



The Insider

Highlighting Excellence in Harrisonburg City Public Schools
October 2018



Virginia's First Lady Visits HCPS

On October 5, Virginia's First Lady, Mrs. Pamela Northam, visited Elon W. Rhodes Early Learning Center as part of her statewide "Back to School" tour to raise awareness of the importance of high-quality Early Childhood Care and Education. Ninety percent of a child's brain development occurs before kindergarten, and so ensuring high quality education during that time is so important. Mrs. Northam is also interested in learning more about early childhood education programs across Virginia, so she came to visit Elon Rhodes and Stone Spring Elementary to hear about our local early childhood strengths and needs.



Mrs. Northam spoke with many of the teachers and thanked them for their hard work. She spent time interacting with the students in the developmentally appropriate space that was designed just for them.



She read to them, played games, and handed out special first lady coins. She brought books to the classrooms and distributed school supplies. She received many hugs, smiles, and artwork from children.

Mrs. Northam also ate lunch with students at Waterman Elementary and participated in "Crunch Heard 'Round the Commonwealth," an event intended to increase awareness of Virginia Farm to School programs, in which participants across Virginia simultaneously took a bite out of a locally-sourced apple. Students also gave Mrs. Northam a tour of the school's garden.

After lunch, she stopped by Stone Spring Elementary, where she toured Head Start classrooms and donated books. Our staff and students were delighted to host her, and would love to welcome her back again soon!

Stone Spring Elementary Supports All Students

In 2009, the General Assembly passed a resolution, initiated by a group of youth with disabilities, designating October as Disability History and Awareness Month (DHAM). They also developed a vision statement for DHAM: *Disability history education and awareness will promote positive attitudes in schools creating a culture of mutual respect, understanding, and equal opportunities for all.*

At Stone Spring Elementary, approximately 16% of our students have a disability and receive special education services. No matter the challenge, we ensure that all students are a full member of our school community. Their peers are a huge part of this! It is not unusual to see a student pushing a wheelchair to help another student transition from one classroom to another or attending a lunch bunch to help practice social skills. One student, who is non-verbal, lights up with a giant smile when her peers greet her by name every morning. To her classmates, she is just another student and friend who also happens not to speak.



Various programs are available to support students with disabilities. In our Autism program, students have access to a sensory room with a variety of materials to help them regulate sensory inputs and needs. The teachers, assistants, and support staff, such as the Speech Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, and Behavior Specialist, collaborate to design and implement integrated programs to develop vocabulary, communication skills, social skills, and daily living skills. In our Multiple Disabilities program, we have adaptive equipment for music and PE to ensure students with limited mobility can participate in specials. The class also takes field trips to the Wellness Center with our

physical therapist to facilitate movement activities in the warm water pool. These are just a few examples of specialized programs. There are many more that occur as a regular part of our school day.

What can you do at home to foster acceptance of people with disabilities? Here are a few suggestions:

- Help children see that children with disabilities may need to do things differently, and there is nothing wrong with that.
- Talk with your child about how all children have things in common. They have favorite activities, music, tv shows, books, and foods.
- Children with disabilities also have feelings, so the words that we use matter. Children with disabilities are not “sick” or “have things wrong” and children without disabilities are not “normal” but rather “typical.”
- Name calling and jokes are not acceptable whether or not a person has a disability.
- It is ok to ask questions. This leads to understanding.
- Finally, the best way to teach a child something is to model it. If your child sees you being friendly, they will be friendly.

Upcoming Dates

Oct. 26: No School - Teacher Workday
Nov. 5: Parent/Teacher Conferences (11a-7p)
Nov. 6: No School - Teacher Workday
Nov. 6: School Board Meeting - 7:00 pm

Visit our website for
the full calendar of events

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New Teachers Thrive at Keister Elementary

One of our goals at Keister Elementary this year is to ensure that our new teachers don't just survive, but thrive! A collaborative team of teachers, administrators and support staff developed and designed a school-based mentoring program for teachers in their first year of teaching. New teachers at Keister now have their mentor teacher to support them along with the "Thrive!" program, where they receive ongoing support as they navigate their new world of teaching.

The Thrive group meets at strategic times throughout the school year. The goal is to acclimate new staff to the division, familiarize them with school expectations, support them in a manner that allows them to quickly become contributing members of the school community, and help them build positive collegial relationships with one another.

Our first meeting was held on September 20 at Magnolia's restaurant in downtown Harrisonburg. As a small group, we discussed teacher evaluations, smart goals and professional development goals. Teachers shared bright spots and specific challenges they are facing. Research shows that programs such as these can help improve the performance and retention of new teachers, enhance their skills and result in an increase in student learning.



If our ultimate goal is student growth and achievement, we must build on what our new teachers know and strengthen their classroom instruction. We hope our new teachers learn, laugh and continue to thrive in their first year at Keister!

Smithland Elementary: Here Comes the Sun

"No one is useless in this world
who lightens the burdens of another."
- Charles Dickens

Learning about the world around us sometimes inspires seeking out ways to help others. In September, many of our morning meetings and classroom discussions revolved around Hurricane Florence. Smithland students saw the effects of the rain on our playground and the effects of the hurricane on many other communities in the news. Our students wanted to help when they heard that between 8,000-10,000 homes suffered major damage or were destroyed. We'd like to share two examples of small actions that led to helping those around us and others we don't even know.



- Second graders in Ms. Munn's class decided that there was a need for grooming our playground to make it safer and more fun to play on. They gathered up our garden tools and went to work spreading the mulch around so that others would enjoy their time outside.
- After hearing about Hurricane Florence and its aftermath in the news, Ms. Hunt's kindergarten students asked if they could help those affected. They collaborated with a local company, Rockingham Redi-Mix, that was planning to drive trailers of supplies to North Carolina. Supplies were collected from teachers at Smithland as well as donations from a local church. Ms. Hunt's students worked to earn the supplies by helping in other teacher's classrooms. They collected over ten boxes of supplies! The supplies were taken to a donation site for Hearts with Hands Disaster Relief in Asheville, NC, where they will be distributed to those in need.

Just as the appearance of the sun elevates our moods and brightens our hearts, these small acts of kindness bring joy to our students and others. We are proud of our students for finding ways to reach out to other communities and provide love and support.

Changing Our Mindset at Thomas Harrison Middle

Walking the halls at Thomas Harrison, you rarely hear students say, "I can't do this." Instead you will hear, "I can't do that yet." Over the past three years, Thomas Harrison has been working to change student mindsets and improve our school's culture. Through the work of our growth mindset committee, students have participated in lessons and activities at each grade level, focusing on what a growth mindset is: the belief that intelligence is not a fixed trait but that intelligence can be developed and improved through effort and learning strategies. Our entire school has worked to change the language we use and how we view learning. All around our building you will see displays promoting a growth mindset.



In classrooms, teachers work to have students grow and challenge themselves. Students have the opportunity to revise work and request to retest. Students meet weekly in community building groups, called den groups. During this time, students participate in activities designed to foster a deeper understanding of what a growth mindset is. Students set goals for themselves, monitor their progress, and receive more specific feedback from teachers. In the coming year, we are working to engage parents in using this language with their children. Principal Don Vale notes, "The growth mindset culture has made a significant difference in our students having a greater level of resilience and persistence."

Along with the work of our growth mindset committee, our school has also begun implementing ideas from Don Hellison. This program, called "Taking Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR)," focuses on the language students are familiar with in physical education. Now, we are working to use this throughout our school day. Students work to

develop awareness of their actions and how they are working toward improvement. As this idea has grown to a school wide effort, eighth grade student leaders facilitated den meetings and educated their peers on TPSR. Students also created posters to visually display these levels, and their work can be seen throughout the school's halls.

As a result of the ideas of TPSR and our growth mindset committee, there has been a positive shift in our students' beliefs. In the upcoming months, our school will continue to grow with these ideas in our den meetings and with our outreach to parents.

Superintendent Search Community Forums

As we begin our superintendent search, we are asking parents and members of the community to help us identify the characteristics we will be seeking in a new superintendent.

You are invited to participate in the following community forums:

Tuesday, Oct. 30

6:30 - 7:30 pm

Skyline Middle School &
Thomas Harrison Middle School
(both locations will be open)

Wednesday, Oct. 31

12:00 noon - 1:30 pm

City Council Chambers
(located at City Hall)



The HHS Unified Basketball team enters the court to cheers.



Principal Daniel Kirwan stops by a Dual Language class at Skyline Middle School.



School Nutrition staff were recognized at a School Board Meeting for receiving the 2018 Dorothy S. McAuliffe School Nutrition Award.



Students are all smiles at Keister Elementary School!



Spotswood Elementary students and their families enjoyed a variety of learning activities during the school's recent Family Math Night.