

THE LEARNING Curve

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

Preparing Students for the Big Test

"The kids who need the help are the ones we have to personally reach out to," explains Miller Middle Principal Dr. Tanzy Kilcrease. "We're trying to maintain and push those in the 'needs' category into the 'exceeds' category."

Students across the county and state have all just recently gone through the annual Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT's), which, according to the Georgia Department of Education's Web site, is "designed to measure how well students acquire the skills and knowledge described in the Georgia Performance Standards (GPD and the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC)." Under the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000, students in grades one through eight are required to take this test every year in reading, English/language arts, and mathematics. Students in grades three through eight also take tests for science and social studies.

With such an important test looming, schools in Bibb County went above and beyond the normal instruction to help make sure their students were thoroughly prepared. Offering special test-taking sessions (some on



Miller Middle students spent two Saturdays reviewing test material and taking practice tests in the computer lab.

Saturdays), they invited students to come make sure they could go into the tests with confidence.

McEvoy Middle held two, all-day CRCT lock-in camps during school (March 9 and 10 for eighth graders and March 22 - 24 for seventh graders), to emphasize test-taking skills. In addition, they also held two Saturday Camps, which were voluntary for students. According to Principal Benji Morgan,

almost 200 students showed up for the extra instruction.

Throughout the practice questions, they were required to use the scratch paper and pencil provided, since they would have them available during the math portion of the test to help with computations. "They often do not take advantage of this opportunity," says Morgan. "We have made it a requirement that they must use the paper to calculate problems.

Miller Middle held two consecutive Saturday sessions, which were open "to all grades, but we really worked to get the eighth graders," says Kilcrease. (Passing the CRCT's is a requirement for eighth graders to be promoted to ninth grade.) In the three-hour sessions, students worked on test-taking skills, reviewed subject information, and took practice tests on the computer. In addition, the school hired university tutors to work with small groups of students in the morning before school.

"We do well [on these tests]," says Dr. Kilcrease, pointing out last year when they had 96% of their sixth graders meet or exceed standards and 85% of their eighth graders meet or exceed standards. "We're going to use this

opportunity to shine."

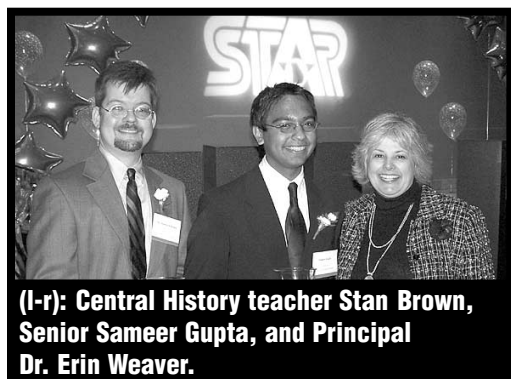
On March 4 and 11, Brookdale Elementary hosted Saturday Success Schools for their first through fifth graders (with almost 200 showing up), where they were taught test-taking strategies in reading and math. "The purpose was to build test-taking confidence and to give students that have significant deficits in reading and mathematics additional academic support," says Instructional Lead Teacher LaJeune Williams. "Our CRCT goal for this year is to make our Principal's dream a reality, which is for 90% of our students to meet or exceed standards."

Union Elementary, after spending extra time reviewing test material, hosted a pep rally "to get the kids excited about testing, to take away some of their nervousness," says Principal Efram Yarber. Bringing in the Southwest High Cheerleaders and Drum Line, they ran a PowerPoint of test-taking tips, had students participate in games to test their knowledge in a fun environment, and cheered for higher score. "We want to celebrate today how well you're going to do tomorrow," Yarber told them.

State STAR student from Bibb County

"It's cloudy and rainy outside, but the stars are shining bright in Atlanta tonight," announced Tom Wommack of the PAGE Foundation, answered by a roomful of smiles and nodding heads.

448 top-quality students, all honored at the local level by their school districts as being at the very top of their classes, were narrowed down to 14 regional winners. From



(l-r): Central History teacher Stan Brown, Senior Sameer Gupta, and Principal Dr. Erin Weaver.

there, these future leaders converged on Atlanta for the 48th Student Teacher Achievement Recognition (STAR) Banquet. Sponsored by the Professional Association of Georgia Educator (PAGE) Foundation, Inc., PAGE, the Georgia Department of Education, and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, it is a night to honor the best and brightest Georgia students, as well as the teachers that helped them along their way.

To get here, the student selected at the local level must have the highest score on one administration of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) as well as be in the top percent (or top 10 students) of their class. After being nominated, they name their STAR teacher for being one who has been influential in their education.

"Congratulations to every student and teacher in this room," Georgia Chamber of Commerce President George Israel, III told them. "Students, you are our future."

The Bibb County awards night was hosted at Macon State College and sponsored by PAGE and the Macon-Bibb County Chamber of Commerce. "It is an honor and a privilege to have you here on Macon State's campus," featured speaker and Vice President for Academic Affairs for MSC Dr. Barbara Frizzell told them that night. She pointed out to them that, being students in the United States, they were afforded many opportunities other parts of the world didn't have. "You have within your reach a level of education available to only a small portion of the world's population. Make your plans, pursue your goals, and never stop learning."

From Bibb County, Central High School Senior Sameer Gupta was honored as the STAR student, and from there, he was also named the Region 6 recipient. His STAR teacher is his International Baccalaureate History teacher, Stanford Brown. "He's one of the most amazing educators I've ever had in my life," Gupta told the distinguished guests in Atlanta.

"Knowing how exceptional Sameer is, I thought all along that he had a good chance to be the state STAR student," says Brown. "He has a very high SAT score, he is the valedictorian of his class, he is exceptional in intellect, he is exceptional in character, and he is exceptional in heart."

During the State Banquet, each Region winner was honored with a hand-blown glass star and was interviewed briefly before the crowd about their plans, hopes, and why they chose their particular teacher by Jeff Dore, a reporter for WSB-TV in Atlanta. Not only did each of the fourteen finalists receive a \$500 cash award from the Cecil B. Day Foundation at their Regional banquets, they also received a \$100 award from the Coca-Cola Company at the State Banquet.

Gupta has not finished deciding which university would like to attend, but he has been accepted to Yale, Princeton, Brown, Duke, Stanford, and Georgia Tech.

Musicians Advance to State Clinics

Each year, middle and high school band, strings, and chorus students compete in local, region, and state auditions for placement in honor ensembles. To participate in an ensemble, a student must pass several levels of audition, including some combination of prepared piece of music, sight-reading, scales, ear training (for chorus), and, for some, a shot interview.

Band, chorus, and strings groups are separate from each other, each hosting their own All-State weekend. They are divided up into 7th/8th grade, 9th/10th grade, and 11th/12th grade ensembles, with Chorus dividing grade levels up by men's, women's, and mixed groups. They will spend several days rehearsing music selected by a guest conductor for a performance at the end of the weekend.

This year, Bibb County Public Schools was represented at the state level by seven students in chorus (Matthew Ford and Matthew Reese from Central High, Trevor Connell and Emily Suber from Rutland High, Kentrel Hunt from Southwest High, and TeKeyah Martin and Rebecca Butterworth from Weaver Middle) and one student in band (Andrew Bennett from Rutland Middle).

"I was frantic because I didn't think I did that well," admits Martin, who received a perfect score of 100 on her final audition. Butterworth also did exceptionally well, scoring a 96, and each of them received a special seal on their certificate.

To prepare, students take time out of their own day to work on a selection of prepared pieces sent to them in the months prior. "You prepare by practicing scales, etudes, rudiments, and sight-reading daily," says Bennett. "I met with the Rutland High School band director at 7:00 a.m. each morning to practice and let her see how well I was doing from September until December."

Weaver Choral Director Brooke Lefevre, had them work through their solos and sight-

reading "to show them what an audition would be like."

For the clinic, students will spend the weekend in Savannah (February 23-25 for band and March 2-4 for chorus), where a guest clinician will work with them on a variety of music. For 2 - 3 hours at a time, they will gather in large groups, working on passages, rhythms, tuning, and learning to play well with musicians they have just met.

"On the first day, you report to your



Weaver Middle Chorus Director Brooke Lefevre with her two students, TeKeyah Martin and Rebecca Butterworth.

group, practice a few hours, then have supper. You come back after supper and rehearse for three more hours. The next day, you arrive early, practice until lunch, come back and practice until supper, then practice a few more hours," says Bennett "On the day of the concert, you have one final rehearsal, have lunch, then perform the concert."

"There was enough time between practice between practice to buy meals, meet people, and walk around the city a little while," says Ford.

"It was a great experience to better my musicianship," says Butterworth with a smile.