

# OAK RIDGE ELEMENTARY

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Dr. Jasmine Smith  
Principal

Terri Martin,  
Assistant Principal



## STATEMENT OF NOMINATION

It is a distinct pleasure to provide a Statement of Nomination for Baleasa Hill; our 2021-22 Glenn Howell Distinguished Educator of the Year. The depth and breadth of Baleasa's commitment and service to the Oak Ridge Community is both extraordinary and expansive.

I am a firm believer that things happen in your life at just the right time and just the right moment. Baleasa Hill joined the Oak Ridge family during a time in which was tremendously difficult for us as a school family. I had just completed my first year as Principal at Oak Ridge and was trying to recover from earning a school grade of D (the school's third consecutive D) and preparing myself and my staff or all that would come as we were faced with improvement for the 2018-19 school year or possible school closure.

During a time that was the most critical in my career as I led a school and community that was literally facing school closure, I found myself facing weekly DOE visits, lowered morale, 55% teacher turnover rate, and to top it off tremendously low Reading proficiency rates. It was decided that we would have both a Primary and Intermediate Reading Coach so that we could better serve the needs of our school community. When I met Baleasa, she had been serving as a first-grade teacher at Riley Elementary School and her resume and work to support early learning was exceptional. It became immediately evident in our interview that Baleasa was the perfect person for the Primary Reading Coach position at Oak Ridge, but it was also immediately evident that she believed in the power of having high expectations for children and finding any way possible to ensure that they met them.

Baleasa joined our team as a Reading Coach and immediately began to bond with both the students and staff. It was as if she had been there the entire time that I had been at the school. Under her leadership and guidance, we created what became known as the Epic Book Club. Baleasa formed a book club for some of our 2nd grade students that were proficient and on the cusp of being proficient readers with the hopes that working with them during the summer would help them to not experience summer learning loss. Each student in the book club was given a device to use which gave them access to over 30,000 book titles. She created a required book list and met with the students to discuss the books. What we experienced that summer was nothing short of amazing. Over the course of the summer, ten students read thousands of books. We realized at that moment how impactful access was for our school community. This was in 2019, well before we went 1:1 as a school district.

This is just one of many examples of how Baleasa has positively impacted our school community. She currently serves as the Sponsor for both our Girl Scout Troop and our 100 Girls of Code Club. She meets with these students on weekends and organizes and facilitates innovative and engaging activities for them. She also leads Intervention Groups, models for teachers, monitors data regularly, and organizes and implements our Accelerated Reader Program. Under her guidance, our percentage of students making their AR goal has doubled and there is visible excitement about reading in the building. And even during Covid, our Learning Gains for our Lowest Quartile students increased from the 2018-19 school year by nearly ten percent. That is a testament to the fact that there are no quick fixes with Baleasa. There is just true knowledge of the Science of Reading and even greater commitment to ensuring that our students meet their highest potential.

I don't know if I can accurately capture on paper all that Baleasa has given to Oak Ridge and how honored I am to have the opportunity to work with her. As a principal, I have learned so much from her and have great respect for her work. Leon County Schools could not honestly select a better person as our 2022 District Glenn Howell Distinguished Educator of the Year. In closing, I highly support Baleasa Hill's nomination. Should you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Signed:

Jasmine C. Smith, Ed.D.

Oak Ridge Elementary School  
Principal

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