

# The Learning Curve

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

## Choral groups represent Bibb County Public Schools at state, national, and world levels

### Skyview Elementary School invited to perform with choruses from around the world



Skyview Elementary's chorus performing at the Ocmulgee Rivergate Park.

In December, the Skyview Elementary Chorus was invited to participate in The National Association for Music Education's (MENC) World's Largest Concert. Choruses from around the world record themselves singing a song they have selected from a list and send the tape to MENC. About 40 schools nationwide are selected to participate, and each group sings one song.

The submitted tapes are then edited together to make a seamless performance which is broadcast around the world in March as part of national Music in Our Schools Month. According to the MENC website, the performance is watched by more than six million students around the world.

This year, each group was asked to use a river in the city as the backdrop for the performance, so choral director Susan Mincey took her students to the Ocmulgee Rivergate Park. They selected an African-American spiritual arranged by James Christensen titled 'Down by the Riverside' to sing.

"They really put a lot of work into [getting ready and the performance]," she says.

They were filmed singing the song three different times – a stationary video, a close-up, and a video with the camera panning from side to side – and then were able to vote as a group on which to submit.

"We voted in chorus and agreed the third was the best. We were on beat and all together."

"The kids looked great in their Skyview uniforms. They put on a wonderful performance."

### Southwest High School wins national honors

"It's been quite a year for us," says Jimmy Mills, Choral Director at Southwest High School.

After a year of group and individual student accolades, the Southwest Philharmonic Society and the jazz ensemble – The Ladies and Gentleman of Jazz – traveled to the invite only New Orleans National Music Festival. It's held in conjunction with four other cities hosting the Festival the same weekend, including Baltimore, Los Angeles, Toronto, and Washington, D.C. The New Orleans site featured groups from North & South Carolina, Illinois, Texas, and Georgia.

"It was a good trip," says senior Akeia Booker. "I've never been to New Orleans before."

Before heading to New Orleans, they traveled by bus to perform at Fort Valley State University and Carver High School in Columbus, GA. Traveling through the night since they had to perform at the Festival the very next afternoon, the students arrived tired, but ready.

"We wanted to sleep," explained senior Samantha Murray. Walking off the stage, though, she says they were all pretty confident in their performance, "especially in certain areas, like jazz."

The Philharmonic Society performed two classical pieces as well as two spirituals, while the Jazz Ensemble sang three pieces of varying styles. "They've worked so hard [to

prepare this music]," says Mills.

As the awards were announced, students were left speechless as both of Southwest's groups won first place in their categories. The Jazz Ensemble was performing in an open category, so they competed against several college groups. Senior Alethia Johnson was awarded the Top Soloist Award for the event.

When the scores were added up in all the other categories at the New Orleans Festival, Southwest was honored as the Overall Grand Champion for having a higher score than any other competing group.

As there were several locations around the country hosting the Festival at the same time, scores between different cities could be compared. Southwest was then awarded the Sweepstakes Award for having a higher score than any other AA school at any of the locations.

"There was jumping and screaming," Johnson says with a smile.

"And a lot of running to get the trophies," Booker adds.

"These are some students who have really dedicated themselves to working hard," explains Mills.

And it shows.



(top) Southwest's Philharmonic Society helped the school win several awards.

(bottom) The Ladies and Gentleman of Jazz not only won their division, but also beat several college ensembles.



### Howard Middle School brings home top state awards



(top) Howard's Show Choir is the top-performing group and won the Sweepstakes Award for their division.

(bottom) Howard's 6th grade Chorus also won the Sweepstakes Award for their division



"We were the best school there," says Howard Middle 7<sup>th</sup> grader Alyssa Armstrong of the school's choral performance at the Southern Star Music Festival held at Six Flags in Atlanta, GA.

In early April, Howard students in three different choral groups traveled to compete against 25 other choral and instrumental groups from around the southeast. The school's 6<sup>th</sup> grade Choir and the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Girls Treble Chorus competed against each other in the same division. The 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Show Choir – the top-performing group – got judged not only on their singing, but also the dancing they had to incorporate into their performance.

Each group performs for three judges, each giving their own rating, ranging from Blue to Bronze to Silver to the top-ranking of Gold. Before each performance, choir director Stephana Lynch told them

to just have fun on stage, and they would be great. "They worked hard to get where they are now."

After performing early on Saturday morning, "we were stuck inside a theme park all day [until the award ceremony]" said 6<sup>th</sup> grader William Hammet with a wry grin. "The lines [at the rides] were the only bad part," said Armstrong.

"But definitely worth it," added eighth grader Taylor Sapp, to which all agreed.

At the ceremony, everyone was shocked as the rankings and winners were announced. Each Howard group received a Gold ranking from every judge, making them the only school to get all Golds. The Show Choir won the Sweepstakes (1<sup>st</sup> place) for their division, and the 6<sup>th</sup> grade Choir won Sweepstakes in theirs, with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade treble choir coming in second. "It was *very* close," says Lynch

with pride in her voice.

"No one thought we would do that well," said Sapp. The thought of making all gold and winning the Sweepstakes award was actually something they joked about in the days prior. "It was unbelievable," said Armstrong.

According to Lynch, out of 160 students that joined chorus at the beginning of the year, less than ten had any concert experience. "They showed a lot of potential, and they've improved tremendously. Do you all remember what it was like at the beginning of the year?" she asks her students, who respond with laughs.

"We had a lot of fun," said Sapp. "It's great being a new school and doing well."

"We're representing Howard," Armstrong adds.

All the groups were so excited about doing well; they are already looking to repeat next year. "We're already at the top. We can't quit now," Hammet says.