



The Buzz

NOVEMBER
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Thomas County Board of Education Newsletter

Thomas County Schools Lands 2.7 Million Dollar Grant to Boost Literacy Skills

The Thomas County School System does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin, sex, or disability.



Garrison-Pilcher Media Specialist Darlene Cook reads a book to, from left, Trinity Simmons, Madysen Dupree and Arnonei Turner.

The Georgia Department of Education awarded the Thomas County School System a 2.7 million dollar grant to assist the district in implementing a comprehensive literacy plan for children in Thomas County from birth through eighth grade.

The Striving Reader competitive grant was awarded based on the quality of the proposal and the capacity of the system to implement the plan. Thomas County's plan places a heavy focus on reading and writing in all content areas and on vocabulary development.

The purpose of the grant is to improve students' ability to communicate effectively with others, to think and respond critically in a variety of settings to a myriad of print and non-print text, and

to access, use, and produce multiple forms of media, information, and knowledge in all content areas.

Grant funds will allow the district to enhance and expand many of its current initiatives, to accelerate the implementation of its technology plan, and to broaden the reach of the school system to pre-school age children, birth to age 5.

"Three years ago, the district launched a reading in the content area program aimed at having students in all disciplines engage in reading non-fiction material related to science, social studies, and math," said Thomas County Superintendent Dr. Dusty Kornegay. "Among many other things, grant funds will allow the district to purchase books and digital literacy content (e-books) to support this

literacy initiative."

One of the most exciting features of the grant is that it will provide funding for the system to reach out to pre-school age children, birth to age 5, to introduce them to early literacy skills.

"Our understanding of how the brain works has greatly increased over the last two decades, and we have learned that the early years of a child's life form the foundation for later development," Kornegay said. "A strong foundation increases the probability of positive outcomes, and we want to make sure that every child in Thomas County has a strong foundation."

Associate Superintendent Melanie Chavaux led the team of teachers who wrote the grant proposal. "I am very proud of the team of teachers that worked collaboratively to create and develop a comprehensive literacy plan for the Thomas County School System. Through numerous meetings and consistently talking and listening to one another, the teachers were able to create a plan that will continue to improve literacy achievement for all students in the system."

The grant writing team represented all Thomas County schools and worked closely

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CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS

Nov. 6 - Varsity Football Region Play-In at the Jacket's Nest, 8:00 p.m. ***SENIOR NIGHT*** Recognition before the game and during half-time

Nov. 7 - TCMS Fall Dance

Nov. 9 - Cross Creek Canned Food Drive Begins

Nov. 11 - Veterans Day Parade at Hand-in-Hand; celebrations at all schools

Nov. 13 - Garrison-Pilcher Pioneer Day

Nov. 16 - TCMS Spelling Bee

Nov. 17 - Cross Creek "Give Thanks to Mom" Day

Nov. 23 - 27 - Thanksgiving Holidays



Please visit the school websites for a complete calendar of events.

The Buzz is a monthly publication of the Thomas County Schools. Send suggestions or comments to Melanie Hester, 200 North Pinetree Blvd., Thomasville, GA 31792; 229.225-4380, ext. 115; mhester@thomas.k12.ga.us. The Buzz is available online at www.thomas.k12.ga.us, News and Events tab.

Garrison-Pilcher Elementary Rallies Around Reading



TCCHS band members play their instruments to excite the young crowd during the recent reading rally.

Students made a lot of noise on the track at Garrison-Pilcher Elementary School this week. Cheers and music were heard as students participated in a pep rally for reading and literacy. Garrison’s Reading Rally is a carefully developed learning opportunity designed to build awareness and make lasting change in the lives of young readers.

“This is an annual event at our school,” said Darlene Cook, Media Specialist. “It really promotes reading and literacy among both our teachers and students for the full year. It is our kick-off celebration after our first nine-week period when students have settled in and have become more independent readers.”

Proceeds from Garrison Pilcher’s recent book fair were used to purchase a book for every child. The rally began with students choosing his or her free book from a wide selection of titles. TCCHS band members, athletes, and cheerleaders were at the reading rally to help provide a pep rally atmosphere. Members from the Thomas University Night Hawks

basketball team were also there greeting the students and cheering on the crowd.

“We could not have this event without the help of Thomas County Central High School,” Cook said. “They provide the marching band, cheerleaders, and athletes to create the pep rally atmosphere. Our students are thrilled to see these high school students. These students remind our GP students to read, stay in school and become future Thomas County Central Yellow Jackets.”

The rallies are fun, interactive events where volunteers from the community gather and read a book aloud to a group of students. Volunteers help young students develop a lifelong interest in books and reading which impacts their language and literacy development. The rally also included time for popcorn, photos, and, of course, reading a book.

TCCHS Junior Anna Jense, who read to small groups, said, “It’s great to see the kids get excited about reading. Spending time with this future



generation of Jackets was a lot of fun. I think this activity will leave a lasting impression on these kids.”

“This is a wonderful opportunity to help children discover the joy of reading,” said Donna Sellars, first grade teacher at Garrison-Pilcher.

“I love how it involves the younger and older kids from different schools. My students enjoyed meeting the football players, cheerleaders,

band members, and the Thomas University basketball team. I love how we put the emphasis on reading as important and fun.”

Mario Williams is a student in Sellars’ class. He said, “It was fun getting autographs from the football players and dancing with the band and cheerleaders. It’s hard to pick my favorite part because everything was my favorite.”

FIRE SAFETY & PREVENTION



Cross Creek Elementary students Yasmin Bryant and Cayden Collins from Mrs. Lanie West’s third-grade class talk to members of the Thomas County Fire

Department. Recently, the firemen presented correct fire safety and prevention procedures to all of the students at Cross Creek. Squad members demonstrated and explained the parts of the fire gear that is worn when they are called to a fire.

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together in order to provide effective literacy instruction and support systems for all students.

“The focus of our work was not on ‘maintaining status quo,’ but on enhancing and enriching literacy in all content areas. It was also very important that our comprehensive literacy plan “expand” our current work instead of replacing it,” Chavaux said.

“Teachers will have opportunities to receive professional learning from nationally recognized ‘experts’ in the field of literacy,” Chavaux added.

Dr. Bob Dechman, Director of Federal Programs and Accountability for Thomas County Schools, noted, “The Striving Readers grant will give us an opportunity to provide engaging instruction that will motivate and encourage readers even before they enter school. We are excited to partner with the Thomas County Public Library and Thomas County Family Connections to offer resources and activities for children from birth to five years old, as well as provide additional instructional materials in schools throughout our system.”

“We plan to work with the public library to offer early learning programs in the branch libraries throughout Thomas County,” Kornegay explained. “The support of the public library system will be critical in helping us reach young children in the communities where they live. We will be able to provide books and literacy resources to the children and conduct workshops for parents on how to use the materials to support

the development of early learning skills.”

“What a unique opportunity for the library to join the county schools to enhance the learning of preschool children and their families,” said Nancy Tillinghast, Director of the Thomas County Public Library System. “Being prepared to enter school is the prize and with us working together we can encourage, teach and show families how to achieve this goal. We are thrilled to assist the schools in this endeavor,” Tillinghast said.

The school system will be able to contract with the public library to extend library hours at the branch facilities as needed to support the literacy initiative.

“We know that reading is the foundation for all learning. Students who do not develop this skill early are at a disadvantage in all academic disciplines,” Kornegay said.

“Reading is a skill that improves the quality of life. By providing a variety of resources, this grant will make possible the enrichment of a generation and unlock the potential of tomorrow’s leaders,” Dechman said.

This grant program is for ALL readers, not just struggling readers. “The grant allows schools to enrich instruction for all students, rather than just a handful of students who are below grade level. We anticipate that we will be able to provide even more resources and experiences for our students. We will be able to implement our school literacy plans and support the individual needs of every learner,” Dechman explained. Grant funding will be spread out over five years and will

be used in each school for teacher professional learning; benchmark screeners to measure students’ reading ability and to monitor progress; and robust materials, curriculum, and technology to support literacy integration.

“Student literacy is a crucial issue and a key focus

of my administration,” State School Superintendent Richard Woods said in announcing the Striving Reader grant award recipient.

“We are extremely excited about the grant award and the positive effects it will have on student growth and achievement,” Kornegay said.

GP Students Transform a Pumpkin to a Reading Masterpiece



Pictured with their books and fictional characters are Ingrid Huerta, from left, Ethan Daniels, Nolen Taylor, and Ava Ramey.

Pumpkins, pumpkins everywhere, but not your usual pumpkins. Garrison-Pilcher students had the opportunity to turn a pumpkin into a reading masterpiece. Students in LeAnn Jackson’s second grade class were recently given a family project to pick a favorite character from a book and decorate a pumpkin to portray that character.

The students and parents came up with creative ways to turn a pumpkin into a book character. Olivia, Ferdinand, Fancy Nancy, and Scat the Cat were among the many book character choices. Ava Ramey created a pumpkin Pinkalicious as her character.

“I really liked doing this because I like to read and I like Pinkalicious; you know she saved Halloween, don’t you?” said Ramey.

Each child also shared a book report along with their pumpkin creation. The pumpkin characters were on display in the Garrison-Pilcher’s media center so all students would be able to enjoy them.

Jackson said, “This home project was a great way to get the parents and students involved and have fun while reading a book. I really enjoyed the creative ways the families portrayed their pumpkin characters. The students all had a special share time and got to summarize the story, tell why he or she liked the character, and explain the unique ways they decorated and created their characters. I was amazed to see the creative efforts that went into this project and look forward to future years of reading fun with this seasonal fruit!”



TCMS STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT REDUCING TRASH- GenerationOn, a club at Thomas County Middle School, allows students to develop leadership skills while working towards improving the community. In a partnership with Keep Thomas County Beautiful, this group of students (sponsored by Mandy West) had the opportunity to tour the Thomas County Landfill and Recycling Center to learn where our trash goes after being picked up. Pictured is Jimmy Smith, Jr., with the City of Thomasville explaining a normal day at the landfill and recycling center to TCMS students from GenerationOn.



HARVESTING LITERACY IN A PUMPKIN PATCH - The 5th Annual Literacy Pumpkin Patch at Cross Creek Elementary cropped up in Michele Dechman's and Jen Mobley's classes. Students selected their favorite book to read, summarized the book, then used their imaginations to create a "pumpkin character" from the story. Students did an outstanding job, and the pumpkins were amazing. The pumpkin patch was visited by parents, community members, and other classes throughout the day. Pictured above is Brayden Payne providing a tour for Carson Godwin and Kingsten



Stewart from Wanda Baggett's third-grade class. Pictured at left is Paige Parkerson explaining her pumpkin design to second-graders from Garrison-Pilcher. Several classes from the neighboring school took a short field trip to visit the pumpkin patch.

TCCHS Students Attend EPA Symposium

By Tyler Williamson, student reporter

Thomas County Central sent six students to the International Youth Symposium hosted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Juniors Jordan Bush, Anna Jense, Logan Herring, and Tyler Williamson, along with sophomores Haley Ferrell and C'lee Kornegay traveled to Atlanta with their teacher Laura Kornegay for the symposium.

The group attended the conference to gain a better insight on their upcoming science fair projects, all relating to environmental science.

"We got to see what other research students are doing, both at the high school and college levels," teacher Laura Kornegay said. "We also learned about other areas in which we can compete in addition to the traditional science fair."

The symposium was held at the Sam Nunn Atlanta Federal Building. Students could participate in a poster contest, essay contest, a series of interactive panels, and listen to numerous speakers.

This was the first year the conference was open to international students. The six students got the chance to interact with students from not only the United States, but also from Germany and Brazil. They got to talk to them about different environmental issues occurring in today's world, as well as listen to a student-based panel addressing issues such as climate change, pollution, fuel alternatives, and incorporating environmental awareness into



TCCHS students (front to back, left to right) Jordan Bush, C'lee Kornegay, Hailey Ferrel, Tyler Williamson, Anna Jense and Logan Herring attend the International Environmental Youth Symposium held in Atlanta in October.

elementary education.

Each speaker had a different environmental topic which benefited each of the girls due to the variety of environmental problems they will be addressing in their projects. Among the speakers was Ms. Gina McCarthy, the executive director of EPA. She discussed how "every person in this room will be affected by climate change" and how the time to address it is today.

"It was a fantastic opportunity to be able to listen to such inspirational people speak about the growing problem that is climate change," attendee Anna Jense said. "I was introduced to key ideas that I hadn't even thought about!"

While there, students also got to attend an extracurricular activity: they took in a baseball game as the Atlanta Braves played the Washington Nationals.

Thomas County Schools Celebrate Lights on Afterschool in Georgia



Kelvionta Hinson, from left, Colby Shiver, Caitlin Harrell and Justin Pilkinton complete coursework during night classes at Bishop Hall.

On October 22, 2015, hundreds of afterschool programs throughout Georgia joined together with students, families and communities to recognize the 16th annual Lights on Afterschool event. Since 2000, Lights on Afterschool has emphasized the importance of keeping the lights on and the doors open after school in order to provide students with quality afterschool programs.

The Thomas County School System provides many opportunities for students to attend afterschool programs. An important partnership with Thomasville Community Resource Center (TCRC) allows the students to receive extra help in academic areas of math, reading, and science, test preparation, homework help, and enrichment activities from certified teachers and certified paraprofessionals. These activities get the students engaged in learning.

Through Georgia's Title IV, Part B, 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program (21st CCLC), the Georgia Department of Education provides federal

funds to establish or expand community learning centers that operate during out-of-school hours. The grant allows TCRC to serve students in the community. During this school year, approximately 26,000 21st CCLC students will attend afterschool programs offered at 243 locations that serve more than 60 school districts in Georgia.

"I think our partnership and collaboration with the Thomas County School System is a great and much needed asset that has grown this year," said LaTonya Williams White, 21st Century Program Manager at the TCRC. "This partnership allows Thomasville Community Resource Center to have access to the schools, students, and school equipment. TCRC currently serves students at Cross Creek, Garrison-Pilcher, and Thomas County Middle."

The afterschool program at TCRC also allows the teachers to reteach skills that the students were taught during the school day. The ratio is one teacher per ten students, and the students receive one-on-one attention if they need it. The smaller group settings,

peer to peer tutoring, and one-on-one is very beneficial to struggling students. The program is also allowing the students to have a safe place to go afterschool.

White said, "The 21st Century Community Learning Center Program is an asset to the working parents. The students receive snacks through the school nutrition program at Thomas County Schools. The parents don't have to worry about the students being hungry while they are attending the program, paying for daycare fees, or wondering where their child(ren) are. This program also helps with productivity in the workplace, because the employees are there and can produce the work that is required of them."

Transportation is provided to the students who attend the 21st Century Afterschool Program at one of the Thomas County Schools.

Over the course of a year, students only spend an

average of 15 percent of their time in school. Twenty-first CCLC programs help students meet

academic standards in core subjects by offering a broad array of enrichment activities that complement regular academic programs, as well as literacy and other services for the families of participating children. Lights on Afterschool is a powerful reminder that afterschool programs play a critical role in keeping youth safe, engaged and prepared to be successful adults.

Another important

afterschool program exists at Bishop Hall Charter School. Bishop Hall offers night school and Saturday school for those who need extra school hours. Nine teachers are on duty from the end of school until 4:30 p.m., and two teachers are on duty from 4:30–9:00 p.m., Monday–Thursday.

Currently, night school at Bishop averages 20 students a night, and Saturday school averages 25 students.

According to Chris Huckans, Bishop Hall Principal, more than 40 credits were earned by night school students between January and May of 2015. Through night school, five students are on track to complete requirements for graduation in December 2015. One student completed his requirements for graduation in spring 2015.

"Students attending night school are predominately students with full-time jobs during the day or teen moms," said Huckans. "There are a number of students who

attend night school only one or two nights a week to get additional help in math or English. These students

attend regular daytime hours."

Huckans added, "The ability to provide evening and weekend hours for students has been invaluable for Bishop Hall. Removing the hurdle of a very finite school day has opened the door for students to be a provider for their family, as some are the sole provider, and still have the face to face access to quality teachers that they need to be successful academically."



Successful STEM Science Nights at Cross Creek and Garrison-Pilcher



Preston Cronin works with his father, Kevin Cronin, at the “Problem Solving Puzzles” station at Cross Creek.

STEM education is quite elementary, and it proved to be just that for the elementary students in Thomas County at both Garrison-Picher and Cross Creek Elementary Schools. Both schools hosted family STEM science nights where students and parents gathered to experience up to 19 different hands-on learning activities in science, technology, engineering and math.

Both students and parents had the opportunity to rotate from station to station as students chose from activities such as “Balloon Rockets” to “Water Cycle in a Bag.”

In elementary school, STEM education is curriculum based on the idea of educating students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics in a blended learning environment where students are shown how the scientific method can be applied to everyday life. The goal is to pique students’ interest so that their first experience begins to develop before they reach the middle and high school years.

A STEM-focused education allows for more student collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and problem solving. It was evident during the STEM Family Science nights at both Garrison-Pilcher and Cross Creek that students and their parents were engaged in the process of learning together as they communicated and collaborated with other school families.

Melanie Chavaux, Associate Superintendent, stated, “STEM education supports innovation and best practice. The Family STEM science nights at both Garrison-Pilcher and Cross Creek allowed our elementary students’ parents to be involved in authentic learning opportunities while at school.”

The Thomas County School System is dedicated to providing innovative opportunities in preparing world class students by providing high quality educational opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

NATIONAL SCHOOL BUS SAFETY WEEK



NATIONAL SCHOOL BUS SAFETY WEEK CELEBRATED - Thomas County Schools celebrated National School Bus Safety week by moving class outside. Several buses and drivers went to Cross Creek Elementary to demonstrate correct procedures for boarding, riding, and exiting a school bus. During the week of October 19- 23, kindergarten through 5th grade students took to the school buses to learn how to stay safe on and around them. Administrators at Thomas County Schools believe it's important to start teaching students these habits at a young age. Nearly half of the students in Thomas County ride the bus regularly, but throughout the year almost every student will ride the bus at least once for field trips. Pictured above is Lauren Stewart’s fourth grade class with bus drivers Annette Ervin, Marzella Raines, and Degory Jones.



HEALTHY HABITS DAY AT HAND-IN-HAND - Kindergartners at Hand-In-Hand Primary School took part in Healthy Habits Day on October 22. Students moved from station to station on campus enjoying a variety of activities, from exercising with TCCHS football players to hearing Halloween safety tips from a police officer. Hand-in-Hand celebrates Healthy Habits Day every year to provide a fun, hands-on approach in order to teach and reinforce healthy habits to the students. Above, the kindergartners enjoy hopscotch while the football players and cheerleaders cheer them on.

“JAZZ”-ing it up

TCCHS Chorale Performs Its Annual Fall Showcase

By Blaine Wilson, student reporter



Thomas County Central High School Chorale performed its Fall Showcase, “And All That Jazz,” on Oct. 29 at the Thomas County Board of Education auditorium. The event, which was free and open to the public, gave the young singers the opportunity to show off their musical talents to the community through their various groups, solos, and as a full chorus. Selections included “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” “That’s Life,” and “What a Wonderful World.” Participant Chyna Cook said the performance was “really fun and exciting” and she was happy to sing with her group. The show ended with all groups returning to the stage for a final number. Above, the TCCHS Chorale performs the last song, “And All That Jazz.” Chesya Caroline, pictured at right, performed “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.”



TCCHS Students Win, Place in Miss Kitty Art Contest



TCCHS student Sophie Anderson, Hakeem Stevens, and Camille Sowell are congratulated for their win in the Miss Kitty Feline Sanctuary Poster Contest by Carol Jones, chairman of the Miss Kitty Board of Directors.

The chance to promote awareness of some of nature’s furry creatures in need of good homes was catnip to some Thomas County Central High School young artists.

Three art students placed in the high school division of the Miss Kitty Feline Sanctuary Poster Contest: Sophie Anderson and Hakeem Stevens tied for first (along with a student from Thomasville City Schools), and Camille Sowell placed second.

“We were awe-inspired by the creativity and emotion we could see in the work,” Carol Jones, chairman of the Miss Kitty Board of Directors, said of contest entries. “We were

thrilled with the response and thought the submissions were very creative and thoughtful.”

Jones said the winning entries stood out for their “composition, color, and capturing the essence of a cat.”

TCCHS Art teacher Jocelyn Rivard is “very excited” for the students selected as winners and applauds the individuality of their submissions.

The winners’ posters are expected to be shown in the “Fall for Art Exhibit,” which will hang in three venues around Thomasville: S.A.S.S. Restaurant, Thomas County Public Library, and Thomasville-Thomas County Chamber of Commerce.



TCMS SPOOKTACULAR DONATION DRIVE - The Thomas County Middle School National Junior Honor Society hosted its second annual Spooktacular donation drive during the month of October. All grade levels collected items for different organizations throughout Thomas County. Fifth grade students collected items for the Thomas County Food Bank donating more items than any other grade in the school. Pictured above are National Junior Honor Society members Angela Garcia (L-R), Megan Curry, Joshua Stephens, Janice Anderson (Thomas County Food Bank), Lexi Knapp, and Bryce Barwick.

NEED CPR? FIRST AID?

CPR and First Aid will be offered during the school year from 4:00 - 8:00 p.m. at Hand-In-Hand Primary School.

See dates below:

11/17	CPR	3/15	CPR
12/15	First Aid	4/19	First Aid
1/19	CPR	5/17	CPR
2/16	First Aid		

Please sign up on PExpress to attend the training session.





THOMAS COUNTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
JACK O'LANTERN JOG 5K & FUN RUN



On Saturday, October 17, more than 220 parents, students, and faculty members participated in Thomas County Elementary Schools' Jack o'Lantern Jog Fun Run and 5K. This event is a fund raiser and family fun event for Hand-in-Hand, Garrison-Pilcher, Cross Creek, and Thomas County Upper Elementary schools. The winners of the Fun Run were Anna James (female division/overall) and Cason Dennard (male division). Finishing first in the 5K were Megan Curry (female division) and Conley Wilhelm (male division/overall). The Barrett Family (Travis, Suzanne, Kaylee, Ragan, and Ethan) competed in the Fun Run and won the family division in the costume contest.



Peanuts

Angie Manning's kindergarten class at Hand-In-Hand has been doing science exploration with Georgia-grown peanuts. Georgia is the number-one peanut producing state in the country, accounting for approximately 49 percent of the crop's national acreage and production. Manning's students learned about planting and harvesting times in south Georgia, as well as the importance of peanuts and their various uses. The kindergartners used all of their senses to learn more about peanuts including getting to taste and enjoy the variety of ways peanuts are prepared.

