

The Learning Curve

This page was written and designed by Education First in cooperation with the Bibb County Board of Education, the Peyton Anderson Foundation, and The Telegraph.



Your weekly guide to students, schools, teachers and triumphs in Bibb County's Public Schools

Getting To Know



Gail Gilbert Principal Skyview Elementary

Hometown: Born in Easton, Pa.

Schools attended: Mount de Sales Academy; Georgia Southern University; Georgia College & State University; University of Georgia

Degrees: Bachelors in Elementary Education; Masters in Early Childhood; Specialist in Educational Administration

Professional Affiliations: PAGE

Years in education: 30

Years in Bibb County Public Schools: 30

Years in current position: 12 years as a principal (8 at Burghard Elementary, 1 at Morgan Elementary, 3 at Skyview)

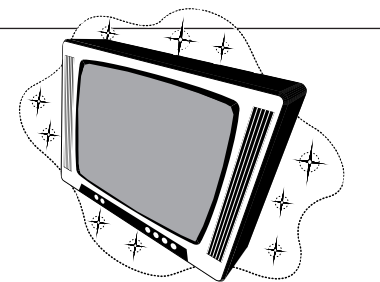
Favorite Teacher growing up: My fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Clark. She allowed us the opportunity to participate in many spelling bees, and I could excel in this area.

Personal educational philosophy: I believe that all students can learn in an environment that is nurtured by a caring, compassionate teacher. I believe that students need to know their teacher sincerely cares about them and shows this both in word and action.

Professional Goals: I have achieved my dream of being a school principal, never knowing that someday I would be given the opportunity to open a brand new elementary school. This has truly been one of the highlights of my career.

Why education? From the time I was a young girl I played school with my dolls. I love helping people (children and adults) learn new things, just as I love learning new things. I guess that's why I always loved non-fiction books.

Favorite story from the classroom: Not sure if I can pinpoint a favorite story from the classroom, but my most rewarding experience as a teacher was team teaching with Linda Bivins, another Bibb County principal. We team taught in the same classroom for three years as Early Childhood Preventive Curriculum (ECPC) teachers. We had the second grade students identified as being at high-risk academically. Our students excelled academically at the end of the school year, and I was able to master the craft of teaching by observing and co-teaching with my teacher partner. It was a win-win situation for both our students and we as the teachers.



For up-to-date information and events concerning Bibb County Public Schools, tune in to Cox Cable Channel 17!

Communities Gather in Schools to Celebrate Reading

"We knew we were focusing on literacy, and what better way to cap it off then to get the parents involved?" asks Lane Elementary Literacy Coach Dr. Sonya Thomas rhetorically.

"We wanted to bring the parents into the school," explains Burghard Elementary Media Specialist Elaine Murray, "as well as give them something to take home to help their children with reading."

"It's to promote reading, and if we can make it fun, the better it is," says Weaver Middle 6th grade Social Studies teacher Colleen Mahaney. "That's really what will keep the kids reading."

Each of these schools hosted a version of a reading night – Lane and Burghard for the first time and Weaver in its 9th year – inviting in students and parents to discuss a book already read, listen to storytellers, buy used books, literacy games, information on the importance of children reading, ways to encourage them to read more, and, of course, food.

Lane hosted their *Celebrating the Love of Reading* with more than 250 people attending events throughout the school. "It was a fun way for parents to see teachers, students to see teachers, and to commune together around reading," said Dr. Thomas.

Beginning with a Reader's Theater, parents enjoyed a pizza dinner while the 5th grade Book Club performed their rendition of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs as Told by the Wolf*. A student teacher from Wesleyan University told stories, then families met in the gym for reading-related games like Scategories, Word Bingo, and a Book Walk. The Media Center hosted a used book sale, with nothing more than fifty cents.

According to Media Specialist Judy Sudderth, the money raised by the book sale will go to buying more books for the library. So far, almost 12,000 books have been checked out this year. "Our children have been reading so much, we're trying to keep a wide variety available."

"I'm so glad y'all are here," Burghard's featured speaker, Middle Georgia Regional Library Head of Children's Services Joanne Hinman, told the audience. "It's so fun to have



Students at Lane Elementary play word games in the gym.

grownups here along with the children."

Burghard's night was titled *Family Reading Night and Spaghetti Dinner*. Originally, it was just going to be the dinner, but the more they thought about it, they wanted to be able to provide something educational for the parents as well. "Reading is such a critical skill, and anything we can do to help bolster that level, we all benefit," explained Title I Home School Facilitator Florence Herring, who helped organize the event with Murray.



Joanne Hinson from the Library System speaks to Burghard Elementary parents.

Hinman – before beginning her storytelling, the most fun part of her job she says – talked to the parents about the importance of children having the love of reading and the many services offered by the libraries, including story time. She also gave them materials which can help them work with the children should they be having difficulties. "Spend time everyday

reading to them and with them. You're not teaching them to read; you're teaching them to love to read."

Weaver's *Reading Circle* is going strong in its 9th year, with almost 400 people showing up for this exciting event. At the beginning of the year, a book is picked out which every student, teacher, and administrator in the school will have read by this time. Parents are encouraged to come in and buy a copy to read along with their children. "It's a school-wide effort," said Mahaney.

Walking past displays students have made centering on this year's book – Ann Rinaldi's *Numbering All the Bones* – families gathered in the cafeteria and was handed a packet containing crossword puzzles, word searches, and short quizzes about the material in the book. The Art Department had decorated the entranceway to resemble the entrance to a prison fort – a central location in the book. The Jazz Band performed and students read their own versions of the story. "There will be something for everyone," says Mahaney.



Weaver Middle's cafeteria was decorated by the art department to resemble the prison fort from the book.

"As long as we can bring the community in for positive reasons, it makes our job a little easier," said Burghard Principal Lynne Donehoo.

"I want to break the cycle [of illiteracy]," said Hinman. "If our parents will read and read and read, the children will learn to love to read."

Children's Author Visits Bruce Elementary

"I hope you all have big dreams." Children's author and storyteller Carmen Deedy told 4th and 5th graders at Bruce Elementary. As they applauded and thanked her for spending the morning with them to tell stories, they were handed an autographed copy of her book and a bookmark that said "Readers Today Make Leaders Tomorrow."

"By having her here and giving them a book, we hope it will inspire them to read more," says Principal Dr. Gloria McSwain (now retired). "It would be great to have more authors [come speak with the students]."

Seeing her telling stories at a conference years ago, Dr. McSwain began inviting Deedy to Ballard-Hudson Middle (where she was Principal at the time) to share her amazing talents. The kids began to look forward to it and that the book, so she implemented it into Bruce's program.

Bruce practices EBIS – Effective Behavior Instructional Support – as part of the Whole School Discipline. Throughout the first semester, students earned "Bruce Bucks" for good behavior, and the ones with a certain amount earned a place at the assemblies. Each grade received a different book based on their reading level.

Deedy, an immigrant in 1964, has written six books since 1989 and has five more ready to come out. As a mother, she signed her daughters up for monthly book clubs. "I was just as excited when they came in the mail," she remembers.



Author Carmen Deedy (sitting in chair) tells a wide variety of stories to Bruce Elementary students.

As she read the books with her girls – reading is something she says she didn't get to do much as a child – her love of telling stories began to grow, driving her to learn as many as she could. Currently, she is able to share almost 75 personal stories and knows almost 700 folk stories. On deciding which one to tell, she says she never knows until the kids show up. "It's a matter of quickly assessing who your audience is," she said,

Her true love out of author, book reader, and storyteller is definitely storyteller, she points out. "I tend to tell stories rather than read because a lot of kids don't have people telling stories to them. I find that stories really form a connective tissue; they bridge all kinds of things: age, race, culture. If

the story is going well, it will get quieter and quieter, and everyone will be in the same place." Her measure of success is whether she can effectively engage her audience to the point they ask for another story when she's done.

"She is talented," praised Dr. McSwain as she surveyed her students sitting forward, attentively listening and reacting to the story. She wants her students to realize that authors are real people, and they can accomplish anything, especially if they keep reading. "By having one of her books, we hope it will inspire them to read more."