

The Learning Curve

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

Northeast High School Seniors reach out to victims of Hurricane Katrina



(l-r) Director of Emergency Services Ginny Hogan with Northeast Seniors Charlie Fletcher, Ardacia Collier, and Austin Shoultz.

"You people are sweethearts!" gushed Central Georgia Red Cross Director of Emergency Services Ginny Hogan. "I can't tell you how much we appreciate this!"

In the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, not only along the Gulf Coast but in Middle Georgia as well, several students at Northeast High School wanted to find a way they could reach out to those affected.

"They wanted to help the community and nation as a whole," explained Northeast Title I Coordinator Barbara Franklin.

On the morning of Wednesday, August 31, barely two days after the disaster, seniors Ardacia Collier, Charlie Fletcher, and Austin Shoultz went to the main office to see what could be done. Their answer: collect money from students and teachers to donate to the Red Cross.

Calling for the donations over the morning announcements, they collected more than \$1,000 within an hour. One teacher wrote a check for \$88, one dollar for every one of his students. The largest student donation was \$35.

"We felt compelled to give to this cause because we were all touched by the disaster," said Collier, who, along with the other two, were still stunned by how much they raised in such a short time.

"There were students just walking in [to the office] giving them ten- and twenty-dollar bills," said Franklin with a huge smile.

"It was amazing," said Fletcher. "We started small, and it just kept going."

"It's the least we can do," added Shoultz. "They're going through so much right now."

As they presented the check for \$1,055.60, there were smiles, applause, and thank-you's from all of the workers and volunteers present at the Red Cross Headquarters on Holt Street. According to Franklin, \$500 is designated to be used locally, and the rest will be used nationally. She and the students all hope and challenge other schools in the area to begin collecting contributions.

"It's so nice to see young people stepping up like this," Hogan said admiringly, adding that in 35 years working with the Red Cross, this is the largest check she has received from a school. "They're phenomenal young people. I hope they gain an interest in service to the community."

Anyone wishing to contribute to the Red Cross can contact them at (478)743-8671.

Bibb County Public Schools offering opportunities for more students to enroll in Advanced Placement Courses

Advanced Placement (AP) Courses are opportunities for high schools to not only gain high school credit, but also earn college credit should they pass the exam at the end of the year. These courses, as well as the grading of their exams, are administered by the College Board, the non-profit organization which also administers the SAT's.

"The primary goal is to have these children with potential be in the most challenging classes possible," says Tand Pressley, Director of Bibb County Public Schools Gifted Programs. "If they'll take rigorous courses now, it'll make their post-secondary work easier. They'll be at less of a chance to lose their HOPE scholarship in the first year."

According to Rutland High AP World History teacher Jana Peacock, "I took AP classes [in high school], and they were harder, in some cases than my college courses. It really helped me along in college."

Rutland High AP United States History teacher Clint Sutton began teaching AP because he did not take any high school, and he wanted to help prepare his students better. "I had no idea what college was about, and I certainly wasn't prepared. We can help them become better students overall."

With the course load and material being on a college level, there are certain skills needed which students may not have been exposed to before like more rigorous study skills, essay writing skills, using primary and secondary sources, how to analyze literature, and document-based questions. To help prepare them for the extra work, the school system offers the AP Summer Academy to any students

interested in taking any AP class. Offered for a week in June and a week in July, the program focuses on the skills needed, so that when they enter the class, they can focus on the material.

Starting in September will be AP Saturdays, completely voluntary classes offered once a month to students enrolled in any AP class. Teachers will volunteer their time and come in to provide extra support and instruction. In April, consultants from the College Board will be offering their assistance in preparing students to take their final tests.

According to Pressley, though, not enough qualified students are taking advantage of the AP program, saying many just do not think they could handle the work. So many times, she says, the AP classes are seen as the classes for students who are in the Gifted Program, but any student can enroll if they show the interest and desire to be there. "If students want to be in that AP class, and they have the support, they'll be successful and better prepared for college."

To help open up the classes to a larger body of students, middle schools will soon begin offering pre-AP classes to all their grade levels. "I think they're real lucky to have this before high school," says Rutland Middle 6th grade geography teacher Liz Sanders, who used to be an AP teacher and will now be teaching one of the pre-AP classes. "I'll have to teach them real simple, beginner things like essay writing, sources...the nuts and bolts."

This past summer, AP teachers and pre-AP teachers were trained how to help prepare students to enter these courses. With the training they received, these teachers say they have learned better and



Advanced Placement Courses help prepare students to enter college.

more advanced ways to teach their other classes as well. "I'm already teaching class differently than I did last year," says Diedre Romero, who teaches College Preparatory (CP) and Honors Literature as well as AP Language Arts.

"We want to prepare them for college, and starting in their senior year doesn't help," says Pressley. By offering pre-AP courses in middle school, it will set the students' expectations that they can exceed in an AP course. "It is our hope by having that pre-AP in the middle school, they'll have a solid foundation for AP in the high school."

"Our goal is to drive selected courses down to 9th grade," says Pressley. "We want to reach that large body of children out there who can do better."

"Let's stretch these kids further because they'll rise to the expectations given them," says Rutland High School Principal Dr. Kathy Reese.

Renaissance Academy officially opens Performance Learning Center

"We're very grateful for the students and parents," Communities in Schools of Georgia (CISGA) Executive Director Neil Shorthouse told the assembled crowd of students, teachers, Bibb County School Board Members, and media at the Renaissance Academy. "This is a big day for education in Georgia."

On August 25, 2005, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held to officially open the school as Renaissance Academy: A Performance Learning Center. It is one of 150 programs like it across the nation funded primarily by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The program is another chance for Bibb County Public Schools to offer students an alternative to dropping out of high school when they fall behind of their grade level.

"I'm glad to see all the students here who realize they have a lot to receive and a lot to give," Shorthouse told them.

According to Principal Dr. Cindy Gibson, there are already almost 80 students signed up for the program. "It's a joy to have this day come. Already wonderful things are



(l-r) Renaissance Academy Principal Dr. Cindy Gibson, Education First Board Member Albert Abrams, School Board President Gary Bechtel, School Board Member Tom Hudson, School Board Member Bob Nichols, CISGA First Board Member Mary Evelyn Feibleman, CISGA Executive Director Neil Shorthouse, Education First Board Member Terry Smith, Education First Executive Director Julie Pennybacker

beginning to happen."

Since it opened, Renaissance Academy has had the purpose of offering this opportunity to students at risk of dropping out, but with the grant, the focus has moved beyond just getting them their high school diploma. Now, they can expand the program and focus on making sure they are fully prepared to enter college or start a career.

"We want to see lots of students graduating with great plans," Shorthouse added. "With everybody together, we're going to work towards a great future."

The grant was able to help update the school's technology and money from CIS helped update and clean the school grounds. "Everything got a real extreme makeover," Gibson says.

"We want to make sure very student in this room is prepared to go to college," Shorthouse charged.

Gibson drives home her and her staff's dedication to the students: "we're going to plan as if you're going [to college] tomorrow."