

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

The **Struggles, Strengths,** and **Successes** of **Exemplary** **Rural Schools** in the **Southeast**



SERVETM
*Improving Learning through
Research & Development*

Table of Contents

- 4 Exceptional Challenges, Exceptional Strengths: Rural Schools That Shine
- 6 Providing a Quality Education for All Students: An Interview with Bob Mooneyham
- 8 West Blockton Elementary School: "What's Best for Every Student"
- 10 Blountstown Elementary School: An Effective Combination of Professional and Personal Skills
- 12 J.A. Maxwell Elementary School: The "Mighty Max," Mighty Amazing!
- 16 Brinson Memorial Elementary School: The Many Faces of Diversity
- 19 Excellence in Eutawville
- 22 An Oasis of Excellence: Mississippi's Hayes Cooper Center for Math, Science, and Technology
- 25 Rural School Teacher Shelley Marsh and Teaching as a Performing Art
- 29 The Rural School District Superintendents' Network at SERVE

About SERVE

SERVE is an education organization with the mission to promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. To further this mission, SERVE engages in research and development that address education issues of critical importance to educators in the region and provides technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs that are striving for comprehensive school improvement. This critical research-to-practice linkage is supported by an experienced staff strategically located throughout the region. This staff is highly skilled in providing needs assessment services, conducting applied research in schools, and developing processes, products, and programs that inform educators and increase student achievement.

SERVE North Carolina Office • 800-755-3277 (Main Office)

SERVE Florida Office • 800-352-6001

SERVE Georgia Office • 800-659-3204

www.serve.org

From Policy to Practice:
The Struggles, Strengths,
and Successes of
Exemplary Rural Schools
in the Southeast

© SERVE 2004

First Printing 2004

SERVETM
*Improving Learning through
Research & Development*

Produced by:

SERVE, The Regional Educational
Laboratory for the Southeast

Associated with the School
of Education, University of
North Carolina at Greensboro

Edited by:

Cindy McIntee, SERVE, Senior Policy
Research Analyst for South Carolina

Written by:

Charles Ahearn, Ed.D., Director of Special
Initiatives

Dee Brewer, SERVE, Senior Policy
Research Analyst for North Carolina

Jeff Gagné, Ph.D., SERVE, Senior Policy
Research Analyst for Georgia

Arthur Johnston, SERVE, Senior Policy
Research Analyst for Mississippi

Cindy McIntee, SERVE, Senior Policy
Research Analyst for South Carolina

Joel Overton, SERVE, Senior Policy
Research Analyst for Florida

Tamara Powell, SERVE, Research
Associate

Jean Scott, SERVE, Senior Policy Research
Analyst for Alabama

Reviewed by:

Theodore Coladarci, Ph.D.

Jeff Gagné, Ph.D., SERVE, Senior Policy
Research Analyst for Georgia

Publications Support:

Donna Nalley, Ph.D., SERVE, Publications
Director

Karen DeMeester, Ph.D., SERVE, Senior
Program Specialist

Tracy Hamilton, SERVE, Graphic Designer

The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. This document was produced with funding from the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. ED-01-CO-0015.

Dear Colleagues:

Beeson and Strange drew attention to the number of young people and communities served by rural schools in *Why Rural Matters 2003*. They note that in the United States nearly one-third of school-aged children attend public schools in rural areas or small towns. A large segment of the school-aged population resides in rural areas in the SERVE region. SERVE is committed to continuing its efforts to disseminate information to educators and policymakers in a way that will assist them in improving learning and teaching. We know that the challenges and experiences of students and educators in rural schools in the Southeast are very important elements to consider in the educational landscape for our region.

This publication, *From Policy to Practice*, will highlight important work being undertaken on behalf of and within rural schools. We are taking a look at exemplary rural schools and programs from around the SERVE region. Six articles will spotlight some of the exciting work taking place in rural schools throughout the Southeast. Each of our Senior Policy Research Analysts chose a school that provided us with an example of an exemplary rural school and exemplary practices in each of the six states.

From Policy to Practice also contains an article about SERVE's work with local superintendents in the six states. The Rural Superintendents Network brings together a dynamic group of rural superintendents. In addition, we are also focusing on a national organization that is dedicated to the improvement of rural schools, the National Rural Education Association (NREA). This publication contains an interview with NREA's Executive Director, Bob Mooneyham.

Finally, we include an interview with Shelley Marsh, the 2002 NREA Rural Teacher of the Year. Shelley's work in rural South Carolina earned her recognition, and the interview will allow you to spend some time in her classroom and examine how she inspires young students to achieve to the best of their abilities.



John R. Sanders, Ed.D.
Executive Director



EXCEPTIONAL CHALLENGES, EXCEPTIONAL STRENGTHS: Rural Schools That Shine

By Jeff Gagné and Cindy McIntee

While “rural schools face many challenges, they also have many strengths.... Rural educators can use their strengths to continue to meet the challenges they face, preserve what is best about their communities, and provide a high-quality education for all their students” (McIntee, 2001).

Much has happened since SERVE published the rural edition of *The Vision* magazine (Volume 1, Number 1) almost two years ago. The U.S. economy took a sharp downturn, jobless rates shot up, and state governments, dealing with huge shortfalls, have been cutting state budgets to make up the difference.

Education has not been spared. Congress also reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 two years ago. Since No Child Left Behind was enacted, states and districts have struggled to meet the provisions of the law, while taking hits from all angles. As Hughes (2000) points out, “Since *A Nation At Risk*, numerous laws have been passed at both the federal and state level in an effort to improve public education. For rural schools and districts with limited funds, complying with these new laws is often difficult.”

The rural issue of *The Vision* focused on low-performing rural schools in the Southeast and the challenges involved in helping them become “high-performance learning communities that promote high student achievement” (Sanders, 2002). Considering all that has happened at the federal, state, and local levels over the



last two years, it seems important now to shine a light on the struggles, strengths, and successes of rural schools. SERVE hopes that sharing their stories will inspire others: “A key to ensuring that all children living in rural areas receive a high-quality education is moving past the consolidation debate and engaging in a critical examination of the strengths and weaknesses of rural schools. The goal should be to address the weaknesses by building upon the strengths” (Mike Arnold in Sherwood, 2001).

New Beginnings

In the winter of 2003, SERVE policy staff went in search of rural schools in the Regional Educational Laboratory for the Southeast's region (North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama) that exemplified rural struggles, strengths, and successes. Our desire to do so grew out of our conversations regarding the challenges rural schools faced in the 21st century, especially after the passage of No Child Left Behind. We wondered how rural schools were bearing up under the increased pressure of high-stakes accountability at the federal and state levels and still succeeding in the face of overwhelming odds (i.e., high poverty, limited resources, shrinking local tax bases, and budget cuts).

School Selection

A rural school from each of the SERVE states is showcased in this edition of *From Policy to Practice*. Each SERVE policy analyst selected a school from his or her state. While the selection process was by no means scientific, we did have some criteria in mind before we began. We wanted to showcase rural schools in the region that were highly successful (that is, had high scores on state accountability tests) despite many challenges, so we began by looking at schools that were high-poverty and high-minority and were located in rural areas with low

per-capita income. We began to narrow down the list by looking at school-level disaggregated student test data to determine levels of success on state accountability tests and by looking for schools that were successful at closing the achievement gap between the various subgroups of students (i.e., ethnicity, race, gender) in their schools.

Once we had identified a handful of schools, we had to secure permission to visit the school site, observe, and conduct interviews. District and school participation was voluntary. In at least one state, the school we selected decided not to participate, so another school on the short list was invited. School personnel also provided school data, pictures, and, most importantly, their time and stories.

Traits of Success

In *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools* (2000), Samuel Casey Carter identifies seven common traits shared by the 21 high-performing, high-poverty schools studied:

1. Effective principals decide how to spend their money, whom to hire, and what to teach.
2. Principals use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement and excellence.
3. Improving the quality of instruction is the only way to improve overall student achievement. Teacher quality is the single most accurate indicator of a student's performance in school.
4. Rigorous and regular evaluation leads to continuous student achievement.
5. Achievement is the key to discipline.
6. Principals extend the mission of school into the home.

7. Time on task is the key to success in school.

For those who have followed the effective schools research over the decades, Carter's seven traits probably seem similar to the "school-level factors" associated with the previous research of Ron Edmonds, Wilbur Brookover, and Michael Rutter. (See R. J. Marzano (2003, 2000) for a greater discussion of the effective schools research and school-level factors.)

In the foreword to *No Excuses*, Adam Myerson is careful to assert that the book is not a "public policy blueprint for reforming education of the poor." At the same time, he argues that the achievements of the principals in the book "do have a number of important policy implications that deserve to be explored more fully in later studies."

While our brief time with these six rural schools does not qualify as formal research, the stories we share reveal that the six highly successful rural schools showcased here share the same traits with their counterparts in *No Excuses*, from time on task to local decision-making. At the same time, like the schools in *No Excuses*, strong leadership also flourishes in each of these six rural schools, guiding each school down a selected path, flanked by clear goals and high expectations for everyone involved, from students to the larger community.

These schools have all set the bar high and succeeded year after year. Do they have some secret we can share? The answer is both no and yes. As all educators know, there is no single answer that will solve the complex challenges our public schools face every day. Even so, we know that great schools that achieve great results do exist, so answers exist if we are willing to look and listen and learn.

References

- Carter, Samuel Casey. (2000). *No excuses: Lessons from 21 high-performing, high-poverty schools*. Washington, DC: Heritage.
- Good, T. L., & Brophy, J. E. (1986). School effects. In M.C. Wottrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching*, (3rd ed., pp. 570–602). New York: Macmillan.
- Lee, J., & McIntire, W. G. (1999, April). *Understanding rural student achievement: Identifying instructional and organizational differences between rural and non-rural schools*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of American Educational Research Association (AERA), Montreal, Canada. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED430755).
- Marzano, R. J. (2000). *A new era of school reform: Going where the research takes us*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED454255).
- Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. Virginia: ASCD.
- McIntee, C. (2002). Challenges to rural education in the Southeast. *The Vision*, 1(1), 12–15.
- Sanders, J. (2002). Dear Colleague. *The Vision*, 1(1), 2.
- Sherwood, T. (2001). *Where has all the "rural" gone? Rural education research and current federal reform*. Report to the Rural School and Community Trust. Retrieved October 30, 2003, from <http://ruraledu.org/docs/ruralgone.pdf>

Each school in this *From Policy to Practice* wrestles with the same problems and challenges shared by all rural schools (e.g., less funding, fewer resources, recruitment, retention). Even so, these schools are succeeding. They deserve our attention, if for no other reason than simple inspiration. In the end, however, their stories offer much more for those who are interested in discovering what makes high-achieving rural schools soar beyond expectation.

Providing a Quality Education for All Students:

An Interview with Bob Mooneyham, Executive Director, National Rural Education Association

By Cindy McIntee

Bob Mooneyham directed the Oklahoma School Boards Association for 25 years until his retirement. However, Mooneyham wasn't well suited to the leisurely life, so in March 2002, he accepted the position of Executive Director of the National Rural Education Association (NREA). I recently talked with Mooneyham about his role at NREA, the issues facing rural educators, and what he envisions for the future of the organization.

Bob Mooneyham graduated from a small school in Holliday, Texas. Although he grew up in a number of locations, Mooneyham's childhood was primarily spent in rural schools. Consequently, rural education is very important to him, and he has spent a large portion of his adult life in education.

Mooneyham recounts that the most enjoyable time in his career was the three years he spent teaching. He left the classroom to become a guidance counselor, and he has also served as a school superintendent in Corn and Okemah, Oklahoma. He also served as a principal at a university lab school. In addition to being Executive Director of NREA, he is an adjunct professor at the University of Oklahoma, and NREA is now affiliated with that university.

SERVE: Could you talk about your previous work and your new position with NREA?



Mooneyham: I liked working with school board people primarily because they are volunteers, committed to providing excellent educational opportunities for the students they serve, and they are reflective of the communities they serve. I enjoyed working on agenda items that benefit schools and working with school administrators.

I feel the same way about working with the members of the National Rural Education Association. A number of people go to great personal expense to volunteer, and they do so because they care about education. I have always liked working with people who follow their convictions and work hard. I believe that the people who have labored for the work of rural education deserve an organization that is even more prominent than the organization is now.

As rural educators, we must "preserve, promote, and protect quality education." I think this phrase sums up our challenges and what we should be about. The value system in rural schools contributes to making children better citizens. I would hate to see us lose our rural communities because of external factors. Rural communities need protection and society owes a responsibility to children, wherever they are. We must protect them from inordinate problems, such as consolidation and transportation. We have the technology and the know-how to do it now.

It may cost more to provide a quality education, but we should provide that education. So many outside forces want to close schools. For example, Arkansas has recently faced calls for massive consolidation.

SERVE: How do you see NREA working to meet challenges facing rural educators?

Mooneyham: We must build upon what we have in NREA—build it into a national force that will be more distinctly heard nationally. We need additional members, and the potential for building NREA is very strong because there are so many rural schools in our country. Our organization can be pivotal in bringing all rural people together under one umbrella.

We need to get more people to recognize the strengths of rural schools. A lot of the things that people are working toward in charter schools are found in rural schools: a neighborhood school that is a community center and has small classes. We already have what many people are trying to accomplish.

To some extent, the impact that legislation has on the majority of schools has not been considered. We are being heard on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and that is very important. Schools must comply with federal mandates but funding has not met the mandates. Originally, they were to commit to funding 40% of the cost of IDEA, but they may be funding 14%. Next year's projection is 20%—that will be done by extending the 40%. While we are glad that next year's projection is higher, we know that it does not come close to the 40%, and inflation eats away at any additional funds that come in. I strongly believe in IDEA, but we must have the money to fund it.

NREA can provide the vehicle to share procedures, practices, and exemplary ideas with schools. We need to figure out a way to use the ideas of the districts that are successful.

Last year, a small school in eastern Oklahoma was last in the API ranking (a numeric score that indicates school performance based primarily on state-mandated tests but also on other contributing factors to a school's

educational success (see end-note 1)). The community and school were not happy and set about working to improve. This year, they were ranked number one. We can really work harder to provide forums for what works and disseminate that information in a number of ways, including *The Rural Educator* (NREA's publication).

SERVE: Why is the state of rural schools so important to you and our country?

Mooneyham: Public education and a well-informed citizenry are fundamental to our democracy. Many of the values that we cherish are very evident in rural areas. The closer we are to one another, the stronger those democratic values are.

SERVE: Because you spent a great deal of time working with school boards, have you identified other needs that could be met by way of the NREA?

Mooneyham: When I came on board, I noted that we did not have district memberships. By providing district memberships, we can help to ensure that more rural schools are actively involved in leadership in national organizations. NREA is a proper forum for rural schools to become involved in a national effort to respond to the needs of rural educators.

SERVE: How have rural students changed recently?

Mooneyham: Rural educators must really work to deal with the amount of information children

have available to them now, and these educators must ensure that students know how to assimilate all of the information they have. Really, educators need an individual educational plan for each student because they come to school with varying amounts of information and expertise.

Some of their expertise is really extraordinary. I am reminded of a four-year-old I saw on television: the child was a genius and had assimilated so much information it was phenomenal. I think we have to recognize that students are coming to us with individual skills and abilities. The bottom line is that we must work together to provide a quality education for all students.

Endnote

- 1 "The API, defined in state law under Title 70 O.S. § 3-150 and 3-151, is a numeric score, ranging from 0–1500, that indicates school performance based primarily upon state-mandated tests but also upon other contributing factors to a school's educational success. The seven educational indicators set forth in the API law (the factors in the API formula) are: 1) Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP) scores, 2) Attendance rates, 3) Dropout rates, 4) Advanced Placement participation and performance (secondary schools), 5) Graduation rates (secondary schools), 6) ACT average scores (secondary schools), and 7) College remediation rates (secondary schools)." See <http://sde.state.ok.us/home/defaultns.html>



WEST BLOCKTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: “What’s Best for Every Student”

By Jean Scott

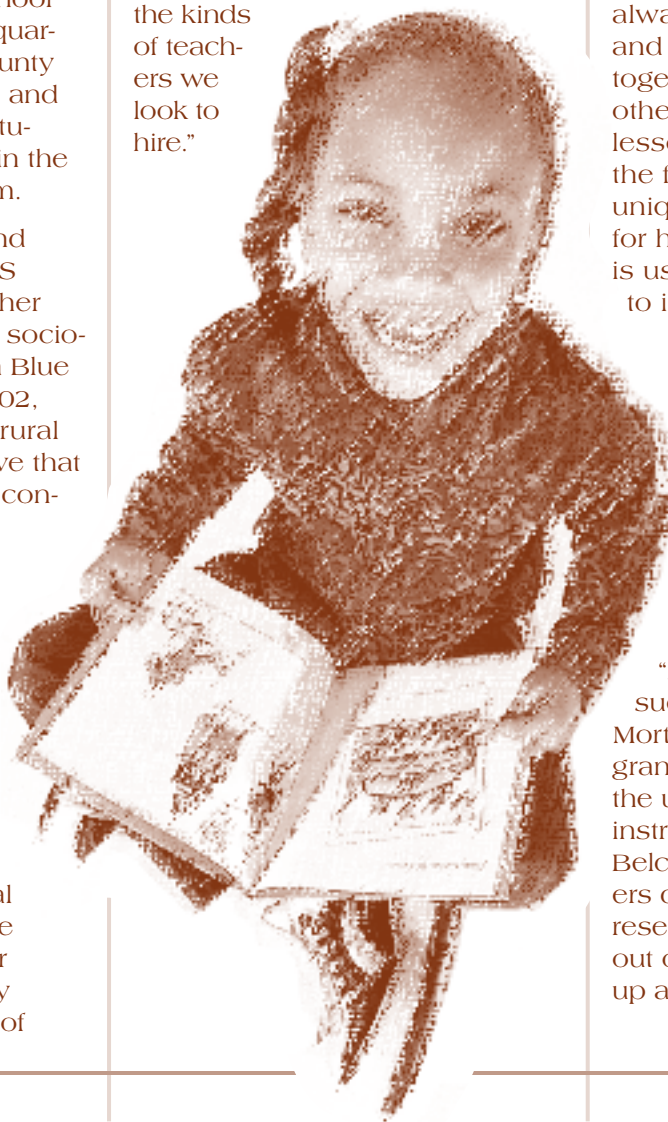
Located in rural Bibb County, West Blockton Elementary School (WBES) sits in the middle of the poorest region of Alabama. Bibb County ranks 127th out of 128 in local school funding, offering only seven mills of tax to the schools each year. (One mill equals \$1 of taxes per \$1,000 of assessed value of property.) Students in West Blockton are funded at a rate of \$300 per year, as compared to students in Homewood City Schools, who are funded at a rate of \$5,000 per year. School officials estimate that one quarter of the adults in Bibb County are not functionally literate, and approximately 70% of the students at WBES participate in the free/reduced lunch program.

Despite its rural location and woeful local funding, WBES perennially outperforms other schools of similar size and socioeconomic status. Named a Blue Ribbon School in 2001–2002, WBES was only one of 13 rural schools nationally to receive that honor. Additionally, WBES consistently outperforms both the district and the state on the SAT 9, receiving a grade of “A” for academic performance from the Alabama State Department of Education.

What factors contribute to the success of WBES? I recently visited WBES to find out for myself. Principal Carol Belcher met me at the door and took me on a tour of the school. I immediately noticed the prominent use of

the school slogan: *WBES, What’s Best for Every Student*.

“We adopted that four years ago when I became principal,” says Belcher. “It’s important to me that we focus on what’s best for every child.” That attitude is reflected in the teachers at WBES. Belcher has only had to hire one teacher in her four years as principal, and she looks for candidates who put their student’s needs first. “When you care about what’s going on, the kids will ultimately thrive. Those are the kinds of teachers we look to hire.”



Teamwork also plays a large role in the culture of WBES. “I encourage activities and relationships that foster closeness among the faculty,” says Belcher. “Teachers actively participate in peer teaching, peer coaching, and modeling best practices. The culture in this school motivates teachers. If you don’t participate, you feel sort of left out. We have strong leaders who pull all the teachers up. The nay-sayers are in the minority.”

Tammy Morton, a second-grade teacher at WBES, says, “We are always sharing with each other, and we learn from working together. Often, we’ll go in each other’s classrooms and practice lessons.” Morton also mentioned the freedom she had to pursue unique learning opportunities for her students. Currently, she is using a group-teaching model to introduce the life cycle of butterflies to her second-grade class. Joined in the classroom by a student teacher and a university professor one hour a day for two weeks, Morton and her students observe and handle caterpillars, noting any changes in the larvae.

“I have lots of support to pursue innovative ideas,” says Morton. In fact, she wrote the grant that provides the money for the university professor and the instructional materials. Principal Belcher notes, “I’ll let the teachers do anything, as long as it is research based. I usually just get out of the way, let them head it up and move it forward.”

Although voluntary, participation in professional development activities is expected at WBES. Small groups of three or four teachers meet weekly to view videos or participate in a book study. Teachers who wish to attend workshops and seminars come back to share what they learned with the entire group.

Out of 25 teachers, five are Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) presenters, and approximately half of the teachers at WBES go back through the ARI training each year. Morton says that training has helped her teaching in other areas. "For so long, we were focused on reading instruction with ARI, but we realized we could take the innovations we learned and apply it to other areas, like math and science."

"Teachers at WBES hold themselves accountable for student

achievement" says Principal Belcher. "We take pride in having the highest SAT scores in the district, and we challenge our kids to do their best. We try to make the test a positive experience. Third- and fourth-graders who are taking the SAT are 'adopted' by kindergarten, first-, and second-grade students, who give them little posters or candy for encouragement."

In addition to the SAT, students at WBES are regularly assessed to document success and monitor progress. "I wouldn't know what to teach if I didn't test," says Morton. "Mrs. Belcher wants to see improvement, and I want to know how I'm doing so I'll know how to teach my class." Morton uses additional assessments, including developing a chart to plot her students' achievement. "I made myself a grid because I wanted to see my children's

progress and improvement. I did it for myself. It would be devastating to me if my children weren't improving."

The success of West Blockton Elementary School draws visitors from around the state and the nation. "We've had Governor Riley and Senator Richard Shelby here recently," says Belcher. "We have between 300 and 400 visitors a year, mostly teachers, who come to see the classrooms at work. Our success is a testament to our teachers and these kids. They are simply the best."

[Note: Since this article was written, Carol Belcher joined the staff of the Alabama Department of Education and is an Alabama Reading First Initiative Specialist. The new principal is Karen Hubbard.]



BLOUNTSTOWN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: An Effective Combination of Professional and Personal Skills

By Joel Overton

Located in rural Calhoun County, Florida, Blountstown Elementary is a K-5 elementary school that routinely performs at the highest academic levels. It has earned a grade of "A" for the past three years from the Florida Department of Education's School Grading and Accountability Reports, and the Department has recognized the school's outstanding performance by awarding School Recognition funding for continued academic improvement and achievement.

This success has come despite challenges. The school has a 61% poverty rate and receives schoolwide Title I funding. Blountstown is a small town located in the Panhandle of Florida with a population of approximately 2,404, and the average per capita income for the county is approximately \$18,000 per year.

What factors contribute to the success of Blountstown Elementary? I recently interviewed Pam Bozeman, Vice Principal at the school. Bozeman noted that Blountstown is a very close-knit, student-oriented school that benefits from a great deal of community support. The teachers, staff, and parents are very dedicated, hard working, and focused on student success. The school's mission statement encourages staff to believe in the potential of all children,



to dedicate themselves to creating a safe place where children know they are cared for, can develop respect for themselves and others, understand they are accountable for their choices, gain a sense of responsibility for their environment, and accept the challenge to learn.

Blountstown Elementary takes great pride in its mission statement and tries to adhere to it on a daily basis. The school encourages teachers to set examples of good character for the students to live by, both at school and in the community. The school utilizes the "Character First!" program and a consistent discipline program called the "Apple System." Character First! Education furnishes tools necessary to weave positive character into every aspect of a student's academic program. Character First! Education is one of three branches of the Character Training Institute (CTI),

a non-profit organization based in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and its curriculum is currently used in over 2,000 schools in 19 different countries and is impacting hundreds of thousands of children.

The "Apple System" was developed by the school as a way to monitor behavior and provide motivation for good behavior. Each child has four apples. They start each day with a green apple, and apples are taken away if there display behavior problems. They go from green to yellow, to red, to purple, with consequences for each apple lost. A purple apple is an office visit. Vice Principal Bozeman stated that this has increased attentiveness, student motivation, responsibility, and diligence, while decreasing the number of disciplinary actions taken by the school. Each child knows he or she is accountable for his or her actions.

Blountstown also conducts a great deal of diagnostic testing and data analysis on student performance and utilizes this information to monitor progress and needs. This is done, in part, by working with the Success Maker computer software. Students perform tasks in the subjects of reading and math, and the software allows teachers to track and monitor student progress. The software diagnoses a student's mathematical ability level and evaluates the student's reading

ability level and provides activities on that level based on the student's academic needs. It provides teachers with training in identifying key indicators in the areas of problem solving techniques/strategies, and it involves parents by allowing them to assist the program coordinator.

The school also engages in Great Leaps and Title One Pullout for struggling students. This allows teachers to target and provide enrichment for students with special needs. Great Leaps Reading uses proven instructional tactics with powerful motivators to remediate a variety of reading problems. Students work individually with an instructor and the materials for less than ten minutes per day (three days per week minimum). The materials (one instructor's manual and one student notebook) are age appropriate and comprehensive.

Great Leaps is divided into three major areas:

1. **Phonics:** developing and mastering essential sight-sound relationships and/or sound awareness skills;

2. **Sight Phrases:** mastering sight words while developing and improving focusing skills; and

3. **Reading Fluency:** using age-appropriate stories specifically designed to build reading fluency, reading motivation, and proper intonation.

In addition to the excellent academic programs in place at the school, Bozeman stressed the importance of the dedicated, hard-working teachers and staff. She noted that many of the teachers care a great deal about the school, children, and community and have remained with the school for a number of years. Most of Blountstown Elementary's 41 teachers live in the community, and 31 of the teachers have been with the school for at least 10 years, with several having over 20 years of service.

The Vice-Principal also cited parental participation and community support as playing a large role in the school's success. Finally, strong and effective leadership was yet another factor identified in helping make Blountstown Elementary a success.

Principal Vicki Davis leads Blountstown Elementary. Both Davis and Bozeman are very active and visible in the school and perform bus duty each day so they can greet and encourage the children each morning and see them as they leave each day. They make it a point to know every child by name. These administrators are also instructional leaders, and they visit in the classrooms daily, assist students with class activities, and have even helped out in the lunchroom. A positive working relationship with parents is so important to this administrative team that they routinely make daily contacts with parents.

The continued overall success of Blountstown Elementary School can be attributed to many factors, including community and parental involvement; teacher retention; dedicated, caring, and hard-working administrators, teachers, students, and staff; and proven academic and character building programs. Continued achievement and recognition show that this rural school is utilizing an effective combination of professional and personal skills to develop and prepare the children of Blountstown.



J.A. MAXWELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:

The “Mighty Max,” Mighty Amazing!

By Jeff Gagné

Located 130 miles east of Atlanta in McDuffie County, Maxwell Elementary, the “Mighty Max” as it is often now called, is currently one of the best elementary schools in the region and possibly the country. That was not always the case though.

Up until 1997, Maxwell was simply another one of the myriad of mediocre schools across the country that seemingly eke by year after year. Students at Maxwell were performing below the 50th percentile in both reading and math on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Their story is a common one—rural, poor, high at-risk population—the list is long and the problems seemingly insurmountable.

Jump ahead three years; in 2000, Maxwell Elementary became a National Blue Ribbon School. Another three years later in May of 2003, after receiving numerous awards, Maxwell became one of only 26 schools in the United States and Canada to receive the International Reading



Thompson County Quick Facts:

- Population (2000)—21,286
- White—60.8%
- African-American—37.5%
- High school graduates—66.7%
- Per capita income—\$18,005

Association's Exemplary Reading Program Award.

What transformed J.A. Maxwell Elementary into the Mighty Max? No single answer can suffice. Even so, there was a clear turning point for Maxwell, however. In the 1997–1998 school year, a new administrative team—Principal Hanna Fowler and Assistant Principal Pat Biggerstaff—took the helm; since then, nothing at Maxwell has been ordinary.

Traits for Success

What has made Maxwell Elementary school so highly

successful is not a mystery, miracle, or accident. For examples of other highly successful, high-poverty schools, read *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-performing, High-Poverty Schools* (Carter, 2000). In his book, Carter argues that all 21 schools he examined share seven common traits that contribute to their success, even though their circumstances should make them strong candidates for failure.

If you ever visit Maxwell Elementary, you will find that it too possesses all seven of these powerful traits, and like other exemplary schools, the Mighty Max is a place where excuses are unacceptable—a powerful belief that begins with the leadership at Maxwell. As a matter of fact, Hanna Fowler and Pat Biggerstaff are fond of stating publicly that the most common factors educators use to explain poor student performance are simply excuses that neither one of them accept.

Factors Cited for Poor Student Performance

- Low socioeconomic status
- Minority student population
- Students from one-parent homes
- Latch-key kids
- Illiterate parents
- Apathy of parents and community
- Limited support
- Limited funds
- Poor discipline





Their shared belief has become something of a mantra at Maxwell and certainly one of the pillars supporting the school's success.

Trait One: Effective principals decide how to spend their money, whom to hire, and what to teach.

All decisions at Maxwell Elementary regarding spending, staffing, discipline, professional development, curriculum, evaluation, and alignment (the list goes on) are made by the Maxwell staff at the school site.

Like many rural schools Maxwell Elementary has a limited budget (only \$44 per child from the local district for instructional materials), so decisions regarding budget and spending are critical. Staff discussions of the annual budget lead to line-by-line decisions on how money will be spent and why. Funds are spent on resources and products that produce measurable outcomes. Materials are purchased with the expectation that they will need to be adapted to fit the needs of the Maxwell students; the staff is adept at meshing materials with student needs each year. For example, Maxwell purchases Saxon's phonics and spelling materials; the staff members at Maxwell also "tweak" the materials every year to fit their program and their students' needs.

Trait Two: Effective principals use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement.

There are clear expectations set at Maxwell that revolve around several key beliefs: no excuses; all children can be exceptional learners; evaluate often; we

know what works; and together we can do it.

Trait Three: Effective principals turn their schools into schools for teachers.

When the administrative team of Hanna Fowler and Pat Biggerstaff took over Maxwell Elementary seven years ago, they walked into the school building that was, to put it mildly, a wreck. Over the course of the summer, the pair spent countless hours cleaning and painting the entire school in order to make it a place where teachers and students would feel valued. They emptied the building of its outdated equipment, brought in newer furniture, books, computers, and manipulatives. They created a new mascot, Max the Lion. His slogan, "To the Max," refers to the hard work and commitment demonstrated at the school every day of every year.

Trait Four: Rigorous and regular testing [evaluation] leads to continuous student achievement.

Evaluation is inextricably linked to teaching and learning and is used to enhance both student and teacher performance. Evaluation components are built into every lesson and every unit. The evaluations are not used punitively but

Components of Accountability at Maxwell Elementary School

- Pre-assessments to find student's instructional level for reading and math
- Class assessment profiles updated all year
- Different types of assessments (not all teacher-made)
- Rubrics
- All teachers on the same page when grading (rubrics are good for this)
- Daily and weekly assessments for both formal and informal assessments
- Clear expectations with benchmarks and goals
- Administrative support for fairness
- Informal evaluations of teaching with positive peer and administrative support
- Formal evaluations of teachers and administrators that support improvement





Components of the Maxwell Elementary School Reading Program

- Accelerated Reading Program with in-house modifications
- Saxon Phonics Program with in-house modifications
- Researched, data-driven, proven programs
- Teaching at each student's instructional level
- Three-and-a-half hours of reading per day, per child
- Explicit systematic reading instruction
- Explicit systematic phonics instruction
- Technology aligned with reading program
- Constant quick assessment
- Flexibility to move students all year
- Creative scheduling—A/B days and block
- Safety Net programs for students needing more support (i.e., site-based instruction, alternative phonics program, mentors, repeated lessons)
- Daily reading test practice
- Curriculum alignment and mapping for reading
- Organization of the instruction day to show time for reading
- Teacher support
- Accountability for teacher and student
- Celebrations, honest awards, and incentives
- When students learn to read, do not continue teaching them to read

are used as diagnostic tools to improve teaching and learning and to provide help.

All staff members are evaluated. Teachers are videotaped teaching twice a year, for example, and each staff member does a self-evaluation using school-established performance standards.

Trait Five: Children need clear and conspicuous reasons to flee from error and run toward success. Achievement is the key to discipline.

There are abundant rewards for success at Maxwell for teachers and students alike. This year, for example, the Presidential Readers at Maxwell (the highest level possible) celebrated their accomplishments with a limousine ride to McDonald's for

lunch. The teachers were also recognized and rewarded at the school's own "Academy Awards" celebration.

The school's student discipline policy contains clear and effective consequences. All students are required to meet specific academic requirements before they move on to the next grade.

Trait Six: An outstanding school is a source of pride, a wellspring of joy, and a force for stability in an impoverished community.

In 1996, when Hanna Fowler and Pat Biggerstaff joined the school staff, Biggerstaff promised the staff and students that someday the governor would come to the school to recognize its success. On May 20, 2003, Governor Perdue traveled to Maxwell Elementary School with State Senator Joey Brush to recognize the school's academic excellence. Governor Purdue signed a newly passed education bill at the school and presented the pen to Principal Fowler as a reminder of his visit.

Trait Seven: Time on task is the key to success in school.

Hanna Fowler personally constructs the school schedule,

using an A/B day or block schedule with the underlying belief that all students, no matter their background or readiness level, can become exceptional learners if given the resources and teaching. Consequently, the



Components of the Maxwell Elementary School Math Program

- Accelerated Math Program with in-house modifications
- Second priority math
- Researched, data-driven program to work with student population
- Curriculum alignment and mapping
- Explicit, systematic math instruction
- Repetition and practice
- Assessments throughout the year
- Daily test practice
- Flexible scheduling with rotations for small group instruction
- Technology (if you have it) aligned with curriculum
- Teacher support
- Accountability for teacher and student
- Celebrations, honest awards, and incentives

schedule maximizes teaching and learning time, while providing the flexibility needed to provide students with instruction aligned to their individual needs. Constant, varied assessments (BLT, Accelerated Reader, STAR, ITBS, CRCT, Running Records) are used to determine student progress and placement on a weekly basis, so that all students are taught at their “instructional level” (safety nets such as sight-based lessons exist for any student not making progress).

The instructional day utilizes rotations that allow for small group instruction with a primary focus on two subjects areas: reading (3.5 hours per day) and math (1.5 hours per day). Science and social studies support the teaching and learning in reading and math. All the instructional lessons are aligned to the school's performance

standards, assessments, and curriculum and utilize programs and methods that are proven by data to work with their student population.

In Retrospect

The policies and procedures that have helped make Maxwell a success were largely in place by the end of Fowler and Biggerstaff's first year at Maxwell, the same year that ITBS scores rose 12% in math and 28% in reading.

By the end of the administrative team's second year, math scores increased an average of 38%, while reading scores increased 27%. Five years later, the staff at Maxwell continues to teach, evaluate, review, and adapt, while their students just keep on learning and scores keep on rising.

In *No Excuses*, Samuel Casey Carter states that by “studying the traits that these high-performing, high-poverty schools share, other schools can replicate their successes. They, too, can emulate the commitment, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit that drive this kind of success and inspire this level of achievement in others” (8). Anyone who wants to see a real-world example of a no-excuses school, just needs to stop in Thompson, Georgia, and visit the Mighty Max—another mighty example to emulate.

An Update

In the spring of 2004, Dr. Hanna Fowler left Maxwell Elementary to become one of Georgia's new regional school improvement coordinators. Pat Biggerstaff continues to serve as a member of the Georgia State Board of Education.

References

- Casey, Samuel Carter. (200). *No excuses: Lessons from 21 high-performing, high-poverty schools*. Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation.



BRINSON MEMORIAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: The Many Faces of Diversity

By Dee Brewer

Principal Karen Skipper has worked at Brinson Memorial Elementary School for 11 years; three years as principal and four years as an assistant principal and a teacher. The school has 53 teachers and about 800 students in grades kindergarten through five. White students make up 76% of the student population, African American students 22%, and Latino students 1.5%. Only five limited-English students attend the school this year.

The school is located in a formerly all African-American section of New Bern, N.C., called James City. Skipper describes the area as "rural as rural can be." Huge, partially wooded grounds surround the school and extend up to the Neuse River.

"It is a beautiful place to be," comments Skipper. There are soccer fields, tennis courts, foot-

ball fields, and four playgrounds around the school. In addition, the School District Technology Center is located on the school campus and is accessible to teachers and students.

The original school building was small. As student enrollment increased, classrooms were added. However, instead of adding four or five classrooms at a time to the existing building, the county decided to build additional buildings, each containing four or five classrooms. This approach continued until the school campus consisted of eight separate buildings with no place for the entire student body to come together. Three years ago, the school underwent a \$1.5 million renovation to get all the buildings under one roof. The renovation was completed just prior to September 11, 2001.

The neighborhood around the school is becoming increasingly diverse. On the river, there are beautiful homes valued at \$500,000 and above; while in other parts of the neighborhood, there are burned-out mobile homes where three families are living. Students who live in a newly developed golf community also attend Brinson.

Consider that among the 800 students at Brinson, nearly 13% are students with disabilities, many "mainstreamed" into regular classes for most of the day. Brinson Elementary is also home for five self-contained classes of exceptional children: two classrooms for students with educable mental disabilities, one for students with severe and profound disabilities, one for students with trainable-level disabilities, and one



for students with behavioral-emotional disabilities.

These students with special needs are transported to Brinson from all over the district. It is likely that Brinson will continue to assume full responsibility for meeting state accountability standards for them, even with increasing expectations of the No Child Left Behind legislation.

Although a special needs population this large can place a strain on school resources, Principal Skipper says, "We love this population and mainstream a lot of them." Translation: Regular teachers and students are accepting of the special students.

A School and District Based on Quality

At the beginning of the implementation of North Carolina's ABCs Accountability Program in 1996, Brinson Elementary faced serious challenges. Only about 60% of its students were achieving on grade level.

In elementary schools, End-of-Grade test results and selected other components are used to measure the school's growth and performance. Schools that attain the standards are eligible for incentive awards or recognition. Schools where growth and performance fall below specified levels are designated as low performing and may receive mandated assistance based on action by the State Board of Education.

Since 1996, Brinson Elementary has either met or exceeded growth standards or had high growth and has been a School of Excellence five out of six years. The sixth year, they missed meeting the standard by less than 1%. A School of Excellence is one that makes at least expected growth *and* has at least 90% of its students scoring at-or-above grade level.



At the end of the 2001-2002 school year, 93% of Brinson's students were achieving at-or-above grade levels in reading and mathematics! On average, over the last six years of the state's ABCs Accountability Program, 91% of Brinson's students have been achieving at-or-above grade levels in reading and mathematics.

Although the state's accountability program was a stimulus for school improvement, Brinson Elementary had already begun its quest by becoming a pilot for the implementation of Total Quality Education using aligned management and quality tools. The district superintendent later took the initiative to a new level and began implementing the Baldrige model district wide. Currently, the district is trying to reach agreement on specific aligned textbooks in reading and math so that student learning will not be negatively impacted when they transfer from one school to another. Principal Skipper indicates that she has good support from the district central office and believes that support is essential to effective school improvement.

Brinson has implemented the total quality model for about 10 years, and the school has had stability in its teaching staff and in its principal. The principal before Skipper worked at the school for

18 years, 14 of which were as the school principal.

Focused, Continuous School Improvement

Principal Skipper clearly attributes the schools' continuous improvement largely to the commitment to quality management—and sticking with it.

"I love to talk about my school," she says. "Implementing quality management means that not using it is not an option. It is the way we do business here." Further, it means focus, "living by the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and eliminating anything not directly related to it. All arrows must be pointed 'due north.' There is no room for random acts of goodness in choosing content unless it appropriately relates to the Standard Course of Study....the butterfly garden may have to go!"

The concept of quality is also communicated to the students as well as the staff so that students are clear about what is expected and begin "to have a deeper understanding of the principles of quality behind their work."

One tool Brinson has used to encourage continuous improvement is a large floor-to-ceiling board in the main hall of the school. The board is divided into space for third-graders, fourth-graders, fifth-graders, and teachers.

Skipper explains that "each month a quality tool is spotlighted, such as the use of 'flow maps.' Student work is displayed on the board to show how each grade level is learning about flow maps, and teachers display examples of things they are doing to teach about flow maps." Students, as well as teachers, learn by example.

Discipline has been another challenge for Brinson, as it is for many schools. Skipper notes that although discipline has not

always been good at the school, it is now.

"We are strict. There is no talking in the hall. The first 15 minutes of lunch are silent." The school also has an anti-bullying campaign to communicate to students that students are respected in the school and bullying will not be tolerated.

Unlike schools that have trouble recruiting and retaining teachers, Brinson has almost no turnover. Teachers want "to teach in a school with aligned management and a professional atmosphere, and then they do not want to leave."

The implementation of the Baldrige principles of management applies not just to teachers but all staff. According to Skipper, "The cafeteria workers have been trained in Baldrige. We had perfect scores on our health inspections last year. The cafeteria is clean, well run, and customer focused.... Our seven custodians will be trained next month."



Focus on Reading

Brinson Elementary focuses on reading. It was the first school in the county to use the Accelerated Reader and the first in the state to use the Master Reading Renaissance Program. At the beginning of each school day, everyone in the school is involved in one hour of uninterrupted, sustained silent reading. The staff members hope that student tardiness will be reduced as more parents understand the importance of this reading time.

Typical Day

In addition to the hour of sustained silent reading, students spend 1.5 hours in language arts; 1.5 hours in mathematics; 45 minutes daily in music, art, or PE; and a half hour for lunch. (Now the state is requiring 30 minutes a day for PE.) Teachers also must teach science and social studies but have the flexibility to decide how to manage the time. Most teachers concentrate on each subject for a grading period.

Skipper's typical day begins at 7 a.m. and doesn't end until after 7 p.m. She requires each

grade-level team to meet once a week, and she and the two assistant principals meet with each team. The teams must prepare an agenda prior to each team meeting. During meetings, the work is concentrated on curriculum issues. The meetings go smoothly because they are based on these quality tools.

During much of the day, Skipper tries to be where the students are. She walks the halls and goes into classrooms to read to students or work with them. Recently, a teacher gave her students an assignment that involved drawing pictures of Skipper. The teacher told her, "The students *think* you have an easy job. They think all you do is walk around all day smiling and reading to students!"

Skipper remarks, "That's why I work late. It's only after the students leave that I begin to focus on the other things I must do."

Biggest Challenges

Brinson has challenges that are similar to those faced by other rural schools. Currently, she is most concerned about keeping parents actively involved in what the school is doing and what their children are learning. Skipper views the parents as critical members of each child's educational team. Providing parents with techniques to help their children with schoolwork at home is one of the challenges. The parents of Brinson students maintain busy schedules typical of the 21st century.

Although Brinson Memorial Elementary School will face many more challenges (as well as opportunities), Skipper believes the school has advantages it can build upon. "The bottom line for any teacher may be much the same as it is for me. I love this school as I think many do. It has its own little soul. It is very special to those of us who love it."

Excellence in Eutawville

By Cindy McIntee and Tamara Powell



Excellent teachers who are life-long community members...custodial staff members who live down the street and keep the building spotlessly clean...a community that is supportive and trusts the school to properly educate its children...teachers and administrators who work collaboratively to meet challenges and make the most of talents and other resources...a principal/instructional leader who sets goals for each student, guides with patience, and works with students so they can develop better reading skills...all of these people make up St. James-Gaillard Elementary School.

Background

St. James-Gaillard Elementary sits in the quiet, small town of Eutawville, South Carolina, in Orangeburg County School District Three. St. James-Gaillard could be described as the school that Hugo built. Gaillard Primary School, which consisted of pre-kindergarten to third grade, was completely destroyed in 1989 when Hurricane Hugo wreaked havoc on the Eutawville community. For approximately eight months following the hurricane, St. James Middle housed the students from Gaillard Primary. The following school year, the school was reorganized to house pre-K through fifth grade and was

renamed St. James-Gaillard Elementary.

The building has been extensively renovated and is a bright, cheerful place for children to learn. Michelle Wilson has been the principal of the school for five years and is the "new kid" on the block. Most of the staff members are from the Eutawville community, and many of them attended the school when they were children. The school's custodian has been at the school for 32 years. Because the parents know the teachers in the community, they trust them to educate their children.

Challenges

St. James faces the challenges that many rural schools do; however, its faculty and administrators have very high expectations and are determined to offer optimal learning opportunities. Because many students cannot afford to travel outside their community, the school has worked hard to expose them to other places and familiarize them with words and ideas that may not be common in their everyday experiences in Eutawville. The fact that 89% of the school's students qualify for free and reduced lunch indicates that the majority of families encounter difficulty in providing some of the "extras" that more affluent parents provide for their

children. The school and community have pulled together to secure resources enabling children to travel outside their rural area and experience the diversity of New York City and sites in Canada.

St. James-Gaillard Elementary sees itself as a high-achieving school in a community that is filled with love and support. Wilson is working to make the student body more diverse and reflective of the surrounding community and would like to see more of the area's entire community enrolled at St. James, where 97.9% of the school's population is African American. One result of the efforts to build stronger relationships occurred this fall when a local church and the school came together to hold a Fall Festival, an event that brought the community together and merged the church's traditional festival with the school's traditional Halloween festival.

District Support

The district office is credited for its consistent support. To assist the school, the district office staff members have provided curriculum-pacing guides and have demonstrated their willingness to bring in outside expertise to provide high-quality professional development. According to Wilson, one of the pluses of working in a small district is the ability to meet with

the superintendent without an appointment. This feature facilitates a closer working relationship between the principal and the Superintendent, Dr. David Longshore. Wilson acknowledges deep district support for the school and its mission.

The focus of the school's professional development has been on team building and building a sense of community this year. Analysis of test scores and teacher input led the staff to renew its focus on teaching English Language Arts and writing. The district assisted the school by providing a consultant who trained teachers in effective implementation of the Cunningham 4 Block Model. Professional development this year has also emphasized team building and further development of a sense of community.

Giving Students Ownership

Each day, students begin their day with an oath: "Today is a new day and a new beginning. It has been given to me as a new gift. I can either use it or throw it away. What I do today will affect me tomorrow."

Students are encouraged to evaluate themselves, assess their learning, and set goals for themselves. The principal has met with every fourth- and fifth-grader to discuss individual academic progress and develop academic goals for the year. Likewise, third-graders set academic goals, too.

Teachers

The teachers at St. James-Gaillard believe in teamwork. They plan together, and the principal accepts one set of lesson plans per grade level. The teachers and the principal believe that working together helps them in their quest to answer the question, "Why are we here?" The staff motto, "We're here for the kids,"



clearly reminds them of the basic reason they are involved with St. James-Gaillard.

Because the number of teachers is limited, one teacher teaches science for both the fourth- and fifth-grade classes. Fine arts teachers often assist other teachers in English/language arts and mathematics. Most teachers live in or near the community; only three teachers live in Orangeburg, the largest town closest to the school. At least two teachers started working at the school as paraprofessionals. These women returned to college, completed their baccalaureate degrees, and became certified teachers.

Most of the teachers have taught in this community for many years. Last year's percentage of teachers returning to the school from the previous year was 88.5%. Additionally, most of the teachers and staff members have a master's degree.

A Community of Believers

We met with a number of parents and teachers at St. James-Gaillard to discuss their school. Iona Gathers, Gail F. Gibbs, Willie Frank White, and Renee Wolpert talked with us about the

school's culture and the role the community plays in assisting the students in reaching their goals. The parents shared that the school could be characterized as a place of love and unity, a place that shares a bond with the community. Parents are welcome to drop in and visit in the school, and they receive information from the school that is helpful in working with their children at home. The parents perceive that the teachers really seem to enjoy teaching and that they work as a team. Most importantly, according to the parents, the teachers include them as team members.

For instance, parents have attended a Family Math and Science Workshop that was designed to show parents how they could use hands-on skills at home to help their children with the mathematics skills that are assessed on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT). Families also receive additional information about things they can do to contribute to their children's educational advancement.

St. James-Gaillard's parents also assist the school in developing business relationships. The local IGA grocery store donated folders for the students to use in preparation for the PACT. Members of the

school's staff reported that parents provide them with ideas to meet needs that they can identify. They also use their skills to assist the school: one parent is the school's photographer, and another makes paper for the students in interdisciplinary science/art settings.

Parents also know that the teachers guard their instructional time. One parent indicated that parents are encouraged to consider scheduling their children's outside appointments so that they do not conflict with the school's schedule. Wilson also confirmed the value placed on protecting instructional time. She related that she had to send someone to retrieve students from a classroom so the children could catch their buses because the teacher was busy squeezing in a little more instruction.

The teachers and staff members that we spoke to, including Edna Holliday, Sheila Washington, Carrie Green, Cathy Huger, Cynthia White, and Tracy Elmore, indicated a willingness to try new ideas and discard programs or methods that did not work. These teachers believe that their primary responsibility is to teach children, and they believe that their ideas and suggestions are valued by the administration. The teachers have input in setting goals for their students' achievement.

They have implemented a number of successful strategies to improve academic achievement. Children may participate in early-bird tutoring, after-school tutoring, and pull-out tutoring based upon the child's needs. Teachers provide the tutorial assistance. They also provide tutoring for students as young as three years old who are identified for assistance by the First Steps program (South Carolina's early childhood initiative).

All students are involved in "Nifty Fifty" activities. Students are heterogeneously grouped for regular instructional time; however, for a few periods each week, students are grouped homogeneously during "Nifty Fifty" time. Students are divided into three levels—Masters, Achievers, and Learners. Masters receive challenging instruction above grade level. Achievers receive reinforcement instruction on grade level, and Learners receive remediation of designated skills. Teachers and students strive for all of the children to reach the Masters level and celebrate when a child moves up from one level to the next.

Twice monthly, advanced and proficient students come together to work on reading, writing, and mathematics. Ms. Lawrence and Ms. Middleton secured a grant from SCANA to fund their homework center; unfortunately, that grant will end. Another grant, SCReads Tutorial Assistance Grant, was secured to provide funding for child development (Project L.O.R.E.) that includes in-home services for some students in the community.

The tenacity and hard work of the teachers is matched by the commitment of parents. Approximately 30 students attended Science Camp last year, and the parents bore the cost. Summer school is being planned for this year, but budget cuts mean that the parents will have to pay the full tuition costs for their students to participate in the program.

Curriculum

Each day, the objectives that correlate to South Carolina's standards are written on boards around the school. The teachers are focused on teaching kindergartners through second-graders how to read and on teaching third-graders through fifth-graders to read to learn.

They use a variety of methods to meet the individual learning styles of the students. Students are assessed at the beginning of each year to determine the individual needs of the students. Kindergartners through second-graders are taught to read utilizing Saxon Phonics, Patricia Cunningham's Building Blocks and Four Blocks, basal series, and Literacy First methods. Mathematics is taught utilizing manipulatives, Saxon Math, and the state-adopted math text *Daily Oral Math*. Science is taught utilizing a combination of experimentation and inquiry.

Wishes and Dreams

At the top of the wish list, Wilson would like to have another science teacher so that students may take complete advantage of the hands-on science material available in the school. The staff would love to have the Spanish program restored and would like to be able to have all students perform at the high levels the teachers believe the students are capable of. Both the community and the educators expect to reach all of their goals. The principal, teachers, staff members, community, and district staff all work together to "be a part of something great."



An Oasis of Excellence:

MISSISSIPPI'S HAYES COOPER CENTER FOR MATH, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

By Arthur Johnston

In the Mississippi Delta, the Hayes Cooper Center for Math, Science, and Technology has formed an oasis of learning and student achievement. As the state's only charter school, Hayes Cooper has built a reputation of excellence in statewide testing while serving a rural and impoverished region. According to a State Department of Education report, "Hayes Cooper students produced some of the highest test scores in the state, even achieving the highest scores in some categories" (Roberson, 2002).

A Bi-Racial History

Named for the longtime African-American custodian of the old Merigold Elementary School, the Hayes Cooper Center grew out of a 1989 federal court order to create a school in the Cleveland district that was 50% black and 50% white. The district organized a blue-ribbon committee made up of a broad cross-section of community representatives, who were charged with designing a school that they would want their children to attend.

"Their instructions were to design a school where learning happens for all students regardless of race, economic background, or family status" (Hayes Cooper, 2002). The group's efforts resulted in a federal magnet school grant in 1990 and a subsequent grant four years later to double the school's size.

While the court order allows a deviation of up to 5%, Hayes Cooper has maintained its racial balance over the years



(Mississippi Report Card, 2003). Fifty new kindergarten students begin their studies at the Merigold each year and are selected by a lottery held during the first week of February. In grades 2 through 6, any Cleveland District student may transfer to Hayes Cooper provided an opening is available and the student possesses no grade lower than a C in core subject areas (Cleveland School District, 2001). Applicants must also meet attendance and behavior requirements and must reside within the Cleveland School District (Hayes Cooper, 2002).

Outperforming the Pack

In the 1999–2000 and the 2000–2001 school years, Hayes Cooper students outperformed other students in the Cleveland School District (Hayes Cooper's home district) in almost every category and also performed well above the state average (Roberson, 2002). In 2001–2002,

the trend continued, with little statistical difference between the scores of white and African-American students in most grade levels and subject areas (Mississippi Test Data Retrieval System, 2003).

As Mississippi's only charter school, Hayes Cooper is exempt from the process standards of the state's performance-based accreditation system and from the provisions of the state's Education Code, except those specifically incorporated in the charter petition and in the charter school law. Hayes Cooper is also exempt from all policies of the state and local school boards, except for personnel policies and certain other policies specifically mentioned in its petition.

Parental Involvement, High Expectations, Student Portfolios, and Test Data

Beverly Hardy, Hayes Cooper's principal, agrees that her school's unique status affords some benefits, but she is quick to point out that what makes her school successful is, first and foremost, parental support and involvement.

"Our parents have to fill out an application, sign a contract to ensure preparedness at home, and agree to other requirements, like attendance at conferences and homework supervision."

Parents volunteer as readers every Friday during a two-hour literary circle and are free to

come into classrooms at any time. "When they do, most end up helping teach," she says.

She also attributes her school's success to high expectations of teachers, parents, and students. "We see C students become A students simply because they know they are expected to do better here. They put forth more effort."

Academic and writing portfolios are kept on each student and follow each student throughout his or her academic career at Hayes Cooper. Like the parental contracts, the portfolios are agreed to and signed by the student, parent, and teacher. The portfolios are used as promotion criteria for each child at each grade level. Work samples contained in the portfolios help teachers chart learning progress and clearly illustrate weaknesses for parents, students, and teachers.

Hayes Cooper also makes interesting use of state test data. As Hardy points out, test results not only guide instruction but also guide teacher improvement and refinement as well. Says Hardy, "our test results make our teachers aware of what their own weakness are, and we are then able to look at the use of strategies to make up for those deficiencies." She readily credits the Mississippi Department of Education and the State Board of Education for "giving us every tool we need to be successful on state testing."

Class Size

Surprisingly, considering its tremendous success on statewide testing, Hayes Cooper has one of the highest pupil-to-teacher ratios in the Cleveland School District—23:1.

Hardy says, "You can be successful without smaller class sizes." She then points to a number of other factors that weigh more heavily in her school's

School Commitment Pledge

Academic Achievement

1. We will know how and use grade-level expectations in teaching.
2. We will interpret grade-level expectations both to the student and parents.
3. We will know the level of achievement of the student.
4. We will use a curriculum guide and a daily lesson plan.
5. We will evaluate student progress and report to the student and parents at regular intervals.
6. We will have a written grading policy and will make the policy available to the student and parents at the beginning of the year.

Interest and Motivation

1. We will encourage the student to do his/her best work.
2. We will demonstrate our belief that all children can learn by setting the same high expectations for academic achievement for all Hayes Cooper students.
3. We will serve as positive role models for your children by evidencing enthusiasm for teaching and learning.
4. We will reward your child's efforts with positive attention and feedback.
5. We will recognize each child's individual strengths and weaknesses and meet each child's individual academic needs and learning styles.

Citizenship

1. We will inform students and parents of all classroom and school rules.
2. We will enforce all rules fairly and firmly.
3. We will maintain well-managed classrooms, conducive to good student behavior.

Homework

1. We will provide the students and parents with written information about the school's homework policy.
2. We will provide homework assignments that are fair, grade-appropriate, and designed to reinforce what has been taught in class.

Beverly Hardy, Principal

Parent/Guardian

Your Child's Teacher

<p>record of achievement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of arts and technology in everyday instruction • Cooperative activities in math and science and physical involvement of students • Emphasis on enrichment, including summer enrichment programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community involvement in the school and school involvement in the community • A structured curriculum aligned with instructional practices and testing • Sound teaching strategies, varied according to student need and background <p>After-school academic labs—where students who are identified as having difficulty in a particular subject or topic are required to be tutored—are also an important aspect to Hayes Cooper's success.</p> <p>Hardy's teachers have built-in interdisciplinary studies in the fine arts, environmental sciences, and physical education at all grade levels. In August 2000, Hayes Cooper fully integrated an environmental studies program into all subjects in all grade levels.</p>	<p>receive 40 hours of professional development training related to student assessment practices (Roberson, 2002).</p> <p>Hardy asks her teachers to visit other public schools outside the district at least once a year in order to get fresh ideas, and she discourages "pencil/paper busy work" in favor of cooperative, hands-on activities so that "kids are learning when they don't even know they are learning."</p> <p>Hayes Cooper teachers are eager to succeed and enjoy putting in long hours. Hardy notes, "I usually have to run people out of this building."</p> <p>Highlighted in SERVE's 1994 "Sharing Success" program, Hayes Cooper received the 2002 Governor's Education Achievement Award in Mississippi. As Mississippi's only charter school, Hayes Cooper is unique in its track record of excellence and is indeed an oasis in the Mississippi Delta.</p>
<p>Beliefs Count</p> <p>Hayes Cooper has certain institutional beliefs that drive the educational system of the school:</p> <p>All students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can learn. • Will experience integrated, relevant and challenging instruction to prepare students for lifelong learning experiences. • Who do not meet basic standards will be remediated. <p>The principal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be a dynamic facilitator for the program. <p>All teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will maintain high expectations. • Will address all learning styles. <p>All parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will take an active role in student learning and behavior by signing parent/guardian commitment pledge. • And community members will be vital resources for the school. <p>All classrooms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be safe, risk-free environments. <p>And collegiality among administration, faculty, staff, and parents will permeate the school climate.</p>	<p>Teacher Retention and Development</p> <p>Because of the environment created by parental involvement and high expectations, Hayes Cooper has little difficulty attracting and keeping qualified teachers. Attributable in part to a first-year teacher mentoring program and the district's summative and formative teacher evaluation process, Hardy has created an atmosphere where teachers share the same high level of expectations as parents and students.</p> <p>All faculty and staff are required to receive a minimum of 20 hours of professional development annually related specifically to the science, mathematics, and technology curricula. Additionally, the professional development must relate to the integration of the environmental studies and interdisciplinary studies curricula. Faculty and staff also</p>	<p>References</p> <p>Cleveland School District. (2001, November). <i>Petition for a charter school</i>. Approved by the Cleveland Board of Education, November 8, 2001. Unpublished manuscript.</p> <p>Hayes Cooper Center for Math and Science. (2002, January). Application for the 2002 Governor's Education Achievement Award. Unpublished manuscript.</p> <p>Mississippi Department of Education. (2003). <i>Mississippi report card for 2001–2002</i>. Jackson, MS. Retrieved June 2, 2003, from www.mde.k12.ms.us/Account/RC2B/RC03web.pdf</p> <p>Mississippi Department of Education. (2003). <i>Mississippi test data retrieval system</i>. Retrieved June 3, 2003, from www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/td/tdwww.htm</p> <p>Roberson, T. R. (2002, December). <i>Mississippi charter schools status report 2001–2002</i>. Report presented to the Mississippi State Board of Education, Jackson, MS.</p>

Rural School Teacher Shelley Marsh and Teaching as a Performing Art

By Charles Ahearn

Nearly one in three of America's school-age children attends public schools in rural areas or small towns of fewer than 25,000 people.

A new 50-state report with state-by-state ranking from the Rural School and Community Trust suggests an urgent need for policymakers to pay attention to rural education issues across the nation. The report, geared to state education policymakers and the rural people they serve, aims to shed light on an often-neglected facet of American public education. The report uses two gauges: the *Importance Gauge* to determine the factors that combine to make rural education important to a particular state and the *Urgency Gauge* to determine the factors that combine to make it imperative that policymakers pay attention to rural education issues. (For a full discussion of how the two gauges are merged to determine a national "Rural Education Priority" ranking for each state, please see: www.ruraledu.org/rpm/rpm502a.htm.)

The National Rural Education Association (NREA) is the oldest established national organization of its kind. Formerly known as the REA, the Association traces its origins to 1907, when it was originally founded as the Department of Rural Education. Through the



years, it has evolved as a strong and respected organization of rural school administrators, teachers, school board members, regional service agency personnel, researchers, business and industry representatives, and others interested in maintaining the vitality of rural school systems across the country.

The National Rural Education Association Rural Teacher of the Year for 2002–2003 is Shelley White Marsh, a teacher at Easterling Primary School in Marion, South Carolina, and also a member of the SERVE Teachers of the Year Advisory Committee (TOYAC).

Recognition

This national recognition required that Marsh document high standards in the areas of student success, collaboration, and leadership. Based on descriptions and examples provided by Marsh and confirmed by administrators, other

teachers, community members, parents, and students, it was determined by state and national screenings that Marsh incorporated the concepts of high standards in her teaching for all students and demonstrated that all students can succeed in learning at high levels. In addition, Marsh has demonstrated excellence as a contributing member of her rural community, a community that she is committed to serving for many years.

Currently, Marsh continues to teach her second-grade class while making presentations to educational and civic organizations and while serving as an advisor to the NREA Executive Committee on issues related to her area of teaching. At the NREA convention, she gave a keynote speech so rich in content and examples of her teaching techniques that the NREA membership unanimously voted her to fill the additional post of teacher advisor to NREA.

I was a member of the audience that day and listened as Marsh related anecdotes about her teaching and her students. While at the podium, she actually changed into several "costumes" to illustrate how she used costumes to emphasize concepts. Her presentation reminded me of the concept of "Teaching as a Performing Art" that had been the

The NREA is a non-profit entity, directed by an elected executive committee, consisting of national representatives of rural school administrators, rural school teachers, state education agencies, educational service agencies, higher education, rural school district boards of education, and at-large constituencies.

name of a teacher preparation course taught by Max Rafferty, the former California State Superintendent of Schools, and the name of a subsequent book of the same name by Seymour Sarason (1999). After listening to her presentation, I asked if I might visit her classroom in Marion, South Carolina.

The Classroom

Marsh's second-grade class decor was also a performance: The students entered what looked like the set of *Survivor*, and the interior of the room left no space unused. A large sign at the top of the wall read, "You never know what you can do until you try." A student station included the large *Survivor* logo with the words "outwit, outplay, outlast." A large bulletin board with the caption "Real Cool Work" included student work, and a small table was adorned with a reading lamp, a toy school bus, and a lava lamp.

An area for special lessons included a rocking chair for the teacher and a large, oval carpet for the students. The rest of the room was covered with a variety of information including the alphabet, spelling words, and student work. Large cards with the days of the week floated on strings attached to the ceiling and stored away in a closet were two birds: Mrs. Name Bird and Mr. State Bird.

The Lesson

But the main attraction was Marsh and her second-graders. As I watched in awe, Marsh taught a spelling lesson like none I had ever seen. Marsh's students learned spelling sitting down, standing up, dancing, and singing.

Next, Marsh asked her class to close their eyes and put their heads on their desks no peeking. During this 20-second

period, she put on a hunting vest and camouflage hat. When the students looked up, "the hunter" proceeded with a lesson on hunting safety. The students provided all the answers.

A large ceramic owl was then brought to the front of the room. It looked fierce, and its head rotated. Even this well-behaved class murmured at the sight of the defiant owl. Marsh also produced a book on "owling," the study of owls, and discussed the difference between hunting owls and studying them. And then she produced the grand finale, an owl pellet (a wad of bolus or indigestible material regurgitated by a carnivorous bird).

Marsh posed the question, "What did the owl have for dinner?" The answer, of course, was in the pellet represented by resistant remains. The students gathered on the oval carpet, where Marsh began dissecting the owl pellet, and a small skull appeared.

"It's a bird," concluded one student.

Another said, "But that looks like fur. Maybe it's a rat."

Another asked, "What is that hole in the skull?"

"It's where an eye used to be," said Marsh.

"Yuk!" they all said in unison but were completely engaged, as Marsh continued to unlock the pellet's mysteries.

The Interview

While her students attended their "pull-out" art class, Marsh answered the following questions.

SERVE: You were named the National Rural Education Association (NREA) teacher of the year for 2002. How did that change your life?

Marsh: After I was named the NREA teacher of the year, I was invited to speak to various

organizations. For example, I was invited to be the featured speaker at the National Rural Education Association national conference in Portland last year. While there, I was elected the teacher representative on one of their advisory committees for 2003.

Several newspapers have run articles about my teaching and my school and community. This has helped put Easterling Primary School and rural schools in general on the map, so to speak. Those who attend my presentations and read the newspaper articles find that schools in rural America are doing many of the same effective things that larger schools in urban areas are doing. This gains a lot of recognition and respect for our rural school, rural school district, and community.

I have also been invited to speak to numerous agencies and organizations in South Carolina, including the South Carolina Alliance for Black School Educators, the South Carolina Character Education Partnership Team, and the South Carolina Rural Education Association. An organization in Kansas just contacted me to speak at its annual in-service meeting in 2004.

SERVE: What do you see as the special advantages of rural schools?

Marsh: We do pull together more, I think. We use our community as a resource. We have a lot of business support and community involvement. Many of the parents and community members volunteer to help.

I feel we are like a family, and we talk about that all the time. This school and community feel like a close-knit family, and we are very supportive of each other. The teachers at Easterling Primary will share their ideas with other teachers. I have been invited by the teachers here to just go into their

filing cabinets, find what I need, and use it. I, of course, share with them too.

The community is also very supportive of the school. We have a parent resource person who goes out and attracts volunteers from the community to come in and speak and work. She also has a van to transport the parents who can't drive to school functions. We have a great turnout for PTA meetings, parent conferences, and other school functions.

SERVE: Why do you think you were chosen national rural teacher of the year?

Marsh: I guess it would have to do with how I use my teaching style to obtain and keep the children's attention and help them to develop associations to remember the content I teach. I also think the committee that made the final decision was impressed with the costumes I use to help students remember lessons on spelling, reading, mathematics, science, and other aspects of the curriculum.

I began to use costumes, puppets, and other memory-enhancing techniques because younger students have shorter attention spans. In addition, second-graders are already acclimated to technology. Television, computers, and video games have images that change every few seconds. My students are accustomed to this and expect this constant change of scenery. So, I dress up, use puppets, or act out lessons with props for each subject each day to grab and keep their attention. It works! Second-graders love cartoons and lively visuals like that, so I become a lively, animated visual.

My students are able to remember the lessons I teach them by associating the content of the lessons with the costumes I wear and the characters I

portray. For example, I use a Superman outfit for "Superman Subtraction," a "Captain Capitalization" costume when I am talking about capital letters, a Raggedy Ann costume for "Raggedy Ann Addition," and a skeleton costume for "Mr. Goodbody," when we are engaged in the study of the human body. My second-graders know the specific skill we are going to work on when they see these characters, and this helps them remember these concepts and skills throughout the year and as they venture through their school career.

I also make our storybooks come to life for them by dressing up like the main characters in the stories. In character, I "tell" the story to my second-graders.

SERVE: There is a concept referred to as "teaching as a performing art." Do you see teaching as a performance and an art?

Marsh: Yes, it is pretty much a performance and an art. I have my own stage, and my students are waiting to see what I am going to do. Like other artists, I must be creative and inventive. Each student in my captive audience is like a sponge waiting to soak up any and all new information.

SERVE: What evidence of improved student performance have you seen as a direct result of your style of teaching?

Marsh: Here at Easterling Primary School, we assess each student's reading level at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year. I have had children jump two or three reading levels in one year. This includes average children, gifted children, and those with special needs.

SERVE: Would you advise other teachers to plan performances as well as lessons?

Marsh: Oh, yes. Definitely! I would especially encourage high school teachers to plan performances and "dress up." They tell me that it only works for me because I teach in a primary school. However, if they would just put on a hat or wear a pair of silly glasses, their students would love it!

I know several high school teachers who present material to their students in a similar fashion. One high school physics teacher roller blades in his classroom to teach motion. His students begged him to wear the roller blades around the hallways. So, now Fridays have become Roller Blade Friday. I teach predicting and inferring skills while I roller blade in my classroom. My students think I'm the coolest person in the world.

SERVE: Was there anything in particular that influenced your teaching style?

Marsh: I observed my mother effectively use puppets and costumes in her first- and second-grade science classes. In addition to maintaining the attention of her class, it looked like fun, and her students responded enthusiastically. So, I tried some costumes out when I did my student teaching. It was very well received, and based on that success, I expanded those few costumes to many more.

My mother and I now have so many costumes, puppets, and props that my dad had to add shelves to his new storage building to hold our containers of educational fun.

SERVE: How do teachers and staff members feel about your teaching style?

Marsh: Other teachers are very supportive. A few of them have even used headbands, hats, and things like that to supplement teaching and to create associations for various concepts. My

principal, Mrs. Cook, loves it. Actually, when I was still student teaching, Mrs. Cook and Dr. Cheryl Allread, the superintendent of schools, would come in all the time just to visit and see what was going on, not just to evaluate.

SERVE: How do parents react to your teaching style?

Marsh: They are also very interested and supportive. I've had many parents come in and want to sit and watch. Of course, they are invited. The only drawback is that the parents want me to move up with their children because they feel that the next year won't be quite as fun and instructive.

On the last day of school, a mother and her child came in to see me at about 4:00 in the afternoon. Her child had been crying since she left school that day. She didn't want to leave second grade. The mom started crying, too. She was glad her child had been in my class. I've gotten many calls and letters from parents like her thanking me for having their child in my class.

Also, some parents react by demonstrating their talents for the class. For example, during our human body unit, a parent brought in X-rays and discussed them. Another parent, whose native language is Spanish, read a book to the class in Spanish and then translated it into English. My students were very impressed.

SERVE: Are there any costumes you tried but decided to eliminate from your repertoire?

Marsh: There are not any that have failed, but I do change some because some characters lose their fame and familiarity. Many of my characters and props originate from the current pop culture or the latest fads. For example, Blues Clues was popular in the past. However, I

wouldn't use those costumes now. Barney was also more popular in the past, but I don't dress up as Barney anymore. I do add new costumes such as Shrek and Multiplication Men in Black to replace the ones that become dated.

SERVE: Do your students react in any unusual ways when you are in costume?

Marsh: Well, when I did my student teaching, I was in the kindergarten class part of the year. Kindergartners give a whole new spin to "dressing up." They actually believed that I was the person I had literally transformed myself into each day. The kindergartners wanted to know where Ms. Marsh had gone. They wanted to know what (the character I was portraying) did with their teacher!

Last year, I was teaching a writing lesson. My second-graders were using the word said too much in the stories they were writing. I told them that said was tired and that they needed to use synonyms for said. I put on a nightgown, nightcap, held a teddy bear, and sat in my rocking chair. I told them that we were going to put "said to bed."

This year, my students became very attached to two of my puppets, "Mrs. Name Bird" and "Mr. State Bird." Mrs. Name Bird visits at the beginning of each school year to help the students become acquainted with each other's likes and dislikes and especially their names. Mr. State Bird tours our classroom once a week during a spelling lesson. He points out our state for the week. The students thought the puppets were real and became interested in their "social life." They wanted Mrs. Name Bird to go out on a date with Mr. State Bird. My second-graders even wanted to know what the birds did over the weekend, where they slept, and what they ate.

SERVE: What made you decide to become a teacher and stay in your community?

Marsh: I grew up in the community adjacent to Marion, South Carolina, where I teach. It is a rural community also. I like the small-town atmosphere, and I wanted to stay close to home. I actually did my student teaching at Easterling Primary School. When the principal offered me a contract, I decided to stay.

I don't see myself doing anything else. A lot of people have asked me if I plan to become a school administrator, but it's not my thing. I've always wanted to be a teacher. When I was a little girl, I founded my own Barbie school. And I would also boss—I mean teach—my little brother!

My mother and grandmother were both excellent teachers. So, now I am a third-generation teacher. My mother's success as a primary school teacher was a big influence on my career choice.

I was also inspired by Christa McAuliffe. I was in the fourth-grade when she embarked on the Challenger mission. Her plan was to strengthen education through the space program. Her motto, "I touch the future, I teach" is very special to me.

SERVE: What do you think is important for your students to remember about their experiences in your classroom?

Marsh: I want them to be able to not only remember what I taught them but also to build on their skills in the next grade. Most of them can read and add and subtract. I want them to be prepared to take it to the next level. I hope my memory-enhancing techniques, including the costumes, will help them remember. I have taught my second-graders foundational skills they will need in the next grade. I want them to be prepared to do higher-level, multi-task skills later and be successful and confident in their actions.

The Rural School District Superintendents' Network at SERVE

By Charles Ahearn

The Rural School District Superintendents' Network at SERVE was launched in 2003, under the direction of SERVE's Executive Director, Jack Sanders, as a new SERVE initiative to involve rural/small school district superintendents in intra-state and national rural activities. The purpose of the Network is to help participating rural school district superintendents and SERVE stay abreast of rural issues, especially in the Southeast; to promote intra-state networking among rural school superintendents; and to develop procedural knowledge for the purpose of improving rural school districts and schools.

Preliminary discussions with rural superintendents and CEOs of state superintendent associations indicated that there was a niche for an inter-state network of rural/small school district superintendents. Continuing discussions with these parties and with SERVE Policy Analysts, located in departments of education in the SERVE region, provided additional encouragement and direction to this effort. This assisted SERVE in the identification of approximately three rural/small district superintendents from each state in the SERVE region.

Members of the Network represent the diversity of the region and are representative of small/rural superintendents who lead high-performing districts or who have demonstrated a sincere interest in learning about district and school-level improvement



strategies and in implementing these strategies in their districts.

The charter meeting of the Network of small/rural school district superintendents was held in Atlanta, Georgia, in the spring of 2003. The faculty for this charter meeting included representatives of the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA), the National Rural Education Association (NREA), the Educational Resources Information Center/Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools at the Appalachian Education Laboratory (ERIC/CRESS at AEL), Ohio University's Educational Studies Department, the Institute for Regional & Rural Studies in Education, a Network member superintendent assisted by an art teacher from Pickens County, Georgia, and SERVE staff.

The theme of the two-day meeting was "networking," and superintendents were invited to send in a brief description of an effective practice that contributed to their success as a superintendent. They were also invited to

submit an unresolved challenge. These successes and challenges were posted around the meeting room, and when the superintendents arrived, each was asked to read the successes and challenges sent in by the other superintendents. The superintendents then located superintendents who, in their opinion, had an interesting success that they wanted to know more about or an unresolved challenge about which they felt they could offer some assistance or advice. This initial networking activity continued throughout the two-day meeting during breaks, during a networking dinner, and at the evening reception.

Bob Stephens, the Director of the Institute for Regional and Rural Studies in Education, synthesized the discussion by summarizing patterns and themes at strategic points during the meeting. In addition, Stephens met one-on-one with participants and presenters to assess reactions and expressed needs. His subsequent synthesis report has

informed SERVE's work, including interventions with superintendents and agenda building.

Steve Bingham, SERVE's Education Leadership Director, discussed the demographics of SERVE's six-state region, the rural nature of the Southeast, and the vision and mission of SERVE with the superintendents.

Kari Afrstrom, representing AESA, answered frequently asked questions about educational service agencies, noting that educational service agencies provide high-quality, cost-effective support programs for local schools and districts enabling cooperating districts to share costs rather than fund duplicative programs.

Al Eads, Jr., President of the National Rural Education Association, overviewed the background, vision, and objectives of the NREA. Eads said:

Our vision is that the NREA will be the leading national organization providing services which enhance educational opportunities for rural schools and their communities, and our objectives are to serve as a national advocate and representative for rural education at all levels; provide coordination at the national level for rural education programs and activities; provide leadership for rural related conferences and workshops, and provide a

forum for all those involved in public education in rural communities; promote state, regional, and local delivery systems, which bring efficient and effective education for children in rural areas; encourage the collection and dissemination of promising practices; encourage colleges and universities to develop materials and resources specifically for rural schools; and stimulate discussion about research and policy development regulating educational opportunities for all students.

Robert Hagerman, representing ERIC/CRESS at AEL, provided materials about the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Charles Ahearn, SERVE's Director of Special Initiatives, discussed the networking theme of the meeting, describing the networking leader as one who sees relationships as the essential way to get the job done, who influences the organization by influencing individuals, and who leads and manages by getting things done through others. Ahearn presented five, research-based networking principles described in Wayne Baker's book, *Networking Smart: How to Build Relationships for Personal and Organizational Success* (2000) and illustrated them with examples and stories. The principles are as follows:

- Relationships are a fundamental human need.
- People tend to do what is expected of them.
- Leaders tend to network with others like themselves.
- Repeated interaction encourages cooperation.
- It's a small world.

On the first day of the meeting, research scientist Jerry Natkin and evaluator Kathleen Mooney conducted a Nominal Group process, exploring the most important issues currently facing rural school superintendents in the Southeast. Of the 55 issues identified, the superintendents were most concerned about:

- Recruiting, employment, and retention
- Parental involvement in student's academic achievement/performance
- Student behavior and motivation
- Teacher motivation and change

On the second day, Natkin and Mooney facilitated focus group discussions, exploring the two highest-priority issues in greater detail. In these sessions, superintendents shared their thoughts about the issues, offered advice to other superintendents, and discussed how SERVE can effectively address these issues in the Southeast.

In her presentation entitled, "Why Teachers Don't Want to be Principals and Why That Matters," Aimee Howley, Professor and Chair of the Educational Studies Department at Ohio University, summarized a study based on a survey of some 2,000 teachers in Ohio. One thousand of them were licensed as administrators, and approximately the same number were not. Of those responding:

- 62.5% were female.
- 37.5% were male.
- 7% taught in pre-K.
- 30% taught in primary school.
- 31% taught in middle school.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31% taught in high school. • 1% taught in adult education. • 44.6% coached. • 55.4% did not. <p>Their mean age was 43.7. Their average number of years as a teacher was 17.8, and their average number of years in their current position was 10.</p> <p>Professor Howley's findings focused on both incentives and disincentives influencing teachers' decisions either to pursue or not to pursue positions as school principals. The most important incentives were the ability to affect the lives of a greater number of children, anticipated satisfaction of providing support to staff, anticipated satisfaction associated with "making a difference," and a chance to have a greater impact as a principal.</p> <p>The most important disincentives were anticipated stress associated with having to play politics; anticipated stress about having less time at home with family members; principals increased responsibility for local, state, and federal mandates; accountability for societal conditions beyond educators' control; and decreased opportunity to work with children directly.</p> <p>According to the findings, based on a scale comparing incentives with disincentives, there was a significant difference between the mean score for disincentives and the mean score for incentives: The mean for the disincentive scale was 2.7, and the mean for the incentive scale was 2.4.</p> <p>Teachers who hold administrative licensure and have applied for administrative jobs, according to Howley's findings, are older than other teachers, have more experience, are more likely to teach at higher grade levels, and are more likely to have been coaches.</p> <p>According to Professor Howley, superintendents should know the following: Teachers are more</p>	<p>concerned about the difficulties and frustrations of the job than with its satisfactions. There are teachers who want to be principals but who aren't being hired. Women and older applicants are being overlooked for jobs as principals. She encouraged the superintendents to carefully consider these applicants.</p> <p>The final presentation to the rural school district superintendents was given by Superintendent Lee Shiver (a member of the superintendents' group) and Kathleen Thompson, a National Board Certified art teacher from Lee Shiver's school district, Pickens County, Georgia. In a presentation entitled "How Rural Schools Use Urban Resources," Shiver defined a useable urban resource as one that can be visited within the school day and which can be completed in time for the busses to return for their scheduled after-school routes. He emphasized the variety of cultural opportunities in Atlanta, Georgia, a city that fit into his definition of a useable resource and gave two examples of resources visited: the Atlanta Zoo and Shakespeare's Tavern.</p> <p>Kathleen Thompson informed the superintendents that there were also ways to transport resources from urban centers to rural districts. She gave examples of materials she had received from the National Gallery of Art and explained how they could obtain "affiliate loan status."</p> <p>The charter meeting of the rural school district superintendents' Network concluded with Shiver and Thompson leading a pre-arranged visit to Atlanta's High Museum of Art, where museum officials hosted a tour of the museum including a pre-opening viewing of the Old Masters, Impressionists, and Moderns: French Masterworks from the State Pushkin Museum, Moscow.</p> <p>"Networking" will be a continuing theme of the Network. These</p>	<p>rural school district superintendents will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in Network-sponsored activities. These activities will include two regional meetings per year and one national meeting. • Articulate and reflect upon each other's and SERVE's vision, mission, and goals. • Engage in the examination of research, specifically relating to rural/small school district and school-level improvement. • Reflect on presentations of best practices, specifically found to be successful in improving student achievement in rural/small school districts. • Engage in discussions of and communications relating to emerging initiatives, especially those affecting rural school districts. • Participate in discussions/presentations of each other's short- and long-range plans relating to school enhancement/improvement. • Share in the identification and design of professional development events designed to improve rural school districts/schools/personnel. • Establish executive communication channels between the superintendent and the Executive Director of SERVE for the purpose of identifying evidenced-based program needs of rural school districts and activities of the Network. • Promote the importance of rural schools and the critical role of the rural school district superintendent. • Share information about initiatives/programs designed to enhance/improve rural education.
---	---	---



PPRUR

SERVE
*Improving Learning through
Research & Development*

Main Office:
P.O. Box 5367
Greensboro, North Carolina 27435

Publications:
1203 Governor's Square Blvd., Suite 400
Tallahassee, FL 32301