

GaDOE Updates

Educating Georgia's Future

June 2015

FROM SUPERINTENDENT WOODS



On May 8, I had the distinct pleasure of announcing the 2016 Georgia Teacher of the Year -- Mr. Ernest William Lee, II.

Much like our outgoing Teacher of the Year, Ms. Amanda Miliner, Mr. Lee experienced a career change that led him to education.

In fact, he worked as a lawyer for more than 20 years before becoming a teacher. Then he began to ask himself, "What have you done to make a lasting and positive impact on the community and the lives of others?" That question led him to substitute teaching, then to a full-time career as a teacher.

Now, he has been recognized as the very best in Georgia education. He will spend the year traveling across the state, sharing his knowledge with other teachers and representing the teaching profession to the public. What an inspiration!

For the first time this May, Georgia extended its Teacher Appreciation Week celebrations throughout the entire month. I was able to thank some of our wonderful educators in person, and was encouraged to see Georgians of all ages thanking their own teachers, past and present.

Because, you see, I believe what Mr. Lee believes -- that teaching is still the best way to make a real and lasting difference in the lives of others. I am grateful to all who continue that work each day.

Meet the new Georgia Teacher of the Year



Mr. Ernest William Lee, II, an IB History, U.S. Government & Civics teacher in the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System, is the 2016 Georgia Teacher of the Year.

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

Barbara Landreth's legacy

There's a classroom at **Newnan High School** stacked to the ceiling with history -- boxes of yearbooks and newspaper clippings, stacks of literature textbooks, Shakespeare printouts.

Then there's the teacher, Mrs. Barbara Landreth, who's been on the job for 53 years, 51 of them in this classroom. Mrs. Landreth is one of Georgia's longest-serving teachers; to kick off Teacher Appreciation Month, State School Superintendent



Richard Woods made a visit to her classroom at Newnan High.

When asked about her long history in education, Mrs. Landreth graciously deflects. But residents of Coweta County would beg to differ. She's an institution, they say. It's an honor to be placed in her class.

During his visit, Superintendent Woods thanked Mrs. Landreth for her years of service, then asked what advice she'd offer to newer teachers.



"Know your content and don't try to please everyone in the room," she said. "You'll never succeed trying to please everybody."

Superintendent Woods asked Mrs. Landreth, who has taught every high school grade level and still

advises the yearbook staff and chaperones the prom, whether she'd make the same career choice, given the chance to make it again.

Her answer was quick and sure. "I'd do the same thing," she said. "I'd do the same thing."

Read a longer version of this story at www.gadoe.org, under "News & Announcements"

Expressing gratitude face-to-face

TEACHER APPRECIATION MONTH

In addition to other efforts to thank teachers during Georgia Teacher Appreciation Month, Superintendent Woods wanted to meet with teachers in person, shake their hands, and say thank you.

He was able to do that at **Dobbs Elementary School** (Atlanta Public Schools), where he walked the halls and said hello to each teacher, letting them know how grateful he was for their service.

“Make no mistake, Dobbs Elementary has not had an easy time of it,” Superintendent Woods said. That’s why I decided to go there – to thank them for persisting, even in the hardest times, on behalf of their students. I wish I could have thanked every teacher in Georgia personally.”

Superintendent Woods was joined on his visit by Principal Dr. Charnita West, APS Associate Superintendent Dr. Danielle Battle, and an exceptional student tour guide, Imoni.



QUICK QUOTE FROM SUPT. WOODS

“You are an encouragement to all of us. We look at you and see what we can become.”

At the Georgia School for the Deaf’s graduation. More: <http://bit.ly/gsdgrad> or scan code.



MESSAGE ON MATH

Superintendent Woods released a column this month on the methods used in math education. An excerpt of the column is below. Read the full version at www.gadoe.org, under “News & Announcements.”

Getting math right for the students and teachers of Georgia has been a priority of mine since day one. I regularly hear from parents unable to help their children with math homework, and math teachers who struggle to master instruction due to a lack of textbook options and unclear expectations for state tests.

While it is important for kids to think critically and to use different methods for problem solving, it is also essential that students have a firm understanding of the fundamentals of mathematics. Teaching using “funny math methods” – such as, for example, the lattice method – is not state-mandated and not a requirement for students to achieve on any state tests.

Due to a lack of textbook options and rushed implementation, many local school systems and mathematics teachers turned to Internet resources and/or vendor products labeled “Common Core”. I ask that local systems, instead of turning outward to un-vetted resources, turn inward toward collaboration among the talented experts within their own departments.

Offering choices and clarification are some of the steps we are taking to address the concerns surrounding mathematics in our state. We will continue to monitor this issue closely to ensure our students have the best education possible.

SOCIAL MEDIA VOICES

“Thankful for teachers like Barbara Tillman and Kay Harrell who taught a shy girl that school is a wonderful place to bloom! #thankaGAteacher”

--@pamwilliamsGA on Twitter

AROUND THE DEPARTMENT

Cowan Road earns STEM certification

GaDOE has awarded STEM certification to Cowan Road Elementary School in the Griffin-Spalding School System. Cowan Road is the ninth Georgia elementary school to earn STEM certification, and the 17th school overall. At Cowan Road, teachers work diligently to integrate math, science, and engineering so students can apply the concepts they learn using project-based learning.

Presidential Scholars semifinalists named

Thirteen students from Georgia public high schools have been named semifinalists in the 2015 U.S. Presidential Scholars Program, one of the nation's highest honors for high school students. Each year, up to 141 students are named U.S. Presidential Scholars. Benjamin Chen, Ryan Chen, Kathryn Duncan, Tony Gong, Eli Guidry, Furichous Jones, Justin Lee, Megan Paik, Yash Shirsath, Dain Song, Sida Tang, Austin Wang, and Rebecca Yan are among 565 semifinalists named this year.

GA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE NEWS

Georgia Teacher of the Year is an inspiration

The Savannah Morning News featured Georgia Teacher of the Year Ernie Lee in a May 11 editorial. An excerpt: “[Lee] had a roundabout career path before finding a place where he could flourish. That took courage. And sacrifice.” *More:* <http://bit.ly/gadoesavannah>.

Tackling the technical skills gap, worldwide

GaDOE world languages program specialist Michaela Claus-Nix is quoted in Global Atlanta's article, “Foundation Tackles Technical Skills Gap from Germany to Georgia.” She shared about Georgia's dual-immersion programs, workforce training, and more. *More:* <http://bit.ly/gadoeglobal>.

AROUND THE DISTRICTS

National honor for GA educator

Jessica Ainsworth, an Assistant Principal at **Lithia Springs High School** in Douglas County, is the National Assistant Principal of the Year. Ainsworth will represent her profession at the national level for the next year.

Ainsworth's efforts have led to consistent increases in reading scores across all subgroups, most notably a tripling of the reading proficiency rate among students with disabilities from 27 percent to 83.



Lithia Springs has also seen increases in graduation rate, job placements and college acceptances. Students describe Ainsworth as approachable, and teachers value the professional development opportunities she creates for them.

“Strong leadership at the school level is absolutely essential as we work to personalize, rather than standardize, Georgia students' education,” State School Superintendent Richard Woods said. “Ms. Ainsworth's role is not an easy one, and it requires a genuine love for the work and a desire to serve students. I offer her my sincere congratulations and am thrilled an educator of her caliber will represent Georgia nationwide.”

SOCIAL MEDIA VOICES

“As a parent on the State Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council this is on the top of my agenda. Bridging the gap in mathematics so parents can assist students with homework, students aren't confused and teachers know what's expected.”

--Wendy Underwood on Facebook