

GaDOE Updates

Educating Georgia's Future

May 2015

FROM SUPERINTENDENT WOODS



The month of May is home, if you ask me, to one of the most important days on the calendar. May 4-8 marks Teacher Appreciation Week, a time to recognize the outstanding educators who spend each day shaping our children's lives -- and to remember all those who played a role in shaping us.

This, to us, is a very special time of recognition -- so we plan to celebrate for the entire month of May, rather than just one week. I encourage all Georgians to visit bit.ly/gadoethankateacher and download a special note of appreciation to send to your own favorite teacher. Then, snap a photo of your note and share it using the hashtag #thankateacher.

A note to the teachers who are reading: I know that your work is far from easy. I know there are increasing demands on your time. I know there are many who don't understand all that you do. I know that gratitude and recognition can be far too infrequent.

I hope, however, that you know and understand the incredible importance of the role you play. I hope you know that you are changing students' lives. I hope you know, even when the days are long and the challenges are great, that there is a student in your classroom today who will remember you long after they have moved on from their schooling, long after the tassel has been turned and the next chapter of life has begun.

This is the way I remember my own teachers. I would not be the person I am -- and I never would have become a teacher myself -- without them. I know other Georgians have similar stories, and I hope those stories will be shared throughout this month. On behalf of all Georgians, I say thank you!

Richard Woods

AROUND THE DEPARTMENT

GaDOE names 2015 Georgia Scholars

183 graduating seniors from schools across Georgia have been recognized as 2015 Georgia Scholars, a program that identifies and honors high school students who achieve excellence in school and community life. Find a full list at bit.ly/gadoescholars.

Friendships that bridge barriers

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Lakeside High School senior Lydia Podowitz knew her school was diverse. Still, she noticed that the school's English as a Second Language (ESOL) students needed an opportunity to connect with their classmates.

So Lydia, 18, did something about it. She founded Friendship Circuit, a club that brings ESOL students together with the rest of the student body for conversation and casual bonding.



"It occurred to me that as a student body, we tend to ignore diversity most of the time," Lydia said. "There seemed to be a real gap in the ESOL and mainstream populations."

Now, students are working together to bridge that gap. The club, Lydia says, gives all students a chance to embrace global citizenship. ESOL students know they're valued by their peers, and all students, in Lydia's words, "are recognizing that the people they thought were too different to relate to are actually just like them."



As time goes on, students are opening up and having conversations that wouldn't have been possible before. "One girl really opened up about her reasons for coming to the United States," Lydia says.

"I am so proud that my peer group could create an environment in which everyone felt safe and eager to share."

For other students who want to make a difference in their school, Lydia offers this advice: "Don't be afraid to try something out! Even if it doesn't work out the way you want it to, it will probably make at least a small difference. It's a trial and error process. You'll learn as you go."

Read a longer version of this story at www.gadoe.org, under "News & Announcements"

AROUND THE DEPARTMENT

Teacher of the Year finalists named

From a pool of 150 applicants, 10 finalists for the 2016 Georgia Teacher of the Year have been selected. They are Brian Butler of Bibb County, Patrick Logan of Buford City, Alexandra Vlachakis of Fayette County, John Wood of Henry County, Holly Canpup of Jackson County, Brian Patrick of Jasper County, Kimberly Lester of Muscogee County, Gary Allen Jones, II of Rome City, Ernest William Lee, II of Savannah-Chatham County, and Blair Inabinet of Walton County. The 2016 Georgia Teacher of the Year will be named May 8, 2015.

Access free digital books all summer

myOn Reader has partnered with the Get Georgia Reading campaign to provide every child in Georgia with a full summer of free access to a library of more than 8,000 enhanced digital books with multimedia supports. Visit bit.ly/gadoefreebooks for login information.

Ag Week contest winners named

From more than 1,000 entries, 12 winners of the GaDOE/Georgia Department of Agriculture National Agriculture Week contests have been named. View the winners at bit.ly/gadoeagcontest.



QUICK QUOTES FROM SUPT. WOODS

“When we standardize education instead of personalizing it, we hold students back.”

More: bit.ly/gadoepersonalized or scan code.



“Building a foundation is not always flashy, but when a building is completed we are thankful for a great foundation.”

More: bit.ly/gadoefoundation or scan code.



GA's Public Schools in the News

Spotlight on PBIS in Bibb County Schools

Middle Georgia's NBC station, WMGT, visited the Bibb County School District for a look at their implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Read (and watch) the story at bit.ly/gadoepbis.

Forsyth Central gets STEM-certified

This month, Forsyth Central High School became GaDOE's sixth STEM-certified high school. The Forsyth Herald takes a look inside the school and what STEM means to its students. Read at bit.ly/gadoeforsyth.

AROUND THE DISTRICTS

Georgia's National Distinguished Principal

Elm Street Elementary School Principal Dr. Christi Hildebrand has been named Georgia's 2015 National Distinguished Principal by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the U.S. Department of Education. In his congratulations letter to Dr. Hildebrand, Superintendent Woods wrote: “I want you to know...that I am so grateful for the work you do and so impressed with the excellence you've accomplished. Without strong school leaders like you, we cannot accomplish our mission of Educating Georgia's Future.”



National Distinguished Principal Dr. Christi Hildebrand, of Coweta County Schools' Elm Street Elementary

Have news for GaDOE Updates?

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