

River Rambler

OCONEE REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCY

Serving the counties of Baldwin, Hancock, Johnson, Putnam, Washington & Wilkinson

Volume 1, Issue 1

December 2013

Directly Speaking

You are reading the first edition of *River Rambler*, the new Oconee RESA Newsletter. The newsletter will provide an additional avenue of getting relevant information to you regarding available professional learning opportunities and education issues. As you approach the holiday season and look forward to time at home with family and loved ones, know that I appreciate the work that you do for all of our children. We, the staff of Oconee RESA are deeply grateful to you for allowing us to serve you and assist you in improving student achievement and the teaching profession. Enjoy your holidays!

Hayward Cordy

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Blueberries

"If I ran my business the way you people operate your schools, I wouldn't be in business very long!"

I stood before an auditorium filled with outraged teachers who were becoming angrier by the minute. My speech had entirely consumed their precious 90 minutes of in-service. Their initial icy glares had turned to restless agitation. You could cut the hostility with a knife.

I represented a group of business people dedicated to improving public schools. I was an executive at an ice cream company that became famous in the middle 1980's when *People Magazine* chose our blueberry as the "Best Ice Cream in America."

I was convinced of two things. First, public schools needed to change; they were archaic selecting and sorting mechanisms designed for the industrial age and out of step with the needs of our emerging "knowledge society." Second, educators were a major part of the problem: they resisted change, hunkered down in their feathered nests, protected by tenure, and shielded by a bureaucratic monopoly. They needed to look to business. We knew how to produce quality. Zero defects! TQM! Continuous Improvement!

In retrospect, the speech was perfectly balanced – equal parts ignorance and arrogance.

As soon as I finished, a woman's hand shot up. She appeared polite, pleasant – she was, in fact, a razor-edged, veteran high school English teacher who had been waiting to unload.

She began quietly, "We are told, sir, that you manage a company that makes good ice cream."

I smugly replied, "Best ice cream in America, Ma'am."

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"Super-premium!" Nothing but triple A." I was on a roll. I never saw the next line coming.

"Mr. Vollmer," she said, leaning forward with a wicked eyebrow raised to the sky. "when you are standing on your receiving dock and you see an inferior shipment of blueberries arrive, what do you do?"

In the silence of that room, I could hear the trap snap...I was dead meat, but I wasn't going to lie.

"I send them back."

She jumped to her feet, "That's right!" she barked, "and we can never send back **our** blueberries. We take them big, small, rich, poor, gifted, exceptional, abused, frightened, confident, homeless, rude, and brilliant. We take them with ADHD, junior rheumatoid arthritis, and English as their second language. We take them all! Every one! And that Mr. Vollmer, is why it's not a business. It's school!"

In an explosion, all 290 teachers, principals, bus drivers, aides, custodians, and secretaries jumped to their feet and yelled, "Yeah! Blueberries! Blueberries!"

And so began my transformation.

Since then, I have visited hundreds of schools. I have learned that a school is not a business. Schools are unable to control the quality of their raw materials, they are dependent upon the vagaries of politics for a reliable revenue stream, and they are constantly mauled by a howling horde of disparate, competing customer groups that would send the best CEO screaming into the night.

None of this negates the need for change. We must change what, when, and how we teach to give all children maximum opportunity to thrive in a post-industrial society. But educators cannot do this alone; these changes can occur only with the understanding, trust, permission, and active support of the surrounding community. For the most important thing that I have learned is that schools reflect the attitudes, beliefs and health of the communities they serve, and therefore, to improve public education means more than changing our schools, it means changing America.

Jamie Robert Vollmer 2011

Jamie Vollmer is a former business executive and attorney who now works to increase public support for America's public schools.

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Georgia FIP: The Keys to Student Success.

Oconee RESA, working in conjunction with the Georgia Department of Education's Assessment and Accountability Division, will be supporting online professional learning opportunities dealing with Formative Instructional Practices (FIP).

Georgia FIP: The Keys to Student Success is designed to enhance educators' use of formative instructional practices and is aligned to the new teacher and leader effectiveness systems, TKES and LKES. Research has shown consistently that effective use of formative assessment leads to significant increases in student achievement, even with learners who have previously struggled.

Georgia FIP consists of seven online modules. The primary target audience for five of the modules is teachers, while the other two are designed for administrators, coaches and teacher-leaders. Georgia FIP has four major content components: (1) Establishing Clear Learning Targets, (2) Collecting and Documenting Evidence of Learning, (3) Providing Effective Feedback, and (4) Developing Student Ownership of Learning.

More information about this initiative, including implementation resources, can be found on the following webpages: www.gadoe.org/GeorgiaFIP and at www.oconeeresas.org.

Gifted Endorsement Offering

Registration is now open for a new cohort for the first of the four required courses necessary for educators to obtain Gifted Endorsement Certification. **Characteristics of the Gifted** is the foundation course for the gifted endorsement program. In the Characteristics of the Gifted course, participants will acquire knowledge of the characteristics of gifted learners including special populations. In addition, this course will address methods by which the unique characteristics of gifted learners can be addressed in instruction and the learning environment. The registration deadline is January 3, 2014. Register online at www.oconeeresas.org. For additional information, please contact Ms. Cathy Mayberry.

Looking for ways to increase student achievement and close achievement gaps?



Good news! Help is as close as your desktop. When you login into your student information system (Power School, Infinite Campus, Enterprise, etc.) you will see the **Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS)** icon on your computer screen. SLDS is provided to educators at no cost by the Georgia Department of Education. The SLDS Dashboard includes historical student data as well as data for students currently enrolled. In addition, helpful resources are also available. Using Georgia's SLDS Resources helps educators:

- Access content that is aligned to Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, Georgia Performance Standards, and National Education Technology Standards.
- Search for resources aligned to a standard for student consumption or for teacher directed usage.
- Access resources including Georgia Virtual School's course content, Thinkfinity, Learning Village, Destination Math and Reading, GaDOE subject frameworks, and additional teacher aligned vetted digital links.
- Assign digital resources to students based upon the student's performance on an assessment.
- Make more informed (data-driven) decisions designed to improve student learning.
- Identify students' academic strengths and weaknesses.
- Increase student achievement and close achievement gaps.

Celebrations

The Georgia Department of Education recently released the list of 2013 Reward and Alert Schools as a part of the state's waiver from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Oak Hill Middle School in Baldwin County and Putnam Middle School in Putnam County were named as 2013 Reward Schools for Highest Progress.

The Highest Progress Reward School designation is given to the top 10% of Title 1 schools in the State that are making the most progress in improving the performance of the "all students" group over three years on the statewide assessments.

Congratulations Oak Hill Middle School and Putnam County Middle School!

Research indicates a positive correlation between student participation in extracurricular activities and student engagement in schools. Extracurricular activities provide a channel for reinforcing the lessons learned in the classroom, offering students the opportunity to apply academic and social skills in a real-world context. Recent research suggests that participation in extracurricular activities may increase students' sense of engagement or attachment to their school, and thereby decrease the likelihood of school failure and dropping out (Lamborn et al, 1992; Finn, 1993).

Hats off to the Washington County Golden Hawks football team as they advance to the Georgia High School Association Championship game. Washington County will be playing Buford High School in the Georgia Dome at 5:30 pm on Friday, December 13, 2013.

Best wishes to the Golden Hawks!

Upcoming Activities:

Monday, December 9, 2013

Activity: ***SLO New District Training Day 1 of 3***
Presenter: Ms. Tawni Taylor, GaDOE
Location: Oconee RESA Media Center
Time: 8:30 am to 4:00 pm

Tuesday, December 10, 2013

Activity: ***SLO New District Training Day 1 of 3***
Presenter: Ms. Tawni Taylor, GaDOE
Location: Oconee RESA Media Center
Time: 8:30 am to 4:00 pm

Wednesday, December 11, 2013

Activity: ***SLO New District Training Day 1 of 3***
Presenter: Ms. Tawni Taylor, GaDOE
Location: Oconee RESA Media Center
Time: 8:30 am to 4:00 pm

Tuesday, January 7, 2014

Activity: ***Curriculum Directors' Association Meeting***
Presenter: Dr. Allene Magill, Executive Director of the Professional Association of Georgia Educators
Location: Oconee RESA
Time: 9:00 am to 10:00 am

Activity: ***Oconee RESA Board of Control***
Location: Oconee RESA
Time: 10:00 am to 12:00 noon

Thursday, January 9, 2014

Activity: ***Phil Hartley Legal Update Seminar for Administrators***
Presenter: Attorney Phil Hartley of Harbin, Hartley, and Hawkins
Location: Baldwin County Board of Education
Time: 9:00 am to 1:00 pm (Tentative)

Visit us at www.oconeeresasa.org for additional upcoming professional learning activities.



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