

February 17, 2011

Get Connected With Newton County Schools

Are you connected with Newton County Schools?

A major goal of the Newton County School System (NCSS) is providing accurate and timely information to all stakeholders—students, parents, employees, and residents. In that vein, Newton County Schools has added additional communications methods to promote increased communication to and from the school district and its stakeholders.

In addition to the school system's award winning website, www.newtoncountyschools.org, and an online newsletter, Newton County Schools is now on both Facebook and Twitter.

"We recognize that more and more people get their news from social media," said Gary Mathews, Superintendent for Newton County Schools. "With Facebook and Twitter, we can provide information about our school system to a much larger audience. After all, our business is the public's business."

According to Facebook.com, the social media website has more than 500 million active users and 50% of those users log on to Facebook on any given day. Facebook reports that people spend over 700 billion minutes per month on the site.

Once on Facebook, www.facebook.com, visitors can access the district's page by typing "Newton County Schools" in the search bar. The NCSS Public Relations Department updates the page on a daily basis with news releases, pictures, event information, etc.

In addition to Facebook, the school system recently launched a Twitter account to provide instant updates on NCSS news, including Board of Education votes, links to minutes and press releases, and emergency school closing information. During the snow and ice storm in January, the NCSS Public Relations Department posted instant updates on closures due to the weather conditions.

According to Twitter.com, the site currently has over 175 million registered users and over 95 million tweets are written per day. Those interested in following Newton County School System through Twitter can access our page by typing "NewtonCoSchools" in the search bar on www.Twitter.com.

To provide more transparency in the day to day operations of the district, Newton County Schools has also added a new feature to the district webpage—video recordings of Newton County Board of Education meetings. Effective February 15, all school board meetings will be recorded and posted on the Minutes and Video page located in the School Board section of the website. In fact, the recording of the February 15, 2011, meeting has already been posted online.

"The technology department is using MediaCAST to record the meetings," said NCSS Technology Director Gary Shattuck. "This is our first attempt at doing this and the quality of the broadcast will improve as we learn from this first experience. Video is a very powerful communication tool and we are happy to provide this service."

“It’s our goal to provide as many communication options as possible for parents,” said NCCS Public Relations Director Sherri Davis-Viniard. “We know that timely and accurate communication results in increased student achievement, so we are utilizing everything we possibly can to provide parents with information that they can use to help their children succeed in school.”

In addition to the Facebook and Twitter pages, the school system had already increased communication through the district website and School Messenger, an automated calling system that allows the school system to reach thousands of parents in a matter of minutes.

One visit to the school system website can provide a wide variety of important information for parents and students—from the balance of a child’s school lunch account to his grades, attendance reports, homework assignments and even online tutoring.

Currently the following communication methods may be accessed via Quick Links on our homepage at www.newtoncountyschools.org:

- **Infinite Campus:** Parents of secondary students can use this quick link to access student schedules, grades, attendance, discipline, and teacher email. Parents of elementary students can access attendance and discipline information.
- **Bus Routes/School Zone:** Parents can utilize this link to find out which school their child is zoned to attend, what bus they ride, and when and where it will pick up their child.
- **Meal Pay:** Parents and guardians may create an online account to pay for their child’s school lunches. The program also allows parents to monitor their child’s food purchases and stay current on account balances.
- **Online Assessment System:** Students can access tests that consist of the same kinds of questions as appear on the state's assessments in Reading, English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies in the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT), the End of Course Tests (EOCT), and the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT). After taking an assessment, students can view reports aligned to the state curriculum that show instructional strengths and needs. Parents can access reports from tests their children have taken by logging in as the student and viewing reports. Also, parents are informed when teachers share reports on their child's success on assessments. Reports are all aligned to the state standards so success on these assessments shows ability on the state curriculum.
- **Carnegie Learning:** Students can receive one-on-one, professional online math tutoring 24 hours a day. Students should use their school ID number and password to log into the system. All tutors undergo background checks, rigorous training, and certification before being hired to deliver online tutoring sessions.
- **Google Translate Español:** To provide more information for our families where English is not the primary language, Newton County School System has recently added Google Translate to the district website. By clicking this link, all pages are converted from English to Spanish. (In addition to Google Translate, the school system is also providing select school messenger calls to parents in Spanish.)

- **Newsletter Sign Up:** By simply providing an email address in the signup box, parents can start receiving press releases and other important news items electronically.

In addition to the quick links, many teachers throughout the district have a personal eLearn page located on their school website, where they provide everything from current homework assignments, test dates, study guides, and notes from the class. Check with your child's teacher to see if he or she has a site as both parents and students can access the information available.

"Ultimately, our goal is to provide not only important news about our school system but also information resources parents can use to stay involved in their child's education and help their students succeed in school," said Davis-Viniard. "Our hope is that parents and residents will utilize the various resources we have available to continually stay informed about our district and its students."

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