



# EducationMatters

W C P S S E M P L O Y E E N E W S L E T T E R

## Arts Educators Value the Opportunity to Meet in PLTs

CHRISTY BARNETT, COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST, [CBARNETT@WCPSS.NET](mailto:CBARNETT@WCPSS.NET)

Like all other teachers in Wake County, dance teacher Gerrie Bowen and drama teacher Kellie Harris meet with their Professional Learning Team each week to discuss such topics as student behavior and assessment strategies.

Both participate in the specialists PLT at Conn Active Learning and Technology Magnet Elementary which, in addition to Bowen and Harris, includes the school's art, music, PE, Spanish, media, technology and AG teachers.

"Since we all teach the same students at one point or another, one of the things we talk about when we do our Kid Talk is behavior management strategies," Harris said. "We've also talked about how to support students who may need extra help."

However, Bowen and Harris say they get the most value out of their arts PLT meetings that are held once a month. Referred to as "singleton" PLTs, these monthly meetings provide arts educators the opportunity to meet with other teachers in the district who teach the same content area. For example, all the elementary dance instructors meet as one PLT, while the elementary drama instructors meet as another. Music and art instructors typically divide into regional PLTs by subject area.

"When the county set aside certain Wednesday afternoons for singleton PLTs, we were thrilled," Bowen said.

Harris agreed. "Being in a performing arts profession, everyone has rehearsal, everyone has a show, everyone has something they are preparing for, so it's always hard to get everyone in one place at one

regularly meet with other dance instructors has "been fantastic."

"We decided with our focus on literacy that we would ask our second- and fifth-grade students the first time they came to our classes if they thought dance and literacy connect," she said. "They got to pick 'Never' 'Sometimes' or 'A lot', and we compiled that data. For our first meeting, we shared that information, and we were very pleased with ourselves that there were very few 'Nevers'. We are going to repeat this at the end of the year to see if there are any changes. We also got the literacy cards from second and fifth grade and went through and highlighted things that we do such as retelling. An example is to ask students to create a dance that tells a story about something they've read."

Harris said the elementary drama PLT has focused some of its work around the literacy cards, as well. "The things that we discuss are academic based — they are about our curriculum, they are

about connections to literacy, and they are *continued on page 7*



Conn drama teacher Kellie Harris and dance teacher Gerrie Bowen

time — this is the perfect solution." Bowen said having the opportunity to

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## WCPSS Counselors use Research to Validate Contributions to Success

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*"What gets measured gets done. If you don't measure results, you can't tell success from failure. If you can't see success, you can't reward it. If you can't reward success, you're probably rewarding failure. If you can't recognize failure, you can't correct it. If you can demonstrate results, you can win public support."* (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).



Dee Bostick

The only full time site-based staff member in an elementary school who is qualified to provide individual and small group counseling for students is the school counselor. In today's soci-

ety, more and more children have been placed at-risk because of such issues as single parent families, continual transitions from one school to another, family homelessness and/or financial strains, just to mention a few. Students are not only affected by family strains. School deficiencies such as fewer staff members and growing school populations also contribute to student at-risk placement.

It is imperative that school counselors demonstrate, without a doubt, their contributions to student success through the American School Counselor Association identified themes of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change so as to protect the counselor role: this can be proved through research. The WCPSS Department of Counselors and Social Workers has, for years, led the state and nation in encouraging school counselors to provide three action research plans yearly which show how effective selected school counseling services are at the counselor's school.

Several years ago Dr. Melissa DeRosier, who was working at the University of North Carolina at the time, created, researched, and revised a small group social skills program now called S.S. GRIN. After I was trained in this program's implementation, I began

using it as a part of a three-tiered approach to training Baileywick third-grade students in acquiring appropriate social skills.

Baileywick was a new school at the time, and third-grade teachers observed that their students who were from several different schools were struggling in coming together as cooperative classmates. Together the third-grade teachers and I looked at the third-grade guidance curriculum and decided I would begin this three-tiered process to encourage positive social skill development:

1. Teach classroom sessions on the three most needed topics as identified by the teachers which were: starting a conversation, giving compliments and encouragement, and joining in a group.
2. After the classroom sessions, which would hopefully help about 80 percent of the students in pro-social skill development, I would then use a self-report screening instrument to identify about 15 percent of the students who were still struggling with the development of pro-social skills. Struggling students identified through the screening instrument would participate in the S.S. GRIN small group experience which included 10 sessions. These sessions focused on the development of communication, initiation, cooperation, compromise and negotiation. In addition, emotional regulation, impulse control and perspective taking were emphasized. Skills for coping with teasing and peer pressure were covered. Each session combined skill-based instruction with role playing, modeling and hands-on activities. These topics covered personal/social objectives in the ASCA national standards for students.
3. Once sessions were completed and the self-report screening instrument was administered again (but this time as a post-test measure), those students who were identified as still

struggling worked individually with the counselor, and parent consultation was provided.

At Baileywick, I have used the S.S. GRIN small group counseling program since 2003, and End-of-Grade standard score comparisons of pre- to post-tests for participants each year have always improved. The percentage of improvement has ranged from 68 percent to 100 percent. Because of the continuing success of this small-group experience, every year I use this small-group program as a part of the three-tiered approach that addresses social skills development in Baileywick's third grade.

It is my belief that the "counseling and guidance program in a school is critical in addressing mental health problems that interfere with a student's ability to learn, to succeed, and to participate in the learning process." (Bostick and Anderson, ASCA Professional School Counseling, Vol. 12).

It is important to realize that without the collaboration of Ron Anderson, Ph.D., the comprehensive research information published in the article "Evaluating a Small-Group Counseling Program — A Model for Program Planning and Improvement in the Elementary Setting" could not have been written. My ASCA Closing the Gap action plan included simple comparisons of EOG standard pre- and post-scores, parent and teacher post surveys, and student pre- and post-self-assessments.

Dr. Anderson took the data I had collected over the years to new heights. Also, the Baileywick principals and third-grade teachers have, over the years, allowed me to allocate time to conduct this student service. Parents have supported the program by giving their permission, and students have been willing and even excited to participate in the small group experience. It is just so affirming to find and be able to share with other counselors a process school counselors can provide that really makes a difference for students!



## Well-Rounded Students



A constant challenge in public education has only become more complicated since the economic recession hit. With good reason, our stakeholders place heavy emphasis on

our students developing a clear command of core subjects. On the other hand, they also expect our students to become well-rounded, lifelong learners exposed to a breadth of knowledge and experiences.

For example, our state tests literacy and math skills in elementary grades because being able to read and compute is the essential foundation for every future type of learning. And yet our elementary students must also grasp science and social studies. As our children mature, they begin carving a more individual, specialized path through middle and high school through their choices of electives — and yet great emphasis is made on those core classes tested in End-of-Course exams.

This month's *Education Matters* devotes its attention to our broader curriculum and services to students, while in many cases revealing the links between the work of our specialist educators and the support of the core curriculum. I was excited to read about Jeffreys Grove Elementary's art and music teachers working together to connect the arts and literacy, and Conn Elementary's art educators' excellent work to connect Professional Learning Teams from surrounding schools. Fuquay-Varina High's physical

education teacher is using information gathered through professional development opportunities to improve her classes; Baileywick Elementary's counselor is supporting her students through small groups.

In short, our teachers and support professionals are doing profoundly important work that goes beyond, *but aligns with*, "reading, writing and arithmetic."

In a tight economy, the resources available to all teachers, administrators and support staff can be constrained. That is certainly the case in our current school year, and we can predict that the budget for 2010-11 will be tight as well. Aligning our efforts will continue to be critical in order to remain true to our vision that all children will graduate on time, prepared for the future.

But I also recognize — as does our community — that there are many different keys to keeping our students engaged in learning year in and year out. Specialty instruction, electives, and extracurricular activities are just some of the ingredients that connect our students to our schools and keep them on the path to graduation. Maintaining our emphasis on core academics is essential and will continue — but we will also ensure that our students will graduate with well-rounded experiences and an orientation toward life-long learning.

That is, after all, what 21st-century learning is all about — and I am grateful to our teachers and staff for making that their focus every day.

## Keeping Passwords Safe — The Fast and Easy Way

## Tech Tips

Who really can remember every single password they use for Oracle, NC WISE, voicemail, e-mail, etc.? There is a quicker, easier and safer way to locate the right password when you need it.

### It's called PasswordSafe.

PasswordSafe is a free computer program that allows easy and secure access to your passwords. With PasswordSafe, you can forget about writing down your password on your calendar, a notebook page or a sticky note and taping it to your keyboard, monitor, or telephone. (Yes, we know all the secret hiding places, too.)

### How does it work?

After installing PasswordSafe, you simply:

- Create a secure and encrypted user name/password list.
- Create and remember a single "Master Password" of your choice.

Using this single password, you can unlock and access your entire user name/password list.

WCPSS Central Services employees, school level administrators and teachers with laptops can download the approved version of PasswordSafe available via the intranet under Program Downloads or <http://www2.wcpss.net/downloads>.

## Arts Educators Find Natural Connections between Arts and Academic Instruction

CHRISTY BARNETT, COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST, [CBARNETT@WCPSS.NET](mailto:CBARNETT@WCPSS.NET)

For Jeffreys Grove Elementary music teacher Gay Barnes, the arts have always been an essential component in teaching the whole child.

“Children learn in many different ways,” she said. “You don’t want to just educate the mind — you want to educate the heart. I’ve always felt that way.”

Throughout her career as a music teacher, Barnes has looked for those natural connections between what she teaches in her music classes and what is being taught by her school’s classroom teachers.

“It’s important for the arts to be integrated and seen as essential, because they really help to teach kids in a different way,” she said. “For example, if a child doesn’t read very well but then sees the words in a song that he can sing, it helps him get used to the flow of words, and it helps with his reading skills. For me, it’s not just about music or art — the arts have always been a natural fit with what students are learning in the classroom.”

For the past several years at Jeffreys Grove, the school’s specialists — music, art, PE and ESL teachers — have taken the concept of arts integration a step further through the implementation of Fun Fridays.

Each Friday, the specialists meet in the school’s gym with one entire grade level for a two-hour block where they focus on one specific topic. Each grade level gets the opportunity to participate in Fun Fridays once per month.

During a recent Fun Friday, the specialists focused on the United States with the school’s fifth-graders. They began with 30 minutes of dance or movement related to their study of the United States. Then the next hour was spent on integrated instruction. Barnes taught the students the song, *Fifty Nifty United States*, which teaches students the state names in alphabetical

order, the art teacher presented works by American artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, and musical presentations were made about American com-



Gay Barnes, Jeffreys Grove Music Teacher

posers Aaron Copland and George Gershwin. The students were then tested on their knowledge during a round of Jeopardy, complete with a Jeopardy board consisting of five categories. The block of time ended with a relay where students raced to list the names of the 50 states in alphabetical order.

“These are things we teach in our classrooms, but now we are taking it to the next step — it’s like an extension of what we are teaching,” Barnes said. “In the past, the art teacher and I may not have taught the American artists and the American

composers at the same time, but now we say, ‘Oh, I’m talking about Aaron Copland, and you can talk about Andy Warhol since the fifth-grade is get-

ting ready to talk about the United States in Social Studies.’ It’s just discussing these things and finding the natural connections that are already there and being intentional. It’s really been exciting.”

This past summer, after attending an arts integration workshop, Barnes and Jef-

freys Grove art teacher Irene Talton were asked by Elizabeth Grimes Droessler, senior administrator for Arts Education, to help develop *Literacy through the Arts* connections documents that could be used as toolkits for arts educators across the system in conversations with classroom teachers.

Barnes and Talton teamed with Janice Wilson, the music teacher at Briarcliff Elementary, and Gwen Brink, the art teacher at Dillard Drive Elementary, to begin work on the project. They started by looking at their pacing guides and the grade-level pacing guides for connections to the reading objectives.

“One of the second-grade reading objectives is: make connections between what you read

and your personal experiences; and in music one of the objectives is: the learner will explain personal reactions to musical words, so it relates. Elizabeth wanted us to draft an “I can” statement for each one, so we decided the student would leave saying, ‘I can relate my life to the music I hear.’ Then we also give a suggestion that the teachers could use. For this one, it was *A Wonderful World* and ways they can use it to achieve the objective.”

Barnes said to start, they chose one art and one music objective per quarter and are now working on assembling them into a connections document for K-5 arts educators.

“What it really did for me is make me sit down and realize that I already do a lot of this stuff,” she said. “Now, we just need to write it down, so when we sit together with the grade-level teachers, we will be able to talk about these connections. This is not about more work, it’s work that we’re already doing, but now we’re talking about it, having a conversation about it, so you can see where everything naturally fits right in. It’s like everyone is in their own little silo doing their stuff, but when you get together, you see how we can talk about it and how can we do it better.”

**“Children learn in many different ways. You don’t want to just educate the mind — you want to educate the heart.”**

## Secondary Physical Education with a Purpose

CHARLA T. PARKER, DEPARTMENT CHAIR, HEALTHFUL LIVING, FUQUAY-VARINA HS, [CPARKER1@WCPSS.NET](mailto:CPARKER1@WCPSS.NET)

As a veteran Physical Education teacher, I have realized that every class I teach has a different personality and, therefore, needs to be taught with a different technique.

The biggest challenge I face is to get every student to participate daily. I want all students to find something that interests them in order to continue lifelong physical activity. In order to be successful with this challenge and to prepare students for the demands of the 21st century, I have had to be willing to continue educating myself by attending workshops.

In the fall of 2000, I was chosen as one of 10 teachers in North Carolina to attend the first Physical Education Partnership with Sport Education (PEPSE) workshop and be trained to implement a physical education model called "Sport Education." Each teacher was paired with a university partner to assist in this project.

I was fortunate enough to be paired with Appalachian State University. Together we were able to implement a model which gave me a new perspective on physical education. I was excited about teaching again, and students,

who before did not want to participate, now found it exciting. With the guidance of the PEPSE project, I was able to begin implementing this model of Sport Education which was first developed by Daryl Sidentop at Ohio State University.

The Sport Education model focuses on building teamwork, relationships, sportsmanship, leadership, and game strategies that enhance participation. Elements of this model include a training camp, officiating clinic, and pre-season-regular season competition consisting of small-sided games, a tournament and a celebration in which everyone is a winner.

Students actively engage in their own learning as they choose how they will participate. Each student has a role on his/her team (captain, co-captain, coach, manager, exercise specialist, publicist or sports council.) The team with the most points at the end of a two- to three-week unit wins. Points are calculated by participation and activities such as doing their own warm-ups and successful completion of tasks. Students do not want to let down their peers, so they focus on improving their learning.

The first unit I taught, participation increased 100 percent and school attendance improved. All students learned responsibility by performing their duties; it increased social skills as teams worked together toward common goals in initiative activities and developing successful offenses.

This style of teaching provided more opportunities for students to learn from each other. Cognitive skills needed to learn the rules of basketball and the skills needed to officiate were seen in this model. Students learned good sportsmanship by signing player contracts and displayed team spirit by being supportive of each other, so their team did not lose penalty points due to poor sportsmanship. Students learned to trust and encourage each other.

A self-contained exceptional student, when paired with a teammate gained the ability to actively participate. She learned to keep stats, officiate and participate in full-court basketball games.

They learned that if they work together anything is possible. One student stated, "You don't have to be an athlete to be successful."

All teachers have different teaching strategies — this just happens to be one that works for me. Thanks goes to Dr. Kimberly Bush, a professor at Meredith College, for introducing me to teaching Instructional Models workshops

through the National Association for Sport Physical Education (NASPE). I have presented several of these workshops around the country, and I always seem to learn something from them, as well. Seeing the excitement on the faces of these teachers when learning something new reminds me of why I do what I do. At this time in my life, I am unable to actively participate in the activities I enjoy most like tennis and dancing, but I have found a way to fill that void through teaching and helping others.

My advice to any new teacher is to always keep an open mind and be willing to change. Your teaching style should be based on the types of students you teach. There is nothing that works for everyone, but continue learning for the benefit of your students. Using different teaching strategies will keep you in the profession longer, and your students will appreciate the hard work you put into the daily lessons.

I can honestly say after 27 years of teaching, there is nothing I would rather be doing than teaching Physical Education. There is never a day when I do not enjoy getting up and going to school. It does help to have complete support from administration and a great department to work with at Fuquay-Varina High School. It can best be said by my favorite quote, "Love what you do, and you will never have to work a day in your life."



Charla Parker is the WCPSS Horizon Award winner.

## News & Notes

### Principal and Assistant Principal of the Year



Congratulations to John Wall of North Garner Middle School for being named the 2009 Principal of the Year and Fay Jones of Forest Pines Drive Elementary for being named the 2009

Assistant Principal of the Year in ceremonies held at the Marbles Kids Museum in October.

Wall has been in education for 22 years and has been principal at North Garner Middle for four years. Prior to that, he was principal and assistant principal at Zebulon Middle and a teacher at Carnage Middle. Earlier he taught in New York.

Jones has been in education for 15 years and has been assistant principal at Forest Pines Drive Elementary for five years. Prior to that, Jones has served as an assistant principal and teacher who split time between Green Hope Elementary, Adams Elementary and Farmington Woods Elementary. She also worked as a teacher at Farmington Woods Elementary and West Lake Elementary.

### High Schools Transcripts Sent Electronically

Students at all our high schools now have the ability to request their official high school transcript be securely sent electronically to any of the 110 North Carolina public, private, and community colleges and universities through the College Foundation of North Carolina's college access web portal, CFNC.org.

Our high school guidance offices worked with CFNC to make this service available.

In May, eight pilot schools were added to the CFNC Transcript System and over 1,100 electronic transcripts were securely delivered since that time. With all Wake



County high schools having electronic transcript capabilities on CFNC.org, it is anticipated that more than 10,000 transcripts will be delivered to colleges throughout North Carolina for the WCPSS Class of 2010.

### Carnage Receives Environmental Grant

Carnage Magnet Middle School has received a \$2,500 grant from Partners for Environmental Justice. The grant was awarded to Principal David Schwenker and botany teacher Jody Knapp, following a Big Sweep litter clean up event by Carnage students at the Walnut Creek Wetland Center.

The grant funding shows the community's support for the botany classes at Carnage which will be installing rain-barrels and continuing to expand their gardens and greenhouse classes and activities. The grant also preceded the grand opening of the Wetland Center which is located adjacent to the Carnage Middle School Campus.

### Grimes Droessler Honored

Elizabeth Grimes Droessler, WCPSS Arts Education Senior Administrator, has been honored as a North Carolina Art Education Association Friend of the Arts. Droessler received her award at the NCAEA Conference in Winston-Salem on Oct. 23. She has been recognized as an exemplary arts educator and advocate of the arts.

### Millbrook Elementary Becomes Online IBO Example

Millbrook Magnet Elementary will become an online example of the International Baccalaureate Organization's Primary Years Programme. An International Baccalaureate Organization film



crew from Cardiff, Wales, visited the school in October.

Millbrook's first-grade team of teachers was selected to participate in the project to document the planning, teaching, assessment and reflection on one of their inquiry-based units of instruction for this school year. The team includes Yolanda Barham, Debi Grossweiler, Donna Liefer, Anne Makover, Kristin Vore and Christine Schaller. Paula Trantham is the school's principal.

Millbrook is one of only four schools in the world chosen to be highlighted by IBO on its website. Other IB Primary Years Programme schools are in Australia, Mexico and Germany. The goal of the project is to capture exemplary teaching practices in Primary Years Programme classrooms to share as a professional development resource for IB teacher workshops and school-based professional development.

### Panther Creek High Teacher Traveling to Bangladesh

Panther Creek High School teacher Steven West was selected from approximately 400 teachers to take part in a US State Department visit to Bangladesh in 2010. West was awarded a grant for the Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) teacher exchange program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State and implemented by the International Research and Exchanges Board.

The goal of the TEA program is to provide teachers with professional development opportunities that will promote mutual understanding between US and international teachers, students, and schools. During the two-week grant, teachers are hosted by a TEA international teacher and his/her school where the US teacher has the opportunity to observe classes, co-teach and share best teaching practices.

### Board Names New Principal

In October, the Board of Education named Deborah Edwards principal at

*(continued on page 7)*

## Arts Educators Find Natural Connections *(cont'd from front page)*

about assessment," she said.

During their first PLT meeting, Harris brought along printouts of all the elementary literacy cards.

"We split up into small groups and pulled out the objectives that we already cover in our classrooms and listed the activities that cover that objective. Then we shared as a group. That was how we started our literacy connection," she said. "For our next meeting, we are going to have a benchmarks meeting where we will talk about what we are doing in each grade level. For example, what are you doing at Bugg in kindergarten? What are you doing at Conn in kindergarten? What are you doing at Powell? This will help us to find the commonalities, because even though we are all teaching the same curriculum, we all teach it differently. We may discuss how we each teach puppetry or how we teach pantomime in order to get new ideas from each other and maybe become a little more cohesive. That way, when my kids from Conn go to Ligon Middle School and kids from Powell go to Ligon, they will

have the same basic knowledge. They'll have different knowledge, too, because of our diverse teaching styles. That's what makes theater so great — everybody bringing their own experience to it."

Bowen and Harris said both their singleton PLTs rotate meeting locations each month in order to have the opportunity to view each other's spaces.

"I went to Bugg for our very first PLT, and I really enjoyed seeing the space she uses every day and how her room is set up," Harris said. "For our next meeting, they'll come here to Conn to see my space and how my room is set up."

Bowen said even though her singleton dance PLT has only met a few times, she is already noticing a difference.

"I see the conversations that I'm having with classroom teachers changing," she said. "For instance, I'm now having more conversations with them about literacy."

"I wish we could meet more often with our singleton PLTs," she said.

## News and Notes *(continued from page 6)*

Salem Elementary School. Edwards has served as assistant principal of Salem Elementary since 2001. Prior to that, she was a teacher at Reedy Creek Elementary, Leesville Road High and Cary High. She also worked as the Peace College director of athletics. Edwards was the WCPSS Assistant Principal of the Year in 2007.

The board also named retired principal Sue King as interim principal at Creech Road Elementary. Before retiring, King served as principal of Timber Drive Elementary and Vandora Springs Elementary.

### Flu Shots for Employees

WCPSS employees, retirees and their dependents with Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) State Health Plan benefits are being offered time saving alternatives for seasonal flu vaccines. Free seasonal flu shots are being offered through Dec. 31 at the following locations:

- All Walgreens Pharmacies
- Participating CVS MinuteClinics
- All North Carolina Blue Cross Blue Shield in-network pharmacies

To receive your free flu shot, you must provide:

- 1) a valid State Health Plan and/or BCB-SNC ID card

### 2) a photo ID

Contact one of the above providers of your choice for an appointment; or drop by the location at your convenience.

### Presidential Award State Finalist

Panther Creek High School teacher Gail Barkes has been selected as a North Carolina finalist by the state-level selection committee for the 2009 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching Program. Barkes is one of three teachers of science selected to represent the state and will attend an honors reception on Nov. 5.

As a state-level finalist, she is automatically a candidate for the state Presidential Award. The teacher selected as the state Presidential Awardee will be notified officially by the White House and will receive \$10,000 and an all-expense paid trip for two to Washington D.C., where all Presidential Awardees will be honored during a variety of recognition events.

### Foreign Language Teacher of the Year

WCPSS middle school German teacher Jo Garrison was named Foreign Language Association of North Carolina Teacher of the Year for 2009-10.

Garrison has been teaching in the

Wake County Public School System for the past 16 years, and is currently teaching at Ligon Middle School and Martin Middle School. She is very involved within the school community, as well as at state and county levels. She enjoys helping students make connections between their interests and classroom instruction. She also feels that foreign languages are not electives, but are at the core of students' learning.

### New Members Elected to Board of Education

Four new members will join the Wake County Board of Education in December. The new board members will be Chris Malone in District 1, Deborah Prickett in District 7 and Debra Goldman in District 9. The District 2 seat has been slated for a run-off on Nov. 3. The new members will take the oath of office at the board meeting on December 1.

### WCPSS 20-Day Count: 139,599

Our student enrollment increased to 139,599 on the 20th day of the 2009-10 school year — that's 1,893 more students than last year.

In 2008-09, enrollment increased by 3,700 students; in 2007-08, the increase was 6,930 and in 2006-07, the increase was 7,568.

## Frontline Communication Tips for Support Staff

In order to build a positive image — good public relations — a school must have a warm climate, caring staff, and constantly encourage students to be the best they can be. And, the school must work hard at communicating its good image to others. The goal is to build support for the students, the school and the school district. The frontline army of communicators in most schools is the support staff. They are, more often than not, the first people to greet children and parents each day. Bus drivers are the first and last school employees many children see daily; school secretaries are the key office contact for parents and teachers; the ground-keeper may be the only employee some homeowners (without children) near the campus ever see. As frontline communicators, support staff have tremendous credibility with the public, and along with that, a tremendous responsibility to deliver a good first impression of the school or district. Here are some tips to help everyone in your school, not just support staff, to become better communicators:

- Know important facts about your school and district. You can even create a “cheat sheet” of facts for easy reference to share with your staff.
- Get to know the people who deal regularly with your school and its employees. They are often community opinion leaders, so help them get the answers to their questions.

## Tips and Resources

- Treat every patron who comes to or calls the school like a board member. Treat every staff member like the superintendent.
- Acknowledge people immediately. Greet the parent AND child. Learn names whenever possible.
- Don't appear to protect or cover for an administrator, but don't speak for him or her.
- Never act or appear superior to others.
- Use positive body language.
- Be empathetic. Deal with people from the heart.
- Don't give opinions. Listen to all sides of a story. Don't jump to conclusions.
- Let people know you care and have pride in your job and your school.
- Avoid gossip. Be mindful of confidentiality.
- Maintain a positive office/campus atmosphere.
- Know the process your school or district takes when handling inquiries. Share that information when parents and others ask you for assistance.
- If you hear rumors about your school or district, report what you hear to your immediate supervisor. Also, seek clarification on the rumor.

(Source: *Principal Communicator*, National School Public Relations Association).

**NEWS ABOUT GREAT SCHOOLS**

# The School Connection

News and features about the Wake County Public School System

**Sundays on Channel 11**  
Raleigh area 6:30 p.m.  
Cary area 1:00 p.m.

SC THE SCHOOL CONNECTION  
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WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

## EducationMatters

*Education Matters* is produced every month for the employees of the Wake County Public School System. Please submit any story ideas to Christy Barnett, editor and communications specialist, at [cbarnett@wcpss.net](mailto:cbarnett@wcpss.net).

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