News from Gwinnett County Public Schools

Theme high schools open doors for students

When kids are connected to their learning, they come to school, achievement increases, behavior improves, and, most importantly, students graduate ready for college or the workplace. Those learning connections are at the heart of innovative theme schools and unique programs transforming a GCPS education.

A group of about 650 students in grades 9–11 are “blazing a trail” as the inaugural student body for the new Paul Duke STEM HS. Paul Duke’s technology-infused STEM curriculum was developed with students and their future in mind.

Drawing students from the Norcross Cluster, the school features lots of hands-on learning and real-world applications in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, particularly technology.

Paul Duke STEM’s four-year research program culminates with capstone projects and internships. “We expect all students will have a much better idea of the options and opportunities that match their personal talents and interests when they graduate,” says Dr. Jonathon Wetherington, the school’s principal.

Teacher Philip Peavy says equity drew him to the Paul Duke STEM faculty. “This school is about bringing technology and STEM to all students, not just the top students.”

The new facility offers innovative learning and collaborative research spaces for the students, including large learning hubs on each of three floors, collaboration suites, a makerspace, a design studio, a multipurpose theater, a dance studio, an advanced computing lab, and a host of other specialized labs.

Perhaps the school’s most unique feature is flexibility. Innovative scheduling combines 45-minute periods with 90-minute blocks so students get the most out of their school day. Digital Flex Fridays give students the option to learn digital lessons from home or come to school to get extra help, use labs for their assignments, participate in co-curricular clubs, and work on projects. “This flexible environment empowers students and puts them in charge of their learning,” says Dr. Wetherington.

Quinn, a junior, says attending Paul Duke STEM was an opportunity that she couldn’t pass up. “I love the STEM fields,” she says, noting that she’s spent the first months of school in the lab exploring her interests. “The coolest things I’ve done thus far in the school year are learning how to produce music in Music Tech and building a catapult in Physics.”

Staff members think Paul Duke STEM is pretty cool, too. Teacher Stephen Cochran says “I never thought that I would be sponsoring a Drone Racing Team! I am super pumped!”

And the Meadowcreek Cluster will have something to be pumped about next school year… a health science high school, the
Looking back with retiring Board members… Daniel D. Seckinger

As Daniel D. Seckinger, the District II representative on the Gwinnett County Board of Education, wraps up 24 years of service to the community, he says that he feels an overwhelming sense of gratitude.

“I really just want to say ‘thank you’ to our teachers and employees and to our community. All of our successes as a school district have their roots in good people doing good work. It has been an honor and a joy to work alongside you serving our community and students.

“I appreciate the community for supporting me personally, and, more importantly, for supporting our students and schools. Great communities make great schools and this community and its schools are why so many of us chose Gwinnett as our home. I encourage our community to continue to hold ‘us’ accountable.”

When asked about what he is most proud of regarding his time with the Board of Education, Mr. Seckinger says it is hard to boil 24 years down to one thing. However, he is very proud of two things that he believes are inextricably linked. First, he notes that Gwinnett has had a very stable Board. Secondly, its members have had a singular focus and shared purpose. “Our determination and commitment to raise student achievement for ALL students has never wavered. That is a great accomplishment… and, as a result, we have, by any credible measure, increased student achievement for ALL students. And, we’ve done this amid enormous growth.”
Bulletin Board

SAFE|SECURE|SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

For 2018–19, GCPS has made additional improvements in school safety and our efforts to communicate with our families:

- **More School Resource Officers (SROs).** GCPS has hired 15 additional officers for a total of 89 SROs.
- **New text feature for Tip Line.** Students are encouraged to say something if they see something by calling or texting our Confidential Tip Line at 770-822-6513.
- **Visitor Management System for high schools.** These buzzer systems, in place at elementary and middle schools, are rolling out this year at the high school level.
- **Updated Emergency Management Plans.** School and district leaders have reviewed each building’s Emergency Management Plan, making modifications as needed. These plans guide staff and public safety partners during a crisis response.
- **Designated phone number for SchoolMessenger.** Add 1-844-248-6644 to your Contacts list so you can identify SchoolMessenger calls and texts as coming from the school system. If you miss a call, just call this toll-free number to retrieve and replay phone notifications. If you have not already subscribed to get texts via SchoolMessenger, it’s easy to do. Text the word “SUBSCRIBE” to the number 67587.

Inclement weather reminder

*Here’s hoping that icy roads, snow, and bitter cold pass us by this winter, but it’s good to be prepared for whatever the forecast may hold.* However, if bad weather causes school to be cancelled or dismissed early, public announcements will be made on GCPS TV, on the school system’s website, on Twitter and Facebook, through SchoolMessenger calls and optional texts, and via metro-Atlanta radio and television stations.

Full-day cancellations usually are announced by 6 a.m. Remember, GCPS announces only school closing information. The school system does not issue an announcement when school will be in session as scheduled.

The key factor in all decisions about whether or not to hold school is the safety of students and staff. GCPS will make up any inclement weather days by using scheduled make-up days (Feb. 15 and March 29), Digital Learning Days, and/or extending the school day or year. Unused inclement weather make-up days will be student holidays.

Looking back with retiring Board members... Dr. Robert McClure

Dr. Robert McClure joined the Board of Education in 1995 and he will conclude his service on the Board in December. As he looks back on 24 years as District IV representative, Dr. McClure is quick to give a nod of appreciation to his fellow Board members. “These are people who never saw their elected positions as a stepping stone to something else... it was simply an opportunity to serve the community they loved. I am proud of the difficult decisions we have made and the policies we have put in place to govern our schools. But, above all else, I am proud of the members of the GCPS team, who have pulled together over the last 24 years and who have made our vision of public education a reality and something that stands as a standard of excellence.”

Dr. McClure continues to believe that successful public education is crucial for our republic to continue. “Public education is uniquely positioned to ensure that every child has an equal opportunity of success in life while fostering the unity necessary for ordering our lives together. However, confusing equality of opportunity with equality of results will make excellence impossible, and confusing diversity for unity will make cooperation impossible.

“We often speak about the Promise of Gwinnett... I take pride in the work we have done to support the promise found in every student and to deliver on that promise.”

The Power of One...

In Gwinnett County Public Schools, we believe in the Power of One... One caring adult can change a child’s life. One hour a week can make a difference in a student’s future. One-on-one support can help a student on his or her path to becoming a successful and responsible young adult.

The district is expanding both the size and the reach of its mentoring programs for 2018–19, recruiting mentors for African-American males (grades 4–12) and females (grades 6 and 7). And, in January, a program will begin for both male and female Hispanic/Latino 6th graders.

*So, could you be the one?* If you’re ready to learn more about how you can be the one adult who makes a difference for one of our students, visit gwinnett.k12.ga.us/mentoring to learn more and apply to be a mentor.

GCPS now hiring drivers

GCPS is accepting applications for bus drivers! The hourly wage is competitive, and drivers have excellent benefits and paid training as well as summer vacation and holidays off. Applicants are required to hold a good driving record and a high school diploma or GED. *Questions? Call 678-225-7670 or visit GCPJobs.org.*

Dr. Robert McClure
Honors and Awards

The Promise of Gwinnett is seen in the many national and state honors for students, staff, and schools, including these recent awards...

- A team from Simpson ES took 1st place in the Odyssey of the Mind World Finals.
- A 2018 North Gwinnett HS graduate placed 1st in the Business Growth Plan Event in international DECA marketing competition.
- A Mountain View HS student earned a Grand Award and the $250,000 Drexel University Scholarship Award in the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair.
- South Gwinnett HS twins took top honors in the Youth Entrepreneurs (YE) Summit Big Idea national competition.
- Peachtree ES and Pinckneyville MS students took home 18 medals in sport stacking, including four golds, at the Junior Olympics.
- The Science Bowl Team from Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology was named Region Champion in the U.S. Department of Energy National Science Bowl*.
- Brookwood HS’ Science Olympiad Team brought home the team’s 10th state championship title.
- Chef Simone Byron of Meadowcreek HS was named a 2018 ProStart National Educator of Excellence Award winner and received the James H. Maynard Excellence in Education Award.
- Carrie Settles-Livers of Brookwood HS received a Leavey Award for Excellence in Private Enterprise Education.
- GCPS’ Purchasing and Property Management team won national kudos for best practices in procurement.
- Several career and technical education (CTE) teachers and administrators were honored by state professional organizations for their leadership in the classroom and in support of CTE, including CTE teachers Jackie Emmons of Archer HS, Keri Beth Jones of Dacula MS, Lt. Col. Rob Rooker of Discovery HS, Dr. Krystal Tomlin of Shiloh HS, and Kimya Rainge of South Gwinnett HS; and Jody Reeves, executive director, and Dustin Davis, instructional coach, both of Academies and Career and Technical Education.

connect to Your Schools

- Read Communiqué online at www.gcps-communique.com
- Watch GCPS TV on your local cable station or stream shows online at www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcpstv/
- Find Gwinnett County Public Schools on Facebook, and follow us on Twitter at GwinnettSchools.
- Check out the GCPS website at www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us, and subscribe to GCPS eNews.