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From Lemons to Lemonade

An update from the office of Chatham County Schools

By Beth S. McCullough

"From lemons to lemonade" – This was the theme Superintendent Robert Logan chose for the 2009 administrative retreat he held in June for school administrators and central office staff. As school districts across the state, including Chatham County Schools, continue to weather the financial storm that has blanketed the nation, everyone is dealing with the complicated issues at hand and working diligently to stay focused on the most important aspect of education — our students.

In spite of budget challenges, some incredible things happened in Chatham County Schools this year. Here are a few. The district had two Morehead-Cain Scholarship recipients from Jordan-Matthews. Northwood High School was recognized in a Newsweek list of top public high schools in the nation. A Northwood teacher made it to the regional teacher of the year level. Athletic teams, Career-Technical Education student organizations, musical ensembles, and other student organizations had great success. Academic scores continue to improve across the district. The dual language immersion program at Siler City Elementary is proving to be a phenomenal success,



The reading program at J.S. Waters Schools draw student smiles (above), while Superintendent Robert Logan congratulates Science Fair winners (left).
PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHATHAM COUNTY SCHOOLS.

both academically and culturally. As of the fall of 2008, every teacher in the district had been issued a laptop computer, which was a multi-year process that had begun in 2004 with each high school teacher being issued a laptop. The reorganization of SAGE Academy, the district's alternative school, was also a success. Our district student dropout

rate was well below the state average while our graduation rate was above the state average. Every senior in the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program was accepted to an institution of higher learning. The Class of 2009 at Chatham Central accumulated over \$2.1 million in scholarships. The number of high school students taking online classes grew throughout the district.

What do we have to look forward to in the upcoming school year?

There is an extensive renovation and

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Educate to build a strong community

The chairman of the county GOP lays out his perspective on improving education.

By Brian Bock

For as long as I can remember politicians have talked about and campaigned on improving education. More recently they've added "sustainable communities" as a high priority. They all claim to have education and sustainability as their top priorities as if the two are not related. Yet after decades of increased spending there are few signs of improved student academic achievement in our public schools. Too often we measure commitment to education by looking at the amount of money spent rather than actual achievement. Districts tout that they spend more than neighboring counties or states. If we truly want to build sustainable communities, we need rethink our education priorities. The best way to sustain our way of life is to have a highly educated populace.

North Carolina School districts spent \$2.9 billion in the last school year (\$2,075 per student). This number has increased steadily over the years, so money is not our problem. Sixty-three percent of the amount spent is on salaries and benefits. Another \$643 million is used to cover the debt service for school facilities to maintain construction programs. We should start in these areas if we hope to use our resources more wisely and improve academic achievement.

As legislators struggle to improve the system, three basic tenants should be incorporated; Choice, Accountability, and Freedom. Systems that incorporate all three are proven to succeed.

Let's start with salaries and benefits. There is a better way to allocate the money. Non-instructional staff has increased much faster

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What do you want to be when you grow up?

By Donna Bianco

The older you are the more difficult of a question this is. When you are a child the response is easy; a fireman, a doctor, a teacher. As you approach high school most kids have no idea even after researching and listening to parents and other mentors in their lives. Then maybe they go to college or start working right out of high school and after a few years, it may be a bit clearer, but is the question REALLY answered? This is such a difficult question for anyone who has not searched their heart and soul for the answer.

My path to finding out what I wanted to be when I grew up finally blossomed when I was almost 50 years old. Is that too late to decide? I don't think so. Starting a business on the cusp of a half century seemed comfortable. I had an idea, I had some capital, I had support, and I had experience. My children were all either in college, or starting out on their own, an empty nester, that's what I was! What was I going to do with all this spare time?

Twenty-five years teaching in public schools; 17 happy years in upstate rural NY, seven difficult years in NC. My



Donna Bianco
PHOTO BY JULIAN SERENO

time? "That's what you do before and after school," I was told. Minimal janitorial services; dirty toilets, mouse droppings, told to clean up a child's vomit myself. Didn't I have enough to do? I guess not. Nursing staff at a minimum and let's not forget the notorious End-of-Grade test. A test that is made by educators in Raleigh whereby some-

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dissatisfaction in NC turned into a feverish sense of needing to fix what was wrong here in the public schools. I tried to get things accomplished through the system and was met with so much resistance that it was exhausting. Few materials were at my disposal and even less classroom equipment available to me. Bookshelves? What were they? Copies? Reprimanded for making too many. Books? Nope. Classrooms chock full of kids at all different ability levels with little administrative support. Planning

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