

PROS

Public Relations in Our Schools

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MAY 2008

Vestavia Hills Schools Go Hi-Tech

A massive project underway at the Vestavia Hills School System will put \$12-million worth of technology into every classroom at every school. All seven schools in the system are getting infrastructure upgrades, new computers for teachers and students, and 500 interactive boards along with the high tech accessories.

“We think it’s really going to be great and propel our school system into the 21st Century as far as integrating technology into our instructional program,” said Vestavia Hills Superintendent Jamie Blair.

All of the interactive boards will have an accessory called a voice enhancer. The enhancer makes it possible for everyone in the classroom to hear the teacher no matter where the students sit.

“This is also a big asset for hearing impaired students – they can be in any classroom and hear equally as well. The teacher can talk in a normal voice and can be heard equally as well throughout the classroom,” said Blair.

Another component of the interactive board is a student response device called a ‘clicker’ that allows teachers to ask questions while having

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“This technology is changing the way teachers teach – and students learn. Children are entranced with this new technology. They are ready to take these new teaching tools and run with them.”

– Connie Bain, Vestavia Hills Technology Director

PHASE 1

Upgrade school infrastructure with electrical outlets, cables and wires.



PHASE 2

Every student receives a laptop.



PHASE 3

Install interactive boards.



PHASE 4

Add computers in elementary grades and mobile labs in secondary grades.



the students respond from their desks by pushing a selection on their individual clicker. The questions could be in the multiple choice format such as a, b, c or d. In the upper grades the students can also type in a word or sentence with their clicker.

The teacher can then see the actual responses for each student – which students have answered, which have answered correctly and which have not answered correctly. Vestavia Hills Technology Director Connie Bain says the interactive system can be



an invaluable tool for a quick student assessment. The answers can quickly be turned into a pie chart or bar graph – looking at the class as a whole.

“This technology is changing the way teachers teach – and students learn,” said Bain. “Children are entranced with this new technology. They are ready to take the new teaching tools and run with them.”

Superintendent Blair said the project has four phases and they anticipate completion by the end of this year. The first phase was a \$3-million upgrade to the schools’ infrastructure that included adding electrical outlets, cables and wires.

“We had to do all the non-fun stuff first, things that you don’t see in the ceilings and walls, but that’s what makes the technology work,” said Blair. “The last thing we wanted to do was buy a lot of equipment and then install it and it doesn’t work.”

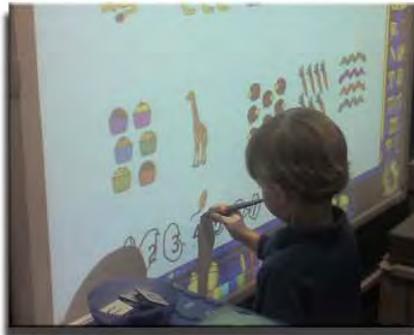
Every teacher received a laptop as the second phase was implemented. The third phase that is currently underway, is the installation of the interactive boards. The fourth phase provides for adding four computers in all elementary schools and increasing the number of mobile labs in secondary schools.

“The reason we did this is because today’s students are more and more digital learners. In the past when we

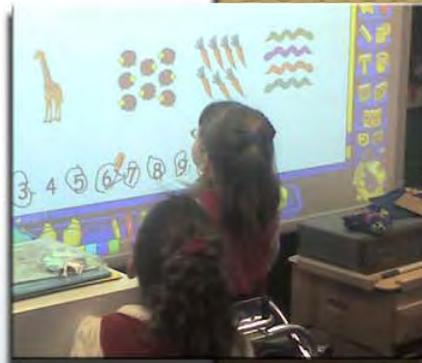
were in school the chalk board was fine. Now schools are up against students who go home and are exposed to cell phones, laptops, iPods and television. We can’t compete with that with a piece of chalk and a slate

board,” said Blair. “So we have to get into their arena. This is going to make a tremendous impact on our instruction and the achievement of the children because they are naturally going to be more engaged.”

“It’s just amazing at the reaction of teachers to this new equipment and it’s amazing at how the kids are reacting to the equipment,” said Blair.



“I walked down the hall of an elementary school – they have only had the boards two weeks and I saw incredible things being done,” said Bain. “I went into a pre-school special needs classroom and saw a little girl in a walker using the board. She identified the number on the board, took the wand and drew a circle around the correct number. That was the first day after having the board installed.”



IF YOU’RE THINKING ABOUT GOING HIGH TECH AT YOUR SCHOOL HERE IS WHAT SUPERINTENDENT BLAIR RECOMMENDS:

1 The first thing I would recommend is that you look, visit, listen, read, do your homework and decide from all information what it is you want for your school systems.

2 Find out what works for you and your teachers.

3 Provide plenty of training. It’s nice to have the equipment, but if the teachers don’t know how to use it it’s not going to be successful and your kids are not going to benefit from it.

4 Do a thorough job of planning before you start and make sure you have buy-in from most of your stakeholders.

DAVID STILES IS FIRST SUPERINTENDENT FOR THE NEW SARALAND SCHOOL SYSTEM



Saraland Superintendent David Stiles is a former Mountain Brook principal and administrator and was most recently a stockbroker for Morgan Keegan in Birmingham. He is the first superintendent to lead the new Saraland City School system.

Q: Briefly tell me about your background?

A: I have a Master's Degree in History and Educational Administration and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration from the University of Georgia. I began my career as a high school history teacher in Gwinnett County, Georgia. I later served as an assistant principal at several schools in that county before being promoted in 1993 to principal of Shiloh High School, also in Gwinnett County.

I moved to Mountain Brook in 1996 as principal of Mountain Brook High School where I worked until 2002 when I became the Director of Organizational Development for the Mountain Brook Schools.

Last year I began work as a financial advisor with Morgan Keegan, where I remained until hearing about the unique opportunity that is developing in Saraland.

Q: What did you learn at Mountain Brook City Schools that helped you at Morgan Keegan?

A: One of the most impressive priorities in the Mountain Brook Schools is its commitment to professional development. It is one of a very few school systems in the nation to receive a model professional development award from the U.S. Department of Education.

When I moved to Morgan Keegan, I wanted to carry that kind of commitment to professional excellence with me. I found that the training programs in Morgan Keegan were very compatible with outstanding professional development ideals.

I was able to embrace a personal devotion to developing my new business practice with a high degree of excellence.

Q: What did you learn at Morgan Keegan that you think will translate and help you in your new role as superintendent?

A: The training for becoming a licensed securities broker was a great opportunity to learn about the complex world of financial investments. I believe that my training at

Morgan Keegan will serve the Saraland schools well because we are going to be growing rapidly and building new schools for some time. And that will likely lead us into the bond market for financing. I am not sure how many superintendents have experience that helps them understand bond issues from both sides of the table so to speak. I am fortunate that I know the kinds of things to look for to make sure our schools are financed responsibly.

Q: Taking all of your experience into play, what advice would you offer school public information officers when dealing with the media/parents/community?

A: In my experience I have found that the most basic tenets of good public relations are very simple: be truthful, be proactive and be available.

Most parents and community leaders know that running a good school system is not rocket science. It is a basic good understanding of people and finding ways to meet the needs of everyone involved. Good schools help build good communities. And that goes back to the basics of truth, integrity, listening, responding and being willing to make appropriate changes when necessary.

Q: What do you see as your biggest challenge ahead?

A: The biggest challenge will most likely lie in the ability to handle rapid growth over the next 5–10 years. I have seen how that works in my previous experience in Gwinnett County, which was the fastest growing county in the nation during the 1980s and early 90s. I have witnessed the challenges of building new buildings, hiring many new staff members, and anticipating additional growth on the horizon.

I am confident that the community of Saraland is committed to providing a world class education in that environment and I look forward to the challenge.



BUTLER COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT NAMED 2008 CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

The Greenville Advocate newspaper named Michael Looney, Butler County School Superintendent its 2008 Citizen of the Year.

"Mike Looney has not been in Butler County long, but in that short time, our education system has made tremendous strides forward," said Greenville Advocate editor Jay Thomas. "Through his efforts, along with the board of education, Butler County students have opportunities they never had before."

Congratulations and Welcome to Crystal Boykin, the new public information officer for Selma City Schools.

KUDOS

Way to Go

Ata Boy

Congrats



SCHOOL DISTRICT CELEBRATES STUDENTS WITH FIRST EDUCATION CELEBRATION

The Russell County School District held its first Education Celebration event in March to celebrate students, recognize accomplishments and motivate students prior to state testing. About 500 community members, family members, school district employees and students participated in the fun-filled celebration.

Those present were treated to a slide show that showcased the school district. Students, teachers and principals performed skits, songs, dances and cheers, and motivational letters from community leaders were read out loud during the program. A variety of local businesses and agencies were on hand to share information with those present as they waited for the program to begin. The celebration will become an annual event.

BCN-TV SWEEPS STATE BROADCAST JOURNALISM COMPETITION

A story about rebuilding a small Mississippi town after Hurricane Katrina, coverage of the Central High School football championship and a feature about the new Oakhill School pond led the Television Production students at the Tuscaloosa Center for Technology to a record number of Alabama Scholastic Press Association (ASPA) awards.

Students from Bryant (B), Central (C), and Northridge (N) high schools participated in the television production program which produces the weekly television show; BCN-TV presents "Common Ground," that airs Fridays at 8 a.m. on WVUA-TV. BCN-TV staffers won 28 of 37 individual broadcast awards presented at the 2008 ASPA Convention in March at the University of Alabama. They also walked away with the top journalism award, "All-Alabama." The program has won nearly 120 ASPA awards in seven years.

Television Production teachers Mark Raines and Valencia Winston accompanied the students to the ASPA Convention. Raines was recently named the national Career and Technical Education Teacher of the Year for his work with the student broadcasting program.



MADISON, ALABAMA STUDENTS RECEIVE STATE RECOGNITION

Students from the Academy of Academics and Arts (AAA) in Madison, Alabama received state recognition in April for working with the elderly. The school received the Intergenerational Award for its accomplishments to establish positive relationships between the elderly and other age groups.

Students have successfully partnered with senior citizens for the last eight years to coordinate The Empty Bowl Service-Learning Project which helps raise money to get people in Huntsville off of the Meals-On-Wheels waiting list. Since the inception of the program, AAA has raised more than \$40,000 to reduce the waiting list. AAA has a partnership with the Madison County Senior Center through their Learn and Serve grant from the Alabama Department of Education.



CONGRATULATIONS

Alabama School Communicators Association members met on April 25 and elected the following slate of officers for 2008-2009.

President—Nez Calhoun
(ncalhoun@jefcoed.com)

Vice President and President Elect—John Merrill (john@tcss.net)

Vice President for Membership—David Hagood (dhagood@dallask12.org)

Secretary—Michaelle Chapman (mchapman@bhamcityschools.org)

Treasurer—Tom Salter
(tom.salter@mps.k12.al.us)

They were elected at the ninth PowerHour sponsored by NSPRA which also doubled as an ASCA meeting. It was held at the Instructional Support Center for the Shelby County Schools. Cindy Warner hosted.



YOUNG GO YAHOO, RICH GO GOOGLE

Research firm Hitwise has put together an analysis that looks at the demographics that search engine Yahoo attracts compared to the audience that Google draws by age group. According to Hitwise, Yahoo Search attracts a younger audience than Google. Yahoo draws a larger share of searchers in the 18-24-year-old category and the 25-34 year old category. When looking at the 45-54-year-old group and the 55 plus age group the results are the opposite. Google receives more visitors than Yahoo in these older demos. And when it comes to spending online, Google users are more likely to be big online spenders.



“It is a good thing for an uneducated man to read books of quotations.”

–Winston Churchill

“Hope is the anchor of the soul, the stimulus to action, and the incentive to achievement.”

–Author Unknown

“We should acknowledge differences, we should greet differences, until difference makes no difference anymore.”

–Dr. Adela A. Allen, Educator

“Learning from experience is a faculty almost never practiced.”

–Barbara Tuchman

“A master can tell you what he expects of you. A teacher, though awakens your own expectations.”

–Patricia Neal

“Education is when you read the fine print. Experience is what you get if you don’t.”

–Pete Seeger

A Little Bit of Humor...

“My wife’s a water sign. I’m an earth sign. Together we make mud.”

– Rodney Dangerfield

STUDIES LINK TEACHER ABSENCES TO LOWER STUDENT SCORES

New research conducted by Harvard and Duke Universities indicates that teacher absences impact student achievement.

“What we are finding is what common sense would expect: that the more teachers are out before the test, the less well students perform,” said Raegen T. Miller, the lead author of a recent paper on the subject produced by a group of researchers at Harvard University’s graduate school of education.

Both studies suggest that schools with higher numbers of low-income students suffered more from teacher absences. The Harvard study found that the poorest 25 percent of schools averaged nearly one more sick day per teacher than the richest 25 percent. Furthermore, the study indicated that teachers in schools with more low-income students had a persistently higher rate of teacher sick and personal days. And the study finds that the absentee rate among teachers is higher in larger schools than it is in smaller schools.



You can read more about the study in *Education Week*.

MAY is ...

				1 National Day of Prayer Holocaust Remembrance Day	2	3 Kentucky Derby 
4	5	6 Childhood Depression Awareness Day Hindenburg exploded, 1937	7 School Nurse Day	8 STATE BOARD MEETING	9 Military Spouses Day	10
11 	12	13 Frog Jumping Day celebrates Mark Twain's 'jumping frog' which made him famous.	14 	15	16 	17 Armed Forces Day
18	19	20	21 Charles Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic, 1927	22 STATE BOARD WORK SESSION	23	24
25 National Missing Children Day	26 Memorial Day	27	28 Golden Gate Bridge opened 1937	29	30 Senior Health and Fitness Day	31



Teacher Appreciation Month



Making Choices for a Healthier Future

Older Americans Month



Military Appreciation Month



Physical Fitness & Sports Month

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