

Opening Day

August 2013

Over the next few days, millions of America's children will return to school to begin or continue on their educational journey toward graduation and a successful career. Approximately 13,000 of these students are enrolled in Whitfield County Schools. The majority of them are excited to see their friends and visit their previous teachers. They are eager to learn the many new things that the coming school year holds for them. The beginning of a new school year is not just exciting for students. Teachers are also enthusiastic and have been busy planning learning opportunities for their students. Many teachers have taken classes this summer to strengthen their skills and better prepare themselves to teach their students. Administrators are making sure their buildings are ready, schedules are finished, and teachers have the resources they need to begin the year.

The sounds of children's laughter and the smiles of teachers who seemed glad to be back from their summer break greeted me as I visited our elementary schools on the first day this year. The halls were full of children eager to see their friends. I saw the mother of a pre-K child waving goodbye and leaving school with tears in her eyes because she was leaving her baby with strangers who will soon become her partners in the development of her child. I saw new kindergarteners enter classrooms timidly looking for their names on the wall so they would know where to hang their new book bags. On the next hall, second and third graders were hugging friends they had not seen all summer.

My visits to our middle schools revealed the same excitement, only the kids were much bigger. Students were already diligently working in classrooms. Our teachers didn't waste any time beginning the tasks of educating their students. Middle school students found some changes upon returning to school including a new STEM lab (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). Grant funds were used to add or renovate a large STEM lab in each of our five middle schools. Five STEM teachers will rotate through the middle schools every six weeks to share their areas of expertise with students that include Criminal Justice/Forensic Science, Engineering, Healthcare, Business/Marketing, and Agriculture.

Students at Southeast High School returned to find work under way to provide new tennis courts, a new track, and updated concession stands thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor. Work will soon begin to renovate the stadiums at Northwest and Southeast to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Coahulla Creek students returned to find a new principal already working with the teachers to ensure the success of all students. Phoenix High School teachers were eagerly greeting new and returning students.

Students get to enjoy a new state-of-the-art mechatronics lab at the North Georgia College and Career Academy. This new course is a direct result of the partnership formed between business and educators to fulfill a need in local industry. The classes are full of bright students who will be learning the skills that could provide them with employment in a career with great pay and benefits. This course is the first of its kind in Georgia and Whitfield County students and teachers will set the pace for this new curriculum. The curriculum itself was written by Dalton leaders, submitted to the Georgia Department of Education, and approved for implementation at the Career Academy. We hope this is just the first of many collaborative ventures.

The Career Academy's new CEO will lead efforts to complete a needs assessment in Whitfield and surrounding counties to discover what technical skills employers need so we can prepare our students to fill these needs. The Career Academy Board and the Whitfield County Board of Education are working together closer than ever to deliver these advanced and relevant opportunities to our young people. When they graduate, we want students to be prepared with the skills they need to extend their education or to immediately enter the work force.

It is a challenging and thrilling time to be a part of Whitfield County Schools whether you are a student, parent, teacher, support staff, or the superintendent! My first opening day as superintendent was terrific and I am excited about the many opportunities the new school year will bring. With tremendous support from our colleagues in business, government, and education, our students and teachers have much to discover and even more to accomplish.