

March 25, 2010

Board of Education Announces New Superintendent

At a special called meeting on Thursday, March 25, the Newton County Board of Education approved by 4-0 vote (Dr. C.C. Bates was out of town) the hiring of Dr. Gary S. Mathews as superintendent for Newton County Schools, effective July 1, 2010. Dr. Mathews currently serves as the Superintendent of the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools (W-JCC) in Williamsburg, Virginia, a position he has held for five years. He will replace Dr. Steve Whatley, who announced in November his plans to retire effective, June 30, 2010.

“The board unanimously voted to extend a contract to Dr. Mathews this morning,” said Ms. Cathy Dobbs, chair of the Newton County Board of Education. “Dr. Mathews brings with him years of experience, enthusiasm, and leadership. He was clearly the best person to fill this very important position and we are looking forward to welcoming him to Newton County.”

According to Dr. Mathews, there were two things—one professional and one personal, that attracted him to Newton County Schools.

“On a professional level, I am aware of Newton County’s excellent reputation and desire for continuous improvement of student and staff learning. As a learner, especially committed to positive outcomes for students, I look forward to joining the Newton Team,” said Dr. Mathews. “On a personal level, my relocation to Georgia puts me within a one day’s drive to aging parents and each of five children. Family is most important to my wife, Pat, and me and we need to be closer than we are now. My father is 80 and my mother-in-law is 85.”



Dr. Gary S. Mathews

While in town for the interview process, Dr. Mathews took the opportunity to drive around the county and stated he was very impressed with what he found.

“I very much enjoyed my drive around Newton County,” he said. “I managed to see schools and various subdivisions realizing how diverse Newton County really is as a community. In talking with county residents in restaurants and at the hotel, I’m most pleased to report that 9 of the 10 people I questioned gave the school system a big thumbs up for quality. When your citizens say good things about the work you do, that’s important.”

Overall, Dr. Mathews has over 18 years of experience as a school district superintendent. He previously served as superintendent of Carroll Independent School District, Texas; Rockwood School District; Missouri; East Baton Rouge School District, Louisiana; and St. Johns County School District, Florida. He also served as an Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services for the Spring Branch Independent School District, Texas and the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum for Jackson Public Schools, Mississippi. He also has experience as a high school principal. Dr. Mathews began his education career in 1976 as a high school teacher at JFK High School in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Dr. Mathews noted that his previous leadership experience will serve him and the school system well as he makes the transition to Newton County, especially during these tough economic times.

“Fortunately, especially in these difficult economic times and in this era of accountability, my experience is vast,” said Dr. Mathews. “I’ve served as superintendent in very large, urban systems such as Baton Rouge with 56,000 students and in much smaller suburban school systems such as Carroll in Texas, with 7,500 students. In all instances, there were a variety of student needs to be met, the likes of which I enjoyed working with others to address. Parents wanted nothing short of the best for their children. Staff wanted nothing short of delivering their best for students. And the communities realized that no community is better than its public schools. While challenging, especially given the budget cuts in Texas and Virginia, the work has been most rewarding as I’ve been a part of building new schools, balancing budgets, redrawing attendance zones, and improving student learning in each assignment. I’ve been blessed.”

With 34 years of experience in public education under his belt, Dr. Mathews has what he says is a two-fold philosophy for what makes a good school superintendent.

A good superintendent is “one who inspires others to accomplish things they would otherwise not achieve and one who keeps students and their learning at the center of all decision making,” said Dr. Mathews.

He added that when he takes the helm of Newton County Schools, he plans to adopt a “look, learn, and listen approach as a new person to the school system and community.”

“I want to absorb all I can from many different people and sources,” he explained. “Let’s preserve what works for children and improve upon that which we have a sufficient consensus to move forward on.”

That philosophy and approach to leading a public school system has resulted in major successes and numerous awards for both Dr. Mathews and his school districts over the years. During his tenure at W-JCC, the school district achieved two major statewide awards: the Virginia Board of Education’s “Leadership for Diversity Education Award” in January of 2008 and “The Governor’s Award for the Innovative Use of Technology in K-12 Education” in November of 2008. And W-JCC was the only Virginia school district to receive the Governor’s technology award in 2008.

In addition, W-JCC reached an all-time high last year on each of the rigorous Virginia’s Standards of Learning tests and the district also cut in half the school system’s “achievement gap” between black and white students in both reading and math under his leadership. ACT and SAT test results for W-JCC students also exceeded both the state and nation during Dr. Mathews’ tenure at W-JCC.

The Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development named him Virginia Curriculum Leader of the Year in 2007 and the Education Technology Think Tank, Washington, D.C., awarded him the ET3 TEC Champion Leadership Award in 2006. Dr. Mathews was named the Louisiana Superintendent of the Year in 1998 and in 1996 the Public Relations Association of Louisiana named him the Louisiana Communicator of the Year.

A presenter at major education conferences and the author of numerous professional articles in various publications, Dr. Mathews holds a B.A. degree in political science from Louisiana State University, a Masters degree in educational administration from Loyola University of New Orleans, and Specialist in Education (Ed.S.) and Ph.D. degrees in educational administration from The University of Southern Mississippi.

His hobbies and outside interests include the Rotary Club, Little League Baseball, swimming, fishing, college and professional athletic events, and the arts.

Dr. Mathews and his wife, Patricia, who is a retired teacher of the deaf and middle school counselor, are the parents of five grown children: Kelly, Jason, Paul, Danielle, and Wes. In fact, daughter Danielle will be joining her parents when they make the move to Georgia.

Although Dr. Mathews noted that he is very excited about making the move to Newton County, he added that he would definitely miss his outstanding staff and community that is the City of Williamsburg and the county of James City.

“We have made considerable progress together with all-time highs in student achievement, the construction of four new schools, and the formation of countless community partnerships,” said Dr. Mathews. “But, most of all, I will be forever grateful for the many friendships we have developed over the last five years. These will stay with us forever.”

For more information, contact Ms. Sherri Viniard, Director of Public Relations for Newton County School System at viniard.sherri@newton.k12.ga.us or by phone at 770-784-2908.
