

**October 14, 2009**

**Newton County School System Receives \$283,447 Caring Communities System of Care Grant from the Governor's Office for Children and Families**

The Governor's Office for Children and Families has awarded the Newton County School System a 2009 Caring Communities System of Care grant in the amount of \$283,447. The Newton County School System was one of only ten recipients in the state to receive a Caring Communities grant award.

The system of care approach is designed to unite and coordinate the efforts of community agencies responsible for serving children and families. Through a community-wide collaboration of agencies focused on improving the welfare of youth in Newton County and support from the Caring Communities grant, the Newton County School System will implement a Positive Behavior Support system at Sharp Learning Center to improve school performance. The Positive Behavior Support system, or PBS, is a proactive approach to teaching and reinforcing appropriate behavior while developing effective interventions for inappropriate behavior. Teachers, administrators, judges, social workers, and mental health counselors will work together to improve the learning environment, changing situations and events linked with problem behavior. Training in PBS will be conducted by consultants from the Georgia Department of Education.

The curriculum for the program consists of identifying specific, positive expectations which will be defined by school staff and taught to students. With clear, consistent school-wide expectations, positive behavior will be reinforced through an incentive-based system that will be created with student input. Students will be awarded opportunities and positive feedback for appropriate behavior and allowed to earn incentives and privileges. The PBS model will also include the effective use of consequences and sanctions to discourage inappropriate behavior.

In addition to the implementation of the Positive Behavior Support model, the Newton County System of Care will provide additional resources to implement a Whole Child Case Management system. Upon assignment to Sharp, students and their families will go through an orientation and assessment process conducted by members of the Case Management Team, composed of counselors, clinicians, social workers and a Family and Youth Advocate. The assessment process will provide school staff with a better understanding of the students' needs, possible indicators of problem behavior, and the opportunity to provide appropriate services. The Gwinnett-Rockdale-Newton (GRN) Community Service Board will provide the behavioral support and clinical staff who will work within the school.

Based on identified needs, students will be assigned to behavioral group counseling to address issues that may impede the learning process. Newton Mentoring, Inc., will pair at least 25 students with strong, successful adults to help them model appropriate behavior while building relationships that provide additional support and boost self esteem.

"Mentoring is a structured and trusting relationship that matches young people with caring adults who offer guidance, support and encouragement," said Margaret Washington, Executive Director of Newton Mentoring, Inc. "I would encourage those 18 or older to consider this rewarding volunteer opportunity." More information can be found on the organization's web-site, [www.newtonmentoring.com](http://www.newtonmentoring.com).

According to Dr. Kathy Garber, Grants Coordinator for Newton County Schools, the assessment process and whole child approach will allow students and their families to be linked with other educational, social, psychological and physical health crisis resources available in the community.

“The planners of the programs funded by this grant worked together under the philosophy that ‘It takes a whole village to raise a child,’” said Dr. Garber. “In these trying economic times, it takes everyone working together to support and encourage our students to do their best in school, at home, and in the community.”

Dr. Garber, who has served as both a middle school and high school principal added, “There are many underlying causes for inappropriate behavior among our young people, including the fact that they don’t always understand exactly what behaviors are appropriate or the serious negative consequences that can result from inappropriate behavior. Programs supported by the System of Care Grant are aimed at correcting those causes.”

Newton County School System is an integral part of the interagency partnership in Newton County which has a strong history of developing and facilitating management teams for the purpose of interagency collaboration. The planning team for the Caring Communities System of Care Grant included representatives from various agencies throughout the Newton County community, including: Ms. Laura Bertram, Executive Director of the Newton County Community Partnership; Dr. Kathy Garber, NCCSS Grants Coordinator; Gabe Burnett, Principal, Sharp Learning Center; Yvette Zielenske, Social Worker, NCCSS; Sheri Roberts and Lisa Mantz, Newton County Juvenile Court Judges; Donald Chambers, Department of Juvenile Justice; Micki Smith, KidsNet Newton; and Margaret Washington, Newton Mentoring, Inc.

“Research has shown that a family-driven community of care and increased collaboration among child-service organizations results in improved outcomes for children,” said Laura Bertram, Executive Director of the Newton County Community Partnership, the county’s official planning and advocacy body for children and families. “Our partners agreed that the Sharp population could be best served through multiple agencies in collaboration with the school system.”

“I commend each of the agencies involved in this endeavor,” said Dr. Steve Whatley, Newton County School Superintendent. “In this economic downturn, our school district has been increasingly tasked to do more with less while trying to meet the mission of providing educational excellence to all students. The grant planning team worked hard to devise a plan and applied for a grant to address a very important need in our district. We firmly believe that no child should be left behind, and the funds from this grant will help ensure that students enrolled at Sharp Learning Center that might need additional assistance and support will receive that support.”

Diana Summers, Research Analyst at Newton County Juvenile Court, who researched and wrote the grant application on behalf of the school system and its community partners said, “We are so pleased to be part of a system of care community which views each child as an opportunity to contribute to our future. The Newton County Juvenile Court believes that implementation of this program will help each child at Sharp maximize his or her potential and develop the skills needed to succeed.”

For more information, contact Dr. Kathy Garber, NCCSS Grants Coordinator, at 770-787-1330 ext. 1273 or Diana Summers, Research Analyst, Newton County Juvenile Court, at 770-784-2060 ext. 4406.