



SUPERINTENDENT'S END-OF-MONTH NOTES

January 2012

OUR MISSION is to provide educational excellence for all students.

NEW HAPPY NEW YEAR

IN THIS EDITION:

- Celebrate, again! (Note #1)
- Learning from Our Graduates (Note #2)
- College Studies Panelists at AHS (Note #3)
 - District Discipline Team (Note #4)
 - Instructional Gaming at NHS (Note #5)
- NCTS & Clements Middle Science Fairs (Note #6)
- Boys-to-Men Mentoring at Porterdale Elementary (Note #7)
- Expert Speaks to Common Core State Standards (Note #8)
 - NCSS Quick Notes—See attachment. (Note #9)

1. As we begin this New Year, we can celebrate—again—recent successes in November, December, and January. November saw **Indian Creek Middle** named a “Breakout Middle School” by the Georgia Association of Secondary School Principals—one of the 12 “best” middles in the state! December saw **Heard-Mixon Elementary** named a “Georgia School of Excellence” by the Georgia Department of Education for the greatest gains in language arts and mathematics over the past three years! January has seen five of our elementary schools named “Title I Distinguished Schools” by the Georgia Department of Education: **Heard-Mixon**, **Flint Hill** (formerly Palmer-Stone), **Rocky Plains**, **Livingston**, and **South Salem**. And, also this month, **Liberty Middle School** was named a “Governor’s Bronze Award Winner” as one of a few Georgia schools to show the greatest student achievement gains while earning AYP and experiencing greater than 20% of its students exceeding standards. When one of us “wins,” we all do! Thanks to everyone who has had a role in bringing these recognitions to these schools and NCSS!
2. On the third day of this month, Executive Director for Secondary Education Samantha Fuhrey, P.R. Director Sherri Davis-Viniard, and I met with five recent graduates of NCSS high schools for the expressed purpose of learning about their high school experience in Newton and their subsequent enrollment in college. (Of the five, 1 is majoring in early childhood education, 1 in computer engineering, 1 in business management, 1 in pre-med and bio-medical engineering, and 1 in accounting. Three were freshmen and two were seniors.) More specifically, two of our interviewees attend the University of Georgia, two attend Georgia Tech, and one attends Georgia College and State University. What we learned from these successful graduates of **Alcovy**, **Eastside**, and **Newton** follows:



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- All three colleges provide a technology-inundated environment. Course syllabi, assignments, grades, and communication with professors and classmates are all via some type of technology. Thus, our recent graduates highly recommend similar environments in our K-12 schools. (Lab Quest—“virtual labs” in science—is widely used at Georgia Tech and our students have found this to be used in other high schools around the state after talking to their peers. They highly recommend Lab Quest for our high school students. Given their current college experience, each of these five students felt the more technology in high school class work, the better.)
- To a person, all five of our recent graduates pointed to NCSS **Advanced Placement (AP)** courses as the most helpful background for college preparedness. Thus, they recommended that we highly encourage student participation in AP, especially for those headed to 2- or 4-year colleges.
- Students also praised **Dual Enrollment** pointing out that, like AP classes, DE required effort and time management. One student noted that “they treat you like a real college student.” Some of these students are graduating early from college due to their Dual Enrollment credits earned while in NCSS.
- All five of our students encouraged us to **increase the level of academic rigor**, in general, throughout the school system suggesting that some course work was *not* challenging enough. (This is a “common” refrain from recent high school graduates throughout the nation.)
- All five of our students praised **extracurricular activities** in NCSS indicating that they give a student “a leg up,” especially if he/she is applying to a prestigious university. Said they, everyone applying for the top schools has excellent grades. The difference as to whether a student gets accepted or not is often found in the level of extracurricular activities. These students gave praise, especially to the Youth Leadership Institute and Youth Apprenticeship in NCSS.
- When asked if they thought Georgia’s new emphasis on having students select a **career pathway(s)**, four out of five indicated that they felt this was a good idea.
- All five of our students indicated that they believe an **SAT/ACT-prep class** in high school to be valuable.



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- When asked about their thoughts about our nation's future, the responses from our five recent high school graduates were as follows:
 - ~ "It worries me how focused we are on college and that politics are so involved in education. People making decisions on education are not in education."
 - ~ "The generational work effort is going to be a problem. We keep pushing college and now no one wants to work in the trades."
 - ~ "I'm worried for our future. Kids are too involved in the problems of other people and not working on what needs to be worked on in school."
 - ~ "I'm optimistic on our future, although we do need to raise the bar a little."
 - ~ "Good is always going to be greater than bad, but folks seem to always focus on the bad."

- 3. This month, I attended a most interesting College Studies Panel held for the Tools for College Success class at Alcovy High. Providing college tips for these high school students were: Dr. Larry Johnson (Division Chair, General Studies, Georgia Piedmont Technical College), Dr. Steven Baker (Professor of Biology, Oxford College), Dr. Jonathan Lewis (Assistant Professor of English, Troy University), Mr. Marquis Williams (Adjunct Professor of Business, Math, Advertising & Marketing, Georgia Piedmont Technical College), and Representative Steve Davis who co-sponsored House Bill 186 which establishes career pathways for students in the State of Georgia. BOE member and Coordinator for Dual Enrollment at Georgia Perimeter College, Jeff Meadors, brought summary remarks following the panel. Among the college "tips" provided to these juniors and seniors were as follows:
 - In addition to strong study skills, college professors also expect students to have mastered "softer" skills such as: attending class on time, able to participate as a "team" member, turning all assignments in on time.
 - When attending college, say the panelists, students must be able to "organize" and "prioritize" their time and tasks. In doing so, academics must take priority over most other—if not all other—alternatives.
 - Much of college classroom instruction can be characterized as lecture, discussion, and hands-on experiments, labs, and other "doing" assignments. As such, one can see why the "soft" skills mentioned above are important.



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- According to English Professor Baker at Oxford College, “**not enough students**” are prepared for college writing. He noted that many of his students do pain-staking work “getting it right” when it comes to contributing to their college writing portfolios. As such, developing the right study habits and perseverance is important to college success. If, at first, the writing is unsatisfactory, it will be done over and over again until correct. Professor Baker is less interested in the grade and more interested in the actual progress he sees in student composition. (The typical writing styles now used in colleges can be found through the following professional manuals: Turabian, APA, and MLA.)
- According to these college studies panelists:
Success = When preparation meets opportunity
- 4. On January 5th, a **District Discipline Team** met for the first time to discuss a systemwide look at discipline in NCSS. Team members consists of Ken Proctor, Samantha Fuhrey, Michael Barr, Shelia Thomas, RaNae Fendley, Sarah West, Carl Skinner, Darren Berry, Edward Vrable, Christina Sneed, Kristine Peebles, Donna Hooper, Lisa Matteen, Craig Lockhart, Jill Adams, Corey Stegall and yours truly. Just as we have emphasized the use of research-based instructional strategies (ala Marzano’s *Classroom Instruction That Works*, ASCD, 2001), building student background knowledge (ala Marzano’s *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Success*, ASCD, 2004) and technology integration as a means for enhancing student engagement and learning, we are now giving more attention to school and classroom discipline. For there’s no question that when student discipline is good (“positive”), learning is more positive. Soon, with the assistance from the Georgia Department of Education, we’ll begin to train school-based teams per each of our middle schools. At this time, it appears that **Newton High** may join in on the training as Principal Craig Lockhart is a strong proponent of PBIS having seen it work elsewhere. **Middle Ridge Elementary** has been implementing school-wide PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) with great success for the past several years. For an overview of PBIS, click on www.pbis.org/.
- 5. Last week I had the opportunity to observe a lesson in Ms. Dixon-Brown’s class at **Newton High School**. Unannounced [she didn’t know that I would select her class to observe], I watched as Ms. Dixon-Brown used an instructional game (“Final Jeopardy”) to teach biology students about evolution (several chapters in the biology text). While that was not so unusual, I do want to note how effective her “Final Jeopardy” game was with her students. In short, if you can imagine the categories of “Charles



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- Darwin,” “Evolution,” “Natural Selection,” “Evidence of Evolution,” and “Odds and Ends,” you would have heard questions like Where did Darwin see the greatest variety of species? How did Darwin know that species changed over a long period of time? What three factors did Darwin identify that affect natural selection? What is a scientific theory? After teams of students deliberated as to the correct answer, Ms. Dixon-Brown would then move into a lecture further expanding on the correct answer and the “whys” and “wherefores” related to the topic. It was an effective use of instructional gaming and lecture.
6. On the 12th of this month, I attended the science fair held at the **Newton County Theme School at Ficquett**. Like others, I unfortunately believe that science has taken a back seat in all-too-many schools across the country (elementary schools especially) when it comes to the hold that No-Child-Left-Behind has had on us. But, the “hands-on” learning I saw at NCTS last week was exciting! It was most enjoyable/encouraging to see these elementary students put forth problems like “Do butterflies develop better in a warmer climate or a cooler climate?” / “What happens when a cold front meets a warm front?” / “Which AA battery makes a toy train run faster along a 3.048 meter track?” Real learning! Thanks students and teachers! Also, on Thursday of last week, I had a chance to view the science fair projects at **Clements Middle**. There were many and well done!
 7. On last Friday morning, I had the pleasure and privilege to speak to the young men of **Porterdale Elementary's Boys-to-Men mentoring program**. On this morning, there were 3rd and 4th graders getting ready to take a field trip to the Rockdale Career Academy where they would continue their introduction to career pathways. From the questions they asked, you could feel their excitement! And they can't wait until our own Newton College & Career Academy opens up right next door to them! We talked about different careers and I left them with three things to remember: study hard, always treat others with dignity and respect, and dream big. Who knows, I may have been talking to a future teacher, principal, lawyer, doctor, mayor, governor, or President of the United States! Many thanks to Guidance Counselor Evalyne Davis, Principal Lizzella Dodson, and to the 10 men who take their time during each month to mentor these young boys who they are turning into young men ... *Mentoring works!*



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8. On January 11, at Georgia Perimeter College, national expert Katherine McKnight overviewed the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for NCSS Content Specialists, Principals, Assistant Principals, and Central Office Administrators. In short, her main agenda consisted of: College and Career Readiness Skills and 21st Century Skills and Textual Complexity and Interdisciplinary Literacy. Throughout her presentation, seminar participants accessed the internet to take a look at the CCSS. (Click on <http://www.corestandards.org/>. This link has sections inclusive of “About the Standards,” “Key Points in English Language Arts,” “Key Points in Mathematics,” “Process,” “Myths vs. Facts,” etc. Very helpful background knowledge!) Georgia, too, has its rendition of the CCSS known as the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS)—100% match to math and approx. 90% match to English/Language Arts. (Click on <http://www.gadoe.org/CCGPS.aspx>.) Per the Georgia link, the CCGPS Timeline is as follows:
 - January - May 2012: Grade-by-Grade Teacher Professional Learning
 - 2012-2013: Classroom Implementation
 - 2014-2015: Projected Date for Common Assessment
9. For updated information regarding our school system dated 1/27/12, see attachment to the e-mail inclusive of these *End-of-Month Notes*: [NCSS Quick Facts](#).

“A simple, emphatic insistence on common curriculum [CCGPS, *my emphasis*], sound lessons [Research-Based Instructional Strategies, Building Background Knowledge, & Technology Integration, *my emphasis*], and authentic literacy [reading, writing, and speaking] ought to be our common goal—the standard for our profession at the classroom, school, and district level. Schools need to focus exclusively on these same, simple priorities for years [in Professional Learning Communities, *my emphasis*]*—or until virtually every student can be assured of reasonably good curriculum and instruction in every course, every year, regardless of which teacher they are assigned. For this to happen, we need to be sure that what we want from our schools is precisely what we communicate—simply, clearly, and persistently.*”

- Mike Schmoker in *Focus: Elevating the Essentials To Radically Improve Student Learning*, ASCD, 2011

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