to school and the game that week, showing their appreciation for the gesture.

"It is amazing to see the details of how we have influenced them," Pelham Park Middle School teacher Kathryn Grimes said.

Grimes enjoys reflecting on the letters she has received from her students throughout the years. She spoke on what an honor it is to see her students give back to the community, thrive and grow.

"The ones I have received have been full of heartfelt words about what they have experienced and felt and how much I meant to them as a teacher," Grimes said. "It hits me...we learn from each other and you see the wonderfulness in them."

Grimes is appreciative of every student who has taken the time to write the letters which continue to encourage and inspire her.



"My favorite part is being able to get to know the kids, see them grow, prosper, and change so much and become wonderful young adults that are striving and working hard. These kids are out there doing such amazing things in their community as well, and it is wonderful," said Grimes.

The bond between teachers and students is simply The Pelham Way. Activities such as these show the tight-knit bond that students and teachers share, inspiring students to grow and thrive beyond the classroom. It's a small gesture that creates a lasting connection and a big impact that the teachers and players cherish.



OUR FOCUS ON SCHOOL SAFETY

From working closely with the Pelham Police Department and implementing the CrisisAlert system to teachers and students being educated in emergency response protocols, Pelham City Schools works diligently to keep schools safe for students and staff.

“School safety is something we continuously work on,” Superintendent Dr. Chuck Ledbetter said. “Everybody has to be safe and feel safe in order to learn.”

The system is implementing the CrisisAlert system, which provides every Pelham City Schools employee with the ability to request assistance or initiate response protocols instantly in the event of a threat or other emergency.

“It essentially empowers all of our people to help keep everybody safe,” Ledbetter said. “We have great educators, and we want to empower all of them so that if something problematic is happening, we can address it immediately.”

One thing research has shown in situations of school crises is that when a threat arises, time is of the essence. Police presence, in addition to timely responses to crises, are focal points of ensuring safety in schools.

Pelham schools have the support of Pelham Police Department School Resources Officers (SROs) who are onsite throughout the school days and at many extracurricular activities and sporting events. “We have been working to increase police presence,” Ledbetter said. “We want to give them the ability to have an immediate response to anything that might be problematic and to prevent problems.”

Additionally, the Interquest Detection Canines program is another safety initiative that provides trained dogs led by certified handlers who can find and identify substances that are of concern to the school environment.

“They come unannounced to our middle and high schools,” Ledbetter said. “It doesn’t search people. It searches places, and the dog will hit on illegal drugs, prescription drugs, alcohol and gunpowder.”

The program was not initiated in response to issues with illegal items on campuses. Instead, it serves as a preventive measure so that students will not bring illegal and/or prohibited items to campus. This proactive approach adds another level of protection in the system’s commitment to ensure a safe learning environment for students and staff.

It is abundantly clear that there is a steadfast commitment to keeping Pelham’s students and employees safe, and according to Dr. Ledbetter, the Pelham school community is a family.

“We are truly a small-town school system in the metropolitan area, and that is pretty unique,” Ledbetter said. “We have those dynamics of a small town, and the idea of the Pelham family is real.”

The mission of Pelham City Schools is to collaborate with parents and community to inspire and empower students to achieve personal success. Inspire. Empower. Achieve.

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