



Fairfax County Public Schools: Go Inside the Classroom with Teachers

Coming in April: Visual and Performing Arts

When was the last time you visited a classroom? You may remember the desks, the chalkboard, or even the heavy copy of the dictionary sitting on top of the bookshelf.

Today's classrooms are dynamic and interactive settings where students learn from teachers who use a wide variety of resources and tools in the classroom to engage and empower students. Whether they are creating unique lesson plans or

This Just In:

Michelle Henry, health specialist and physical education teacher at Liberty Middle School, has been named the National K-12 Health Teacher of the Year by the American Association for Health Education.

inviting professionals into the classroom to share their experience with students, teachers provide opportunities for students to be curious and stimulate thoughts and ideas.

Sometimes the art of teaching requires the use of unique methods

to engage students. Jeff Lonnett, an art resource teacher at Mosby Woods Elementary School, is doing just that. Mosby Woods in Fairfax is one of 16 schools in the Washington, D.C., area that partners with the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts as part of its Changing Education Through the Arts (CETA) program.

Through CETA, Lonnett works with teachers throughout the school to help them develop knowledge and skills to integrate the arts into other subjects such as history, math, language arts, and science.

"Our sixth graders recently completed a unit on the Revolutionary War and were asked to design propaganda posters promoting a real political position of the Revolutionary War," explained Lonnett.

"Art highlights the importance of learning at every opportunity," said Lonnett. "You can probably get through life without being an artist, but art teaches storytelling, problem solving, and creative thinking that you need for so many other things in life."

Teaching students the skills they need to lead responsible, fulfilling, and respectful lives is one student achievement goal in Fairfax County Public Schools. Tom Harlow works with more than 50 physically disabled students from around the county to help them develop the resilience and self-confidence required to deal effectively with life's challenges. He's the adapted physical education teacher at Falls Church High School.

Harlow started a program to bring general education students into the adapted PE classes to work with his students. It is called the Peer Teaching Program.

"At the beginning of the year, I have my students introduce themselves in front of the whole class and talk about what they can do," said Harlow. "Self-advocacy is an important skill and it makes them more confident."



The peer teachers get to know the other students helping by them participate in activities such as fishing, kite flying, in-line skating, archery, and much more.

"It's a win-win situation," said Harlow. "The students who serve as peer teachers come in to help, but by the time the class is finished, they have learned a lot about each other, especially about the ability of the other students. The physically disabled students enjoy working with their peers and have a lot of fun."

Every year, more and more students ask to be a part of the Peer Teaching Program.

"The Peer Teaching Program helps knock down walls that should never be there," said Harlow.

Knocking down walls on the other side of the county is Linda Martin, a resource teacher for the advanced academic program at Dogwood Elementary School in Reston. She is passionate about fostering interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

"Children are naturally curious and should be given simulated opportunities to innovate, create, and resolve unique problems," said Martin. "That's what we try to do through our clubs, camp, and classes."

Martin sponsors the Girls Excelling in Math and Science (GEMS) club at Dogwood and organizes the GEMS conferences annually.

"I believe very strongly in bringing professionals into the classroom to give us authentic experiences. Our students need to meet people in the field who are doing these things now. Suddenly their work is elevated. It has purpose, relevance, and there is a vision that starts to take shape in their minds."

"I never forget that this is their childhood and I am their teacher and I am creating indelible memories for them. I don't want them to just learn and remember things. I want their learning to be unforgettable."



Getting To Know Us

School-Based Technology Specialist Patrick Ledesma

"These are exciting times to be a teacher," says Patrick Ledesma, school-based technology specialist and special education department chair at Holmes Middle School in Alexandria.

"The greatest fulfillment as a teacher is helping students learn. The wide availability of technology tools today, when combined with effective teaching practices, provides almost unlimited ways to inspire students."

Whether students use mobile computing devices such as netbooks, tablets, and iPads in the

classroom or teachers use interactive whiteboards and classroom response systems, Ledesma says it will be the technology advances promoting more equitable student access to technology, rather than a specific brand or device, that will allow us to "inspire, enable, and empower all students to meet high academic standards, lead ethical lives, and demonstrate responsible citizenship," which are FCPS student achievement goals.

Ledesma says it is critical for students to be able to use technology to prepare for careers.

"Technology is seamlessly integrated into many job procedures and responsibilities today. Walk around any workplace or office, technology is evident somewhere in the background. To prepare students to use technology, we must continue to give students as many opportunities as possible to use technology in the learning process," he said.

"More importantly, we must focus on empowering students to be successful in applying higher level thinking skills. The more students are successful in activities that promote these skills, the more prepared they will be to use any technology available to them in the future."

Did You Know?

More than 10,000 (70 percent) of FCPS teachers have master's degrees and more than 370 FCPS teachers are certified by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, the highest credential a teacher can earn.

Students Engaged Through Technology

It may sound like something from a James Bond movie, but the Smart Pen is a teaching tool that is helping students of all ages.

The Smart Pen contains a computer that can capture handwriting and simultaneously record audio. The user taps a specially made sticker placed in a Smart Pen notebook to record the writing and audio.

"My students are extremely excited and motivated when they use the Smart Pen," said Courtney Taylor, a kindergarten teacher at Parklawn Elementary School.

Taylor has multiple uses for the Smart Pen in her classroom.

"Recently each student wrote a report about polar animals and recorded themselves reading what they wrote," said Taylor. "Now any student can pick up the reports, use a Smart Pen to tap on the special dot in the notebook and listen to their classmates read their reports. It is a technology that fosters independence and engagement."

Taylor also records herself reading stories so her students can use free time to listen to a story on the Smart Pen and follow along in the book.

"The pens are very user friendly and my students love using them. They are even generating their own ideas on how we can use them!"



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