Members of GCPS Family reach out to help others

Beloved TV personality Fred Rogers often told this childhood story about how his mother would comfort him when scary events on the news frightened him. “My mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’ To this day, especially in times of disaster, I remember my mother’s words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers — so many caring people in this world.”

The famous quote from the longtime host of “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” speaks to important points that have become abundantly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One, GCPS parents have been there for their children when they needed them most, giving kids comfort, care, and support as families weather these difficult times. We know that families — including GCPS staff members and their families — faced challenges as GCPS continued teaching and learning during the two months of Digital Learning Days (DLD). Yet, families did what they could to keep their children engaged and learning, supporting the work of our teachers. The difficult work you did at home so that these last weeks could have a little bit of “normal” for your kids has been nothing less than extraordinary. We can’t thank you enough for your support.

Two, the GCPS Family is full of the “helpers” that Mister Rogers mentions. We’ve selected a few stories to share, but know these are just a fraction of the caring gestures we’ve seen from GCPS students, families, and staff members. At times like these, we realize that we truly are #BetterTogether. Thank you, students, families, and staff members!

#ThankAGCPSTeacher

During Teacher Appreciation Week, our community came together to thank our teachers for their passion and commitment to the labor of love called teaching and learning. Our teachers were celebrated with sweet treats and meals, hand-drawn posters and yard signs, social media shout-outs, videos, and chalk art. In these uncertain times, we are certain of one thing... our teachers are simply the best! And we appreciate the many caring and creative ways our schools and the community said “Thank you!”

“Look for the helpers.”

-Fred Rogers

In this issue of Essentials, we focus on just a few of the ways that students, families, and GCPS employees have gone the extra mile, expressed their thanks in lovely ways, and shared with their neighbors and community during difficult times.
Heroes make, deliver 2.6 million meals!
Between March 16 and May 15, our teams from School Nutrition Program and Transportation, with help from support staff and administrators, prepared and distributed more than 2.6 million meals to children in our community at no charge to families! In the kitchen, in the pick-up lane, and on the bus routes, these heroes on the front line made sure that many of our students had access to nutritious meals each day during DLD.

Meal Bridge supports medical workers
A trio of students—Christa Campbell and Nathan Eyasu of Collins Hill HS and Shivani Desai of Peachtree Ridge HS—started Gwinnett Meal Bridge, allowing the community to donate meals to healthcare workers to show appreciation for their work on the front lines (and to support local restaurants at the same time). Partners in the hospitality industry also have supported the effort. In addition, the student-led project accepts online donations, used to buy snacks and drinks for health heroes at the hospital and other local health centers as well as caregivers in nursing homes. Since Meal Bridge launched in early April, more than 3,500 meals have been donated and delivered for staff at Gwinnett Medical Center. Christa says she was inspired to start the organization after reading a news story about a teen helping hospitals with a similar program. “I knew I had to do something to help,” she says. “I have been overwhelmed by the support of the community.”

Makers’ produce PPE, sew masks
“Makers” around the globe have used their 3D printers to produce personal protective equipment (PPE), including protective mask shields, full-face visor shields, and surgical mask straps.
ICYMI... District staff notch three national honors

**2020 National School Librarian of the Year**
Cicely Lewis of Meadowcreek HS

**2020 National School Counselor of the Year**
Laura Ross of Five Forks MS

**2020 National Principal of the Year**
Kerensa Wing of Collins Hill HS

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**ICYMI…** District staff notch three national honors

Young people around the world are reading “woke,” thanks to an initiative launched by Mrs. Lewis, Meadowcreek HS’ media specialist. Read Woke has sparked a diversity-in-literacy focus and meaningful schoolwide conversations worldwide!

A “true champion” for students, Ms. Ross is a source of both strength and comfort for the families of her school. She is helping to develop a “connect-edness culture” at Five Forks, working with colleagues to ensure that all kids feel valued, seen, and heard.

Relationships are at the heart of a positive school climate, and Mrs. Wing is a compassionate school leader who knows the way to ensure continued success and well-being for her students and staff is by being a present, involved figure in their lives.
**Bulletin Board**

**Congratulations to the Class of 2020!**

Show your support for the Class of 2020— or feature your own senior!— with a [profile frame](#) on your social media accounts! Families can find more information, including [schedules](#) for virtual ceremonies this month and in-person events in July if possible. Coming soon… the senior issue of Communique magazine!

**Get ready for Kindergarten!**

If you have a child who will be five years old on or before Sept. 1, 2020, it's time to get ready for kindergarten! Begin the [online registration process](#) by visiting the website of the [school](#) your child will attend. (Use “School Look-up” online at if you’re unsure of the school.) Much of the process, including the uploading of documents needed for registration, will be completed online. Families that are unable to obtain the required immunization and/or screening documents due to the COVID-19 situation will be given additional time to obtain those documents but should go ahead and begin the online registration process. Find [additional information about requirements](#) online.

**GCPSS expands virtual summer options for HS students**

In light of current restrictions on gatherings, the district has cancelled face-to-face high school classes, and has [expanded virtual summer learning options](#) instead to support GCPSS high school students.

- GCPSS will offer two summer school sessions with a number of course offerings through [Gwinnett Online Campus](#) (GOC). Registration is open on [MyPaymentsPlus](#). Session 1 will take place June 1–23 (May 24 registration deadline) and Session 2 will be held June 15–July 7 (June 7 deadline). [Rising 9th graders](#) have the option to take Health and PE.
- High school students also can take Health and PE virtually through the district’s [Community School programs](#).
- GCPSS offers [Credit Recovery](#) courses to students who previously failed a course with a grade of 60 to 69. The Summer Session is set for May 26 to June 15, with [registration](#) open through May 22.

**Tentative dates set for ES and MS summer session**

With the ongoing pandemic, GCPSS continues to look for the best ways to support students in grades K–8 during the summer. If conditions allow, the school district will hold a summer session for identified elementary and middle school students, set for July 6–21. Families of K–8 students will receive details in report cards.

**SNP news on meal programs, account balances, and more**

- **Summer Meals**— A partnership between the school district and Gwinnett County Government will provide meal assistance to families over the summer. Gwinnett County is providing meals through its [Summer Meals Program](#) at 18 park locations around the county. GCPSS’ [Seamless Summer food program](#) will extend meal options for families, providing pick up at 25 school sites from June 8 to June 26. Watch for details as locations are finalized.
- **Free and Reduced-Price Meal Applications**— If your household income has been affected by the pandemic, [apply now for Free and Reduced-Price meals](#) to ensure your children have access to these benefits for the first 30 days of the 2020–21 school year. Applicants must re-apply to continue benefits for the rest of the year. An application will be available online in July. This eligibility also can be used to access other types of assistance or services available during the pandemic such as low-cost internet services.
- **Account Balances**— Money left in school meal accounts will automatically roll into next school year, following students to whichever GCPS school they attend. No action is required by parents. Families can request a refund by completing a “Student Meal Account Balance Options” form and sending it to the district School Nutrition Program office at the address on the form.

**Support your child’s emotional health with these tips**

While families are focused on their child’s physical health during these challenging times, emotional health is equally important. Here are [ideas and helpful resources](#) from counselors and psychologists.

**Looking ahead to 2020–21 school year, watch for updates**

No one knows exactly what “going to school” will look like in the fall— if it will be in-person, digital, or some blended version. At this time, GCPSS is planning for an [Aug. 5 start](#). (Online, find the [calendar for the 2020–21 school year](#), which is very similar to this year’s calendar.) GCPS leaders will continue to follow guidance from health experts on safely educating and protecting students and staff in the 2020–21 school year.

Because the COVID-19 situation remains fluid, it is a challenge for district officials to finalize plans for the summer and fall. Thank you for your understanding and patience as we have navigated these uncertain times. GCPSS will continue to share important information as soon as we can, via [SchoolMessenger](#) texts, calls, and emails. In addition, we will continue to post these updates on the GCPS [website](#) and on social media. **Stay safe and well, and stay tuned for more information. Have a great summer!**