

# THE LEARNING Curve

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

## Thank you!

### Ella Carter, Northeast High School

"If you don't love this job, you can't be on it," says Northeast High School's principal, Ella Carter. "I know teaching is a calling for me." "My profession is also my calling, you always think of an excuse [not to leave]."

Besides Northeast, she has been the principal at Jones Elementary School, a teacher at both Peter G. Appling and Ballard-Hudson High Schools, and was even in charge of Bibb County's magnet program for a while.

Not only has her entire career been here, but she is also a graduate of the Bibb County public school system. She graduated from Ballard-Hudson High School at a time when it was the only school for African Americans in the county. Peter G. Appling High School, Bibb County's second high school for African Americans, was her very first job out of college, but it was back at Ballard-Hudson that she

spent half of her career. She not only taught English and French to 12<sup>th</sup> graders, she was also the advisor to the newspaper and yearbook.

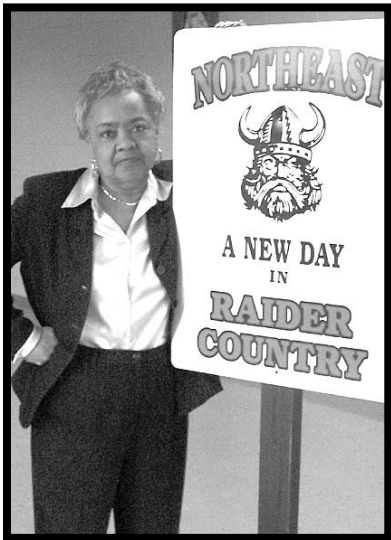
From there, she served as Curriculum Planner for Bibb County's Magnet program, and then became the principal of Jones Elementary for almost 14 years. She took charge at Northeast in 2001. According to Carter, "at every level, you have to do the very best you can." The biggest joy of education is "seeing children reach different plateaus in their lives."

Retirement, she points out, isn't going to be easy for her after so many years of working. "I can't imagine not having a job that gets me up at five and be working by six." Getting there early in the morning allowed her to accomplish her tasks so she could devote the rest of the day to her students and teachers.

In her time at Northeast, she has enjoyed growing the gifted and Advanced Placement classes, as well as watching her teachers grow and develop. "It's been a joyride, and I've given it all my energy."

As for retiring, there was no turning point that told her this was the time. "It was a hard decision to make," she says, but it's been a consideration of hers for the past several years. "I felt there were some students here who still needed me." As for the school's progress, including an award for the most improved SAT scores in the region, "we've done all we could to get where we are."

As for her plans after she leaves, "I really haven't had time to sit down and make any plans," though she feels her five grandchildren "are going to take up a lot of that time."



### Pat Coxsey, Westside High School

"There is nothing in the world like teaching," says Westside High Principal Patricia Coxsey, looking back on her 30 years in the Bibb County Public Schools. "I love education."

Moving to Macon in 1976 with her husband who was Plant Manager at American Standard, she began her career here as a teacher at Southwest High. Previously, she had been a teacher in New York, Arkansas, and Alabama. Majoring first in Business and later in Business Education at the University of Alabama, she says "I just went and taught for a few years and realized this is what I wanted to do."

From teaching at Southwest, she became its counselor and later the counselor at Southeast High. "Everyone can think back and remember things about their teachers," Coxsey points out, saying the most rewarding part is when a student comes to her later in life citing a phrase, a lesson, or a class that changed their life.

After Southeast, she was placed as Assistant

Principal of Miller Middle School, given charge over the entire 7<sup>th</sup> grade building. With 750 students in that one building, she was required to hold her own faculty meetings and attributes this to preparing her for becoming a principal. "If you don't have an administrator with the right vision and the ability to pass that vision on to the faculty and staff, then [the school] won't work," she says.

The community surrounding a school plays an important role in a student's education, but it's sometimes hard to convey to the community at large everything that is going on in the school. "People don't always realize all that teachers do," including after school meetings, heading up clubs and organizations, going to student sporting events, buying supplies for their own classroom, buying supplies for students, outside tutoring, and even working through the weekend. At Westside High, she says there are groups of teachers that come in every Sunday to get work done. "It's not an easy job, and it gets harder every year."

Under her leadership, Westside has been a top-performing school, earning Adequate Yearly Progress every year since No Child Left Behind had been instituted. "We've got good teachers and staff who hold all students to high standards," she says. Knowing some students come in at a disadvantage, either from lack of prior education or outside support, she has her faculty work with them to make sure they are given every opportunity to rise to those high standards.

As for retiring, she can only say, "it's time." Her husband used to joke at their lack of lives during the school year. Fall is for football; basketball season is three nights a week; spring sees concerts, plays, and awards banquets... "people want you to do these things; there's a lot." She wants to spend time with her husband and grandchildren, but still says leaving "is hard because I love this faculty and these kids."



### Dr. Gail Fowler, Southwest High School

"When I look back, this has been a wonderful, tremendous journey," says Southwest High School and Law Academy Principal Dr. Gail Fowler of her more than 30 years in education. "It's so wonderful to me to see the young people I've taught in the community."

Since 1982, Dr. Fowler has served the students and community of the Bibb County Public Schools. Since that year, she has served across the county, from teaching at Appling Middle and Northeast High to being the Assistant Principal at Miller Middle and Ballard-Hudson Middle to Principal at Ballard-Hudson and Southwest.

Coming to Southwest, the school hosted a cosmetology lab, but she says enrollment was very low, showing that students weren't really interested in it. "You have to look at strengths, weaknesses, and needs, and the program didn't fit the school anymore." Using her knowledge of law, she envisioned the Law Academy as being a way to offer

students an education that could provide them a wide variety of career paths.

Looking at similar programs already offered around the country, she wanted to offer more than just an opportunity to be a lawyer. Through the Academy, students can pursue careers in police work, forensics, criminal investigation, court stenography, judicial work, firefighter... "just an array of jobs," she says.

"The community has been invaluable when offering support to the Law Academy," she says, pointing out partnerships with local law firms who have helped instruct the students and provided them with internships.

Looking back on her many years in education, "I'm proud of all that I've done, but I'm particularly proud of the Law Academy and the impact it has had. I see this program strengthening with so much to come for it."

With the different schools and different roles

she has had to play in her career, she says she has learned a lot from students and teachers. "When I look back at 33 years and how the lives of children have changed, I've been able to change with that."

To her successor, she offers the advice to "learn this wonderful community because it's going to take its support, and understand that the children in this district need a great deal of support from the school."

Though planning on spending more time with her grandchildren, she still plans on giving her time to the community, saying she has a vested interest in the education of children. "I'm just closing the door on this chapter." One of her greatest joys is seeing her students later in life and seeing how well they are doing. "It's so wonderful to see the young people I've taught in the community. If you've done your job well, they'll recognize you."

