

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

Bernd Elementary receives donation to build new playground

"This is just another example of a school partnership getting stronger," remarked Deputy Superintendent Sylvia McGee at a recent ceremony at Bernd Elementary.

GEICO, which adopted the school, raised funds within their company to buy the school a brand-new playground. According to Valerie Lemmon, part of the committee which spear-headed the fundraising, they wanted to see what major thing they could do for the school. After a visit around the campus this past summer, "it was noticed the playground equipment is outdated."

Realizing that a place to play has many benefits to the children, including physical exercise and socialization, it also provides a central area that can bring the surrounding neighborhoods together. "It's critical and essential, not only for the school, but for the community as well," says Principal Dr. Linda Harris.

"It will be so nice for them to have a place to play," adds Lemmons.

Meetings began at the end of August and by the end of January, GEICO had raised more than \$10,000 to donate to the school. "They were wonderful," says Harris.

At the school level, Harris and her teachers met to discuss exactly what their playground would look like and what it would include. "Harris knew what her kids wanted," said Raynette Evans, Athletic Director for Bibb County Public Schools, who also helped with the designs. "We wanted the most practical equipment for as many kids as possible."

To bring the school and GEICO even closer together, Harris decided to bring them in on the decision-making process. With several designs in hand, they went to GEICO and decided on what it would look like.

"We determined what was most needed," said Evans.

In the ceremony at the school, the entire student body came to the cafeteria to see the check handed over and to personally thank the employees of GEICO for their contribution. GEICO employees lined the entire front row of the audience, and their introduction was met with wild applause. Representatives from each class came forward to offer them cards which every student signed.

"We are very excited about this," said McGee. "Every child in this community will see an effect of this contribution."

The donation did come with one requirement, Lemmon told the students: "the only thing we ask is you let us play on it once in a while."

Judging by the standing ovation, they seem okay with that.

Bibb County Public Schools works to improve reading instruction

Bibb County Public School teachers have an opportunity to improve their technique for teaching reading and improving literacy. The Office of Professional Learning wrote for and received the approval to offer the classes needed for the teachers to earn their Reading Endorsement. This is the third endorsement offered by the county, the other two being a Gifted Endorsement and a Teacher Support Specialist Endorsement.

"We saw a need to improve overall reading instruction and student achievement in reading and writing," says Rudine Wynn of the Office of Professional Learning. "We want to move the system forward."

To complete the endorsement, a group of teachers sign up, and a cohort is formed. So far, Bibb County has had two cohorts receive their endorsement (13 participants in the first and 8 in the second), and the third starts in the fall. Each cohort must go through three different courses, totaling in more than 150 hours of instruction and outside work, which not only show them new ways of teaching and expose them to new theories, but give them the opportunity to practice and be assessed.

"I needed to know what the new best practices were," said Jean Kiernan, a Kindergarten teacher at Heritage Elementary and member of the Second Cohort. "I love reading; it's my favorite subject to teach." By going through the courses, she could see what instruction was like in the later grades and how those teachers built upon what the students had already learned.

Cynthia Frederick, the Literacy Coach at Bruce-Weir Elementary and member of the First Cohort, has been teaching for 30 years, but says she "wanted to update some of my skills, and reading is such an important subject."

Bernd Elementary Assistant Principal Dr. Sherri Flagg was a part of the First Cohort and says even though she is not a teacher, it was



COHORT 1 (l-r): sitting - Melissa Kuipers, Kathy Grant; 1st row - Rudine Wynn, Dr. Sherri Flagg, Dr. Mae Sheftall (instructor), Jodi Short, LaNaye Parrott; 2nd row - Deborah White, Dr. Kathryn Powell (instructor), Cynthia Frederick; not pictured - Lashun Crawford, Andria Magallano, Janis Peavy, Jane Starling, Travi'e Thomas, instructors Dr. Leslie Crawford & Saketha Sarter

important for her to be a part of this. "As a principal, you've got to be in the classroom on a day-to-day basis. To lead, you have to stay one step ahead."

In the first of the three courses they were required to take, they are taught the new trends in teaching reading: new computer programs, new techniques, vocabulary words, differing philosophies on teaching, the history of teaching reading, and the foundations of a child's education. The second class focuses on assessment: how you know if a child is actually learning, different forms of assessment, and developing plans. They were also required to tutor a child and assess their progress. The third and final class was exciting for most of them since it involved applying what they had learned: they were placed in a classroom setting and were videotaped teaching the students.

"They had to demonstrate they could apply



COHORT II (l-r): 1st row - Joyce Cicalese, Dr. Mae Sheftall (instructor), Tonya Coons, Susan Goins, Julie May; 2nd row - Jean Kiernan, Elizabeth Finch, Dr. Kathryn Powell (instructor) Sandra Davis; not pictured - Jan Trotter, instructors Dr. Leslie Crawford & Saketha Sarter

what they learned," says Dr. Kathryn Powell, one of the endorsement's instructors.

"They learned the strategies, as well as became more involved in the delivery," says Dr. Mae Sheftall, another of the instructors.

"I have a whole different look on teaching," says Kathy Grant, Rice Elementary teacher and member of the First Cohort. "Learning can take place any where there's a lot of interaction in the classroom."

All of the participants speak highly of the endorsement: not only did they learn a lot, they came away with a larger understanding of teaching reading in all the grades and can call on each other anytime for help. Within their own schools, each says they are working to spread what they learned.

"Everything I've learned, I've incorporated into my classes," says Sharon Finch of Appling Middle School and the Second Cohort.

Hutching's Career Center upperclassmen start charitable and fun tradition



Junior Lance Daniel and junior Leesa Collier show off some of this year's prom fashions.

Some Hutching's Career Center juniors and seniors were recently able to raise money for Relay for Life as well as get their fellow students excited about the upcoming prom. This is the school's first prom (this being the first class of seniors), and these students wanted to start a tradition they hope carries on into the future: a prom fashion show.

Dresses and tuxedos, donated by Special Moments on Vineville, were modeled by seven girls and seven guys selected by Principal Laura Perkins and Dr. Heather Harvey.

"We were all gung-ho for it," says senior Amber Swank, adding "our schools' really big into Really for Life."

The idea came about shortly after Christmas when students began receiving adds for dresses, tuxedos, and other prom services. They thought it would be great if they could show the student body exactly what the fashion styles of this year looked like. With prom right around the corner, though, they had to get everything together pretty quickly.

"It took a lot of us to do it," says junior Leesa Collier. They were able to pull it all together in just more than a month's time.

Tickets for the event were sold for two dollars in advance or three dollars at the door. Once there, students could purchase food provided by 'The Heavenly Bakery,' the school's culinary arts classes. Tickets could also be bought for a raffle at the end of the night featuring coupons for nail services, tanning, hair salons, restaurants, and limo services. "Anything relating to prom," says Swank.

Outside of the school, All-Star Limo had several limousines there to showcase, including a Hummer, an Excursion, and a standard limousine. What the students who organized this did not know was after the showcase, they would be invited to shoot a commercial for the company right then. "That was an added bonus," says media specialist Yvonne Stuart.

Everyone involved said the night went off successfully with lots of people showing up. "A lot of the students came out to support us," says Swank.

The event was able to raise more than \$220 for Relay for Life, and it has encouraged them to work on the event even sooner next year. They hope to expand the program to include more local stores, more designers, more items to raffle off, and, of course, raise more money to donate.