



The Buzz

AUGUST/
SEPTEMBER
2016



Thomas County Board of Education Monthly Newsletter

Thank you for creating amazing opportunities!

I am thankful to our extraordinary team of teachers, administrators, bus drivers, nutrition workers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, maintenance technicians, and other support staff for an exceptionally smooth start to the 2016-2017 school year. As we approach mid-term of the first nine-weeks, we have settled into a routine with new and expanded opportunities for our students and staff.

I am very proud of our technology and curriculum staff members who are rolling out and implementing the largest deployment of new technology in our school system's history. The hand-in-hand leadership of our technology and curriculum departments has not only delivered and installed new technology, but our instructional technology and curriculum leaders are providing the support for teachers and students to apply the technology in instructionally meaningful ways. The mass deployment of Chromebooks and iPads has enabled more students to simultaneously use technology

to enrich their learning experiences than ever before. The coordination of grant funds --Connections for Classrooms, Striving Readers, GOSA Blended Learning Innovation Grant, and Project Lead the Way-- and EPLOST has enabled our system to apply synergies to get the most out of each of these individual programs.

I am excited that we have continued to expand STEM opportunities for our students by introducing computer coding and Project Lead the Way into our elementary schools. We have a new computer coding and robotics lab at Cross Creek where all students have an opportunity to gain exposure to these exciting engineering fields, and our competitive Lego League team now has a dedicated place to work. Computer coding opportunities have also been expanded at our middle school and high school. We now offer a full computer programming pathway at Thomas County Central High School which culminates with AP Computer Science.

We have added German to

our line-up of foreign language offerings giving our system the most comprehensive offering of foreign language programs in the area. We now offer Spanish, French, Latin, and German. Our fine arts program has also expanded to include full-day dance programs at both the middle school and high school.

Our athletic program added volleyball and is exploring the introduction of slow-pitch softball this spring in order to provide more options for our students to participate in extra-curricular athletics. Our system has expanded services to special needs students at the high school with the addition of a brand-new classroom dedicated to helping students learn life-skills that they will need as they transition out of high school and into independent, adult living.

When you survey all that our school system offers, you can see that we live up to our theme for the year, "We create amazing opportunities!" I appreciate all that you do to create amazing learning opportunities for our students.

The Thomas County School System does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin, sex, or disability.

CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS

Aug. 31 - Sept. 2 - Hand-In-Hand Grandparents Days

Sept. 5 - Labor Day Holiday

Sept. 6 - Cross Creek Card Order Due

Sept. 7 - 9 - Cross Creek Grandparents Days

Sept. 13 & 14 - Garrison-Pilcher Grandparents Days

Sept. 16 - Cross Creek Constitution Day

Sept. 25 - Watch D.O.G. Dad's Night at Garrison-Pilcher



Please visit the school websites for a complete calendar of events.

We create AMAZING...



THOMAS COUNTY SCHOOLS

Amazing artists
Amazing athletes
Amazing engineers
Amazing mathematicians
Amazing musicians
Amazing scholars
Amazing scientists
Amazing teachers
Amazing writers

The Buzz is a monthly publication of the Thomas County Schools. Send suggestions or comments to Melanie Hester, 200 North Pinetree Blvd., Thomasville, GA 31792; 229.225-4380, ext. 115; mhester@thomas.k12.ga.us. *The Buzz* is available online at www.thomas.k12.ga.us, News and Events tab.



Hand-In-Hand Primary School was recently awarded Safe Routes to School Partner of the Year. Pictured with the award are Assistant Principal Dee Gains, PE Coach Hanah Taylor, and Safe Routes School Outreach Coordinator Chelsea Carter.

Hand-In-Hand Awarded Safe Routes to School Partner of the Year

Hand-In-Hand Primary School was recently named The Partner of the Year by Safe Routes to School (SRTS), a Georgia Department of Transportation program promoting safety among children while interacting with traffic. Hand-In-Hand's Physical Education Coach Hanah Taylor helped the school achieve the honor by encouraging pedestrian, car, parking lot, bus, and other types of transportation safety while educating children, parents, and staff.

The "Partner of the Year" title goes to the most outstanding partner in each of the five territories in the state of Georgia. Hand-In-Hand competed against 62 other counties in the Southwest Territory.

"I am pleased to receive this award," said Taylor. "I work for a great school that cares about our students' safety. I love my job because I learn so much from my students, and they mean the world to me."

Safe Routes to School programs are sustained efforts by parents, schools,

community leaders and local, state, and federal governments to improve the health and well-being of children by enabling and encouraging them to walk and bicycle to school.

Chelsea Carter, Safe Routes to School Resource Center School Outreach Coordinator, said, "Most schools have the misconception that in order to partner with our program and take advantage of our incentives and resources that children need to be currently or potentially walking from home to school, but clearly this is untrue with the Southwest Partner of the Year being a primary school located off of a highway bypass. I'm very proud of Hanah Taylor for not taking their location as an excuse to refuse to participate."

SRTS programs also examine conditions around schools and conduct projects and activities that work to improve safety and reduce traffic and air pollution in the vicinity of schools. They also encourage children to pursue

Thomas County Schools Receives Award for Financial Excellence

For the third year in a row, the Thomas County School system has been recognized by the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts for Excellence in Financial Management and Reporting.

The Department of Audits created the award program to recognize those entities that are audited annually and go beyond standard financial business practices to be considered "the best of the best." An award of distinction is presented to organizations that submit quality financial statements and supporting documentation in a timely manner, whose annual financial report is given an unmodified audit opinion and is free of any significant deficiencies or material weaknesses, and comply with all Transparency in Government requirements.

Thomas county School Superintendent Dusty Kornegay presented the award to Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Chief Financial Officer Joey Holland at the June board education meeting. Upon receipt of the award,

Holland gave credit to the staff members in the system's finance department.

"The Financial Excellence Award is earned because of the dedication of each staff member who plays a part in the finance and accounting function of the school district," Holland said. "Our employees work hard to follow our accounting policies and procedures and strive for their work product to be as transparent as possible. I'm proud of our staff for earning this recognition."

The Thomas County School District manages an annual budget of more than \$60 million with a monthly payroll of more than \$2.6 million.

Kornegay applauded the efforts of the school system as a whole as well as the Finance Department.

Dr. Kornegay said, "We take the management of the tax dollars entrusted to us very seriously as we strive to be good stewards of our resources. I appreciate the fine work of Mr. Joey Holland and his entire department."

healthier and more active lifestyles throughout their lives.

"Coach Taylor's zealous attitude, willingness to get whatever was needed, and high level of activity blew me out of the water," Carter said. "I have worked for the Resource Center for three years, and this is my first time giving out a Golden Shoe Award as part of the Partner of Year title. Hanah is one of my favorite people to work with, and I feel she has earned the

title for Hand-In-Hand."

All schools are able to be a part of the free Safe Routes to School program, and are encouraged to take part in the 20th anniversary of International Walk to School Day in October. Students do not have to walk to their campus in order to be a part of this international event. For more information, contact Chelsea Carter at 404-387-9579 or via email at chelsea@saferoutesga.org.



TCMS teacher Tammy Sharpe (left) and Eyra Morales, a teacher from Florida, plot an electromagnetic field during their research at the FSU MagLab this summer.

Sharpe Becomes a Scientist During the Summer

While many teachers spent their summers on vacations or relaxing at home, one Thomas County Middle School teacher spent her summer as a scientist.

Tammy Sharpe, 5th grade MERIT science teacher, was selected to participate in the Research Experiences for Teachers summer program at the FSU Magnetic Research Lab in Tallahassee.

Teachers from throughout the United

States apply for this opportunity, and Sharpe was one of the few chosen. This program, funded by the National Science Foundation, is a six-week program that pairs teachers with MagLab scientists to work on actual research projects.

They also participated in seminars, professional development, and technology workshops to develop materials for their classrooms.

Central FBLA Students Dazzle at World Competition



Displaying their trophies won at the international FBLA competition held in July are TCCHS students Steven Tran (from left), Marion Rose Young, Shelby Howard and Mason Lawing. Both teams competed in the Digital Video Production category, with the team of Howard and Lawing finishing third in the world, and Young and Tran finishing fourth.

Two teams of students from the Thomas County Central High School Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) finished in the top four in the world at the recent FBLA international competition held this summer in Atlanta.

Both teams of Yellow Jackets competed in the Digital Video Production category, representing the state of Georgia against teams from every other state, as well as against teams from China and other international locations.

The team of Marion Rose Young and Steven Tran finished fourth in the world, and the team of Shelby Howard and Mason Lawing finished third overall in the world.

"There is no better accomplishment, as a teacher/adviser, than to watch your students achieve greatness that surpasses your expectations," Nick Haskin, TCCHS FBLA adviser said. "The pride of watching Steven Tran and Marion Rose Young, two juniors, walk across the stage and accept their award for

fourth place in the world is nearly unexplainable, but then in the next breath hear that your two graduating seniors, Shelby Howard and Mason Lawing, had won third in the world... needless to say we were 'over the moon' excited. There is really no better way to end your FBLA experience than to place at nationals."

Both teams presented their work to a panel of judges and were subsequently chosen as part of a group of 12 finalists overall. The teams then presented their work one more time, with the top finalists announced to the 12,000 overall participants in attendance. After taking the stage with those 10 finalists, both TCCHS teams made the top four.

"All of the credit has to go to these amazing young men and women who worked hard and persevered," Haskin said. "It is no easy task to win at regionals, place at state, and then be named one of the best FBLA video teams in the world. I could not be more proud."



LONG-TIME EMPLOYEE CELEBRATES MILESTONE BIRTHDAY - Inez McMullen is a familiar face for many people who visit Garrison-Pilcher Elementary School. McMullen has helped students, parents, and staff members for more than 39 years in her role at Garrison-Pilcher. Pictured with McMullen and Buzz are students Leland Dees and Marlee Bass.

Computer Coding Taught School-wide at Cross Creek



Cross Creek fourth graders Taden Shroats, from left, and Bre'Anna Brefford listen as Michele Dechman, coding and robotics teacher, explains how to handle and care for the robots.

Cross Creek Elementary Coding and Robotics Teacher Michele Dechman has been busy introducing robots that her class will be learning to program throughout the school year. Learning how to handle and care for robots is just one part of a first-year coding program at Cross Creek Elementary that includes third and fourth grades.

Thomas County Schools is leading the computer science initiative in south Georgia, teaching all students to code. More than 850 students will be taking advantage of Dechman's robotics classes. All students will visit the coding and robotics class as a part of their exploratory rotation.

"The earlier we introduce children to coding, the more comfortable they will be when presented with more in-depth learning opportunities in middle and high school," said Associate Superintendent Melanie Chavaux. "Our students are taught coding beginning in kindergarten. It is important for our students to be introduced to logical thinking, problem

solving, collaboration, and communication skills."

The addition of the class evolved from the school system's desire to build a stronger foundation for computer science skills. There have been many additions and alterations to the curriculum in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). As students enter middle and high school, they will have a better understanding of the computer science field and an interest in the courses offered at the secondary level.

Cross Creek has iPads, Chromebooks, laptops, and desktop computers that will be used to support applications and programs needed for each robotics device.

"This class will expose all students to robotics and coding which is designed to challenge students academically, intellectually, physically, and creatively," Dechman added. "There will be activities that use all of the different technology devices, as well as 'unplugged' activities which don't require devices."

As part of her preparation for her new position, Dechman participated in Thomas County's summer professional learning that was provided for all coding teachers in the school system. She also attended webinars and participated in specialized training through code.org.

"Some of the tasks seem relatively easy, but they build into a more complex use of coding and programming," Dechman said. "The most exciting task during my training was to create a story by selecting characters, creating dialogue, and actually coding what each character had to do. My interest and desire to teach coding and robotics only grew stronger."

Last year, Dechman's students participated in the Hour of Code activities.

Dechman said, "I saw their excitement. I realized quickly that even though it appeared to be like playing a game for the kids, it was really about problem solving and following directions with other academics embedded into tasks."

Dechman has exciting plans for the first year. The first rotation with students involves an introduction, as well as an outline of the subjects covered in curriculum. Dechman is also teaching the students how to operate and care for the robots.

"We plan to dive into the code.org program," Dechman explained. "We will have Dash and Dot, Ozobots, BB-8, Programmable Rover, EV3 Mindstorms, and Lego WeDO 2.0 kits. Our goal is to expose students to as much as we can."

Most of the robots will be used with partners and teams; however, the Ozobots can be used independently. Once the students understand how to use all the robots, Dechman will implement center rotations where the students can use more than one device in a rotation visit.

Dechman said, "I want this program to grow and develop and get kids excited about where technology can take them now and in the future. We have had several discussions in our introduction about kids knowing more than many adults about technology devices. They can pick up a parent's iPhone or other device, punch a few buttons, and have any problems solved in a matter of minutes."

"Every career uses technology," Dechman added. "Our graduates need to be ready for the challenges of higher learning, or to enter the workforce confident and prepared. By starting Thomas County students off early, their skills can only get better and better as they move through middle and high school."

Cross Creek Discount Cards On Sale

The valuable, year-long Cross Creek discount cards are on sale now until Tuesday, September 6. Selling at the same low price of \$5.00 since 1994, Cross Creek cards save money throughout the year and pay for themselves after the first or second use. The 2016-2017 card has 41 business sponsors. For more information, contact Cross Creek Elementary School at 229-225-3900.



Ausley Named Best in Work-Based Learning



Thomas County Central High School's Work-Based Learning coordinator, Michelle Ausley (center) discusses work assignments with seniors Shakira Lewis (left) and Duncan Maness.

Michelle Ausley, Thomas County Central High School's Work-Based Learning (WBL) coordinator, won the title of "Top Gun" at this summer's Top Gun training for the "Best of the Best" in Work-Based Learning.

"This is a certainly an honor for Mrs. Ausley and the WBL program at TCCHS," Assistant Principal Beth Adams said. "I am not surprised that Mrs. Ausley was selected because she has worked hard to maintain a successful program and increase the opportunities for our students to earn high school credit for being employed in our community. The Top Gun Instructor class and the strategies she's gained will give our students an edge to succeed at a different level. Our students and our community both benefit from her experience and guidance."

In partnership with the Governor's Office of Workforce Development, a workshop was organized to provide specialized training to a select group of WBL coordinators. Coordinators completing this training received credentials and were "pinned" in a WBL

Top Gun recognition ceremony at Georgia Association of Career Technical Educators (GACTE) Summer Conference.

According to Dwayne Hobbs, Program Manager, GaDOE CTAE Division, the concept of the "Top Gun" training is based loosely on the theme of the infamous Top Gun movie where the best of the best are honored by participation in a specialized training opportunity to compete and hone their skills related to the excellence they have already demonstrated.

Hobbs said, "Top Gun participants then are better prepared to promote the excellence of Georgia's Work-Based Learning program which shapes the careers and lives of Georgia's students."

At the training, each Top Gun participant received a Marketing and Public Relations tool kit which will enable them to more effectively market and brand their program and increase connections with the business and industry sector. The kit is ready for exhibits, career fairs, community meetings, etc. Additionally, throughout the three-day training, points were awarded

for leadership and initiative, resulting in the naming of the "top" Top Gun participant. Ausley received this honor for the Top Gun WBL class.

"I was extremely honored to receive the e-mail stating I was one of 20 chosen to attend the State of Georgia Top Gun Training," Ausley said. "I can honestly say this was the best

training I have ever received. When Mr. Dwayne Hobbs announced my name as the Best of the Best of the Top Gun training, I was so excited and humbled at the same time."

For more information about Thomas County Central High School's WBL program, contact Ausley at mausley@tcjackets.net.



BACK TO SCHOOL BLITZ A HUGE SUCCESS - Sponsored by Thomas County Family Connections in partnership with the Thomas County and Thomasville City School systems, the tenth annual Back to School Blitz was a success. Hosted by Thomasville City Schools this year, the event was held in the Thomasville High School gym. The goal is to provide students and parents with necessary tools for a successful school year. The community-wide event offers free, basic school supplies, free health screenings, valuable information displays and more. Pictured is Tammy Shealey, TCCHS counselor, giving a TC cup to a visitor.



SUMMER READING CHALLENGE WINNER - Thirty-five Hand-in-Hand students who read at least 20 books this summer were recently rewarded with an ice cream party in the media center. Students' names were posted on a bulletin board in the front lobby. The group received certificates, "Star Reader" pencils, and stickers. During the ice cream party, avid reader Olivia Bass (pictured above) was the winner of a gift certificate to be used at the school's upcoming book fair.

Governor Taps TCMS's Elkins to Serve on Advisory Committee

Major changes are being considered for education in Georgia, and one teacher from Thomas County Schools has been selected to provide the classroom viewpoint on recommended revisions to policies or procedures. Leslie Elkins, a math teacher at Thomas County Middle School, has been invited to serve on Governor Nathan Deal's Teacher Advisory Committee.

In December of last year, Governor Deal received recommendations from the Education Reform Commission outlining changes in Georgia's education system. During the State of the State address in January, the Governor announced that he would appoint a Teacher Advisory Committee to review and provide input on the recommendations that specifically relate to teachers.

The committee will be chaired by Amy Carter, State Representative from Valdosta, who is also a CTAE teacher at Lowndes High School. Carter also serves on the House Education Committee and has been a floor leader in the House for Governor Deal. The Governor's Office solicited recommendations of teachers from the directors of each Regional Education Service Agency (RESA), superintendents, legislators, and other educational leaders throughout the state.

Specific areas to be studied by the teacher group will include teacher recruitment and retention,

assessments, and reporting methods to demonstrate that children have learned the knowledge and skills expected, and teacher compensation models.

"I am very excited and honored to have been selected

to represent Thomas County Schools as part of Governor Deal's Teacher Advisory Committee," Elkins said. "I look forward to representing educators from our system, and within the state, as we

share ideas and discuss ways to help navigate the direction of education in Georgia."

Elkins will join other selected educators from across the state. Teachers were selected from each region of the state including the North, South and metro areas.

The group participated in a conference call on May 25 to receive the charge of the group from Governor Deal. Teachers met as regions to consider the Education Reform Commission's proposals. Elkins met with the Central and South Georgia teachers on June 7 in Perry, Georgia.

The Teacher Advisory Committee will participate in meetings, conference calls and webinars throughout the summer and early fall and provide feedback following each discussion. Dr. Susan Andrews, Director of Special Projects for the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, will facilitate these discussions. A conference call scheduled for October 5 will conclude their participation in the process.



ELKINS



VICTORY FOR VOLLEYBALL - The Thomas County Central girls volleyball team recently celebrated their first-ever home victory with Central mascot "Buzz." The team is halfway through its inaugural season with a record of 7-1. The team beat their hometown rival, Thomasville High School, twice, and will match up with them once more along with Brooks county in a tri-match on September 12 in the old Central High School Gym.

Hand-In-Hand Receives Highest Quality Child Care Rating

Hand-In-Hand Primary School has received the highest quality rating by Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). Bright from the Start assists Georgia child care programs in providing quality care for children and their families. Hand-In-Hand's participation in Quality Rated means the school has gone the extra mile to help make sure children are receiving an enhanced learning experience.

Public schools are not required to go through this rating process. The opportunity was presented to participate in the pilot of rating public Pre-K programs, and Hand-In-Hand volunteered to participate.

"Hand-In-Hand made the highest rating and is proud to publish this accomplishment," Hand-In-Hand Principal Jeanna Mayhall said.

Similar to rating systems for other industries like restaurants and hotels, Quality Rated assigns a rating (one star, two stars, or three stars) to

child care programs that meet certain quality standards in early childhood education over and above the state licensing requirements for health and safety.

"I appreciate the hard work and dedication of our teachers and staff who strive for the highest standards of care for the children of our area," Mayhall said. "We know that early childhood care and education have a profound impact on the lives of children, and our teachers make a significant, positive difference in their futures. We knew that we had a strong program but going through the Quality Rating process helped us to identify our weak areas and make significant improvements to raise our standard of excellence."

Child care centers can earn a 1-, 2- or 3-star rating, with 3 being the best. Hand-In-Hand was rated based on points derived from a portfolio, as well as an independent observation.