

# Nelson School News

Nelson School News

Volume 5, Issue 1

Spring 2007

## *Superintendent's Message*

Dear Parents and Friends:

The 2006-07 school year is progressing at a fast pace and our students are diligently working as they prepare for their futures. On a daily basis, our teachers and other staff members blend rigorous academic study with real-world common sense applications. In addition, Nelson County is blessed to have the services of our tutors, mentors, and volunteers who provide an invaluable, supportive network for our students.

In many households, parents often strive to balance work demands and family responsibilities. Children and young adults alike require a consistent network of support, guidance, and nurturing from family or significant others. Therefore, the role of our committed network of volunteers is vital to the learning process and the overall success of our students.



The Nelson County Public School Division currently has over seventy active adult volunteers who serve weekly in a variety of capacities. These wonderful individuals make a tremendous difference in the lives of our students and contribute greatly to the success of our school division. Annually, several hundred other caring adults give their time to support specific student events and activities as needed.

Last month one volunteer tearfully stated to me, "I receive a tremendous amount of personal satisfaction from volunteering in the schools." Another volunteer said, "I learn much more from my mentoring than the student could ever learn from me."

I encourage each one of you to consider volunteering your time and talent in our schools. You could be the key that unlocks the potential in one or more of our students. Working together, we can help students realize their potential and prepare for college or the world of work. Interested parties should contact individual school principals to inquire about volunteer opportunities.

Enjoy our newsletter, and have a great spring and summer!

Roger D. Collins  
Division Superintendent

Visit our website:  
[www.nelson.k12.va.us](http://www.nelson.k12.va.us)

## *Dates to Remember ...*

Day Light Saving Time Begins	March 11, 2007	Spring Forward One Hour
Employee Retirement Celebration	May 10, 2007 5:30 p.m.	Nelson County High School Auditorium
Senior Graduation	June 9, 2007 10:00 a.m.	Nelson County Veteran's Memorial Field
SOL Testing		

## *Central Virginia Schools form Business-Education Alliance*

In a continuing effort to provide the best educational experience and smoothest transition possible from the world of school to the world of work, Nelson County school officials have teamed up with four other school divisions and Piedmont Virginia Community College to establish the Piedmont Virginia Business-Education Alliance.

The group, which replaces the defunct Charlottesville Area School-Business Alliance, consists of representatives from the city of Charlottesville and the counties of Nelson, Albemarle, Greene, and Fluvanna, as well as PVCC. School superintendents serve on the governing board, and local school divisions provide the funding. Serving as the coordinator for the effort, PVCC develops relationships with businesses and industry in the region and identifies appropriate programs and career path activities. The greater Charlottesville business community is asked to support the venture through program sponsorship and special events.



The stated intention of the alliance is to “build a community of responsible and productive citizens for the twenty-first century.” Program goals are designed to create a comprehensive, regional approach to developing school-business partnerships; to present more career options to all students in grades K-12; to help students identify and develop career goals; to involve businesses in the promotion of educational quality and student success; and to include parents in the process. Depending on a child’s age, potential participatory activities may include mentoring, internships, job shadowing, tours, and career fairs.

Dr. Collins, Superintendent of Schools, stated, “This will be a partnership among businesses and K-12 regional school divisions. We will find ways to bridge educational goals and what businesses in our communities want in employees, plus give students access to experience the world of work. Specifically, what it’s going to mean is more opportunities for Nelson students to participate in a regional way with a variety of businesses.”

In the near future, regional business representatives will form an advisory group to work directly with the governing board. Local business owners or managers are encouraged to consider serving in an advisory role. Interested individuals should contact the *school superintendent directly*.

## *Are My Child’s Teachers Highly Qualified?*

The Nelson County Public School Division administrative staff is proud to report that all teachers currently instructing the core academic subjects of English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign language, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography have met the rigorous requirements imposed by the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2001. A teacher who is *Highly Qualified* holds a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, is fully licensed by the Commonwealth, and demonstrates competency in his or her subject matter by passing a rigorous state test.

The competency requirements for *Highly Qualified* teachers vary for elementary and secondary educators. An elementary school teacher must pass a test on subject knowledge and teaching skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and other areas of the basic elementary curriculum. In order for middle or high school instructors to demonstrate competency in each of the core academic subjects they teach, the requirements are as follows:

- ⇒ Completion of an academic major, a graduate degree, coursework equivalent to an academic major, or advanced certification or credentialing or
- ⇒ Demonstration of knowledge of subject matter by passing a rigorous state test.

In addition, the administrative staff strives to improve and increase teachers’ knowledge of academic subjects through regular, high-quality professional development activities. These activities support teacher understanding of effective instructional strategies and are based on scientifically conducted research. As a result, the teacher is better equipped to help students meet challenging state academic standards. By meeting rigorous standards and participating in quality staff development, professional educators are prepared to provide the best possible education for the youth of Nelson County.

## *New Standards for Special Education*

The special education programs in Nelson County Public Schools, as well as all school divisions across the Commonwealth, are currently being held more accountable for the academic participation and performance of the children with disabilities. Passed by the U.S. Congress in 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) designates fourteen areas of student performance in which local school divisions must meet performance targets. Included in the performance areas are the following:

- ⇒ Graduation rates
- ⇒ Drop-out rates
- ⇒ Suspension and expulsion rates
- ⇒ Percentage of participation in programs with typically developing pre-school peers
- ⇒ Parental involvement in the improvement of service results
- ⇒ Disproportional numbers of minorities in special education
- ⇒ Evaluation timeline compliance
- ⇒ Transition programming
- ⇒ Postsecondary outcomes



Furthermore, the standards for each performance area will increase annually until 2010.

During the first semester of the this school year, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) collected data on the performance indicators from all school divisions and is preparing a report to submit to the United States Department of Education. The results of this report will be made public to each locality this spring.

Meeting these new standards will take continued collaboration and cooperation among parents, school staff, and the community. It is vital that parents remain active in their child's education through communication, attendance at parent/teacher conferences, IEP meetings, and other school activities in which their child is involved. The success of our students depends on all of us.

## *S.T.E.P.*

The staff at Rockfish River Elementary School greatly values parents as partners in the education of children and this spring is offering two learning opportunities for our parents. Beginning in February, parents may enroll in a six week course called **S**ystematic **T**raining for **E**ffective **P**arenting, or S.T.E.P. This program has been used for twenty years in our country and around the world to teach parents the skills needed for healthy families. Specifically, S.T.E.P. offers parents a realistic and practical approach to meeting the challenges of rearing children today and assists them in their goal of creating responsible children who will grow in to responsible adults. David Cameron, a licensed family counselor and community member, will facilitate this course. In addition, the school will supplement the sessions with homework help, teaching strategies, and SOL support materials. Approximately twenty parents plan to participate in S.T.E.P. which has been organized by Ms. Kim Candler, Assistant Principal.

Later in the spring, K-3 parents will be invited to attend an evening of activities geared to give support to early literacy efforts at home. On April 23 Cathy Miller, a literacy consultant from Alabama, will offer creative ideas and materials for families to use as they focus on reading skills. Research has shown that children from homes in which books are valued find the school reading experience more positive and become better readers. Family reading night at school will be informative, rewarding, and fun.



RRES encourages parents to consider participating in these exciting learning opportunities to help children on their paths to success.

## *NCHS Fine Arts Department Welcomes New Baby Grand Piano*

In January 2007, the Nelson County Fine Arts Department received a late Christmas gift, a brand new Yamaha baby grand piano for the new auditorium. The idea for the acquisition began in November of 2005 when NCHS hosted the District 13 All District Chorus auditions. Impressed with the facilities at NCHS, the visiting directors asked Nelson to host the 2007 District Choral Festival. Mr. Belcher, band director and choral teacher, graciously accepted the offer but quickly realized that a grand piano would be a necessity for the forty-plus vocal ensembles that would be competing.



Division staff were able to secure private donations to put a deposit on the piano to lock in the price and obtained sufficient funds to secure the piano in December, 2006.

The new piano greatly enhances the state of the art auditorium in a grand style. On January 26, it was christened at a local veterans program, and the next week a workshop for spring musical vocalists and a concert presented by visiting professional opera performers made use of the piano. However, it will get its first full workout during the District Choral Festival on March 15 and 16 at NCHS.

Mr. Belcher and the Nelson County Fine Arts Department would like to express their deepest appreciation to the community and the generous individuals who turned the dream into a reality. Support for the fine arts in Nelson County is greatly cherished.

## *Partnering to Reach Educational Possibilities*

### *What Is It All About?*

The Tye River PREP Pilot Program is all about time and learning. A group of staff members is developing this innovative program which would extend the school year by ten days. For participating students, the PREP school year would begin on July 30 and end the first week of June with a one-week break in October, thereby increasing the school year to 190 days. To allow more time to master the curriculum and to enrich the quality of learning are goals of PREP. However, *this is not a year-round school proposal*.

The PREP program will operate as a school within a school; therefore, expectations of student behavior and achievement will be consistent with the mission statement and goals of NCPS. Participating students will have the same holidays, workdays, and early dismissals as the traditional students. Moreover, the pilot program will be an optional one for both parents and students.



Tye River PREP plans to serve students in grades K-5 with one class of each grade operating on the extended calendar. Students will begin the school year with their regular teacher for their grade level and have ten additional days for subject mastery. Projected enrollment is around 120 students, and currently 60 students have volunteered for the program. Parents must submit an application in order to have their child considered for the PREP program. At this time, applications are still being accepted.

**The pilot program is pending final budget approval**, but staff are moving forward with planning in hopes that PREP will become a reality. This new approach to learning will increase time for mastery, will give students and teachers short, energizing breaks, and will allow the teachers at TRES to enrich, remediate, and accelerate student achievement.



If you would like more information, you may contact, Sandra McKenzie, Principal, at (434) 263-8960 or via email: [smckenzie@nelson.k12.va.us](mailto:smckenzie@nelson.k12.va.us).

## *Gold's Gym Gives Fitness Equipment to NCHS*

Students, athletes, and even some school employees are benefiting from the generosity of a good neighbor. Gold's Gym of Charlottesville, a health club whose members strive to improve themselves through weight-lifting and exercise regimens, has donated more than \$12,000 worth of fitness machines and other equipment to Nelson County High School.

The membership at Gold's Gym in Charlottesville had grown to the point that it needed bigger and better facilities with new state-of-the-art equipment. Caesar Perkins, club member and volunteer parent/coach at NCHS, became a critical link between the club and the high school. He realized from his involvement at NCHS that the athletic program could utilize updated fitness equipment.



Weight Training Coordinator/Assistant Football Coach Mark Wells monitors student athletes 'MJ' Wells and Kyle Milstead as they workout.

Deana St. John, general manager at Gold's Gym, was excited to hear that NCHS had a priority need for the equipment that the club was replacing. The club's donation included three treadmills, four step climbers, one elliptical, two stationary bikes, two large standing fans, two large racks of pre-set free weights, and two sets of dumbbells totaling about 1,700 pounds.

This new addition to the weight room will benefit the entire athletic program since all sports at NCHS now include weight training as a part of their training regimens. Also, athletes from Nelson Middle School are involved in these programs. Teachers and staff members are encouraged as well to use the facilities when classes and athletic teams are not training.

Gold's Gym with the help of Mr. Perkins has given Nelson County Public Schools a "golden gift" that is immensely appreciated. Their generosity will have an impact on the community for years to come.

## *The Computer and the Internet: A New World for Children*

The world around us is changing rapidly. The way our children learn and how they are taught are influenced by the new patterns of communication and information sharing made possible by computers and the internet. Children in India, China, and even parts of Africa now rival Americans for job placement because their educational and communication systems have leapt forward to the best information technology available in the world through high-speed internet connections.

The Nelson County Public School Division is attempting to keep pace. All instructional classes are wired to the internet, and computers and software are regularly upgraded as budgets allow. Open Office and other public software are available on school computers so that all students can use the computers to learn and prepare for the world of work.

This same software that children regularly use at school is now available from each school's media center for installation in your homes *free of charge*. Included in the no cost material is Open Office, a software version that works with Microsoft's Word, Excel, and Power Point. Other available software consists of picture editing, drawing, research, and organizational tools

However, the new world of learning does not come without danger to children when they use the internet without adult supervision. At each school, children are taught by staff members about safety on the internet, and parents are encouraged to establish common sense guidelines at home for their children. More information regarding this topic can be found at [www.NetSmartz.org](http://www.NetSmartz.org)



Stop by your school's media center for the free software. Good luck, good surfing, and good learning.

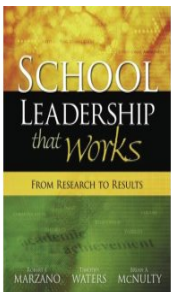
## *Everyone is Learning*

“If teachers continually learn, students will continually learn,” says Dennis Sparks, director of the National Staff Development Council. As students are learning in their classrooms, so are their teachers and administrators. Each year in Nelson County Public Schools, teachers and administrators are involved in professional development activities that are designed to help them meet the challenges of instruction. Some professional development is designed as a school-wide activity while others are optional.

This year elementary school teachers have attended two workshops in Nelson County. Dan Mulligan, a consultant of Simply Achieve, worked with the teachers on reading comprehension strategies and good questioning techniques to use in their classrooms. All elementary schools have been involved in additional professional development activities and workshops in their buildings, such as differentiation, word study, writing benchmark tests, discussing grade level math strategies, and making literacy centers. Each activity or workshop empowers teachers with more effective options to help students achieve.

In the middle school, teachers have been writing common curriculum guides, pacing maps, and benchmark tests. This has prompted meaningful discussions as to how students learn best. Also, in the middle school, math teachers have been attending workshops and working with a math instructor to learn strategies and activities to help meet the needs of their students. In January, all the middle school teachers attended a workshop entitled “School Improvement from Within - Closing Achievement Gaps Through Best Practices and Diversity Awareness”.

At the high school, teachers have been learning about differentiation strategies and how to implement them in the classroom according to Carol Ann Tomlinson’s book called The Differentiated Classroom, Responding to the Needs of All Learners. The teachers have been discussing how they are currently differentiating in their classrooms according to readiness, interest levels, or learning styles of their students.



Currently, twenty-one teachers from across the school division are participating in a class from UVA entitled “Classroom Management.” In this class, teachers are learning how curriculum, instructional strategies, and classroom management all work together to enhance student learning.

School administrators in the county have been working as well on their professional development by attending leadership conferences or workshops. They have read and discussed two books this year: Learning for All, Whatever It Takes, by Rick DuFour, Becky DeFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek; and School Leadership That Works by Robert Marzano, Timothy Waters, and Brian McNulty.

In Nelson County everyone is continuing to learn, from the students to the teachers to the administrators. All professional learning has only one goal, to help our students achieve.

## *Instant Alert Update(s)*



The new school division instant alert notification system allows for more timely and direct communication to parents or significant others when events occur or the school division has schedule changes. Transitioning to an electronic notification system requires detailed contact information and data for successful communication. Our goal is for the system to operate effectively for all subscribers. Family members are encouraged to update telephone numbers and email addresses at individual schools as needed.



## *Creative Problem Solving at Nelson Middle School*

At Nelson Middle School students are participating in two programs that will lead them to creative and interesting lives. Destination Imagination and MathCounts, although different in nature, are competitive programs requiring months of preparation. Moreover, they offer excellent training in the important life skills of creative problem solving, perseverance, and teamwork.

The Destination Imagination team at NMS, coached for the second year by Mrs. Sandra Bruguere, consists of four seventh and two eighth grade students. From five challenges in the D.I. competition this year, the team chose to tackle "Round About Courage," a presentation of an eight minute play in the style of theater in the round. The plot of the play must include a hero who overcomes a personal challenge. The team meets weekly after school in order to prepare for the regional competition; the students without the help of anyone, even their coach, must write the play, design the costumes, and plan the set.

The D.I. team also practices *Instant Challenges* to prepare for the tournament. In an *Instant Challenge*, students learn to work together quickly and creatively. They have only a few minutes to find a solution to a challenge read to them by the coach. For example, they must use the materials provided, such as mailing labels, straws, paper, spaghetti, and raisins, to build a bridge between two chairs placed twelve inches apart. Part of the score is always based on teamwork.



At the Jefferson Region D.I. Tournament on March 17 at Western Albemarle High School in Crozet, volunteer appraisers will use specific criteria for scoring the D.I. teams on their presentations. In addition, teams will receive a score on their handling of the *Instant Challenge* sprung on them with no preparation at the tournament. In order to gain a high score, the students must learn as a team the art of time management for both long-term and on-the-spot challenges.

MathCounts is another program that focuses on creative problem solving, specifically mathematical problems. Twenty-nine students in grades 6-8 meet weekly with Nelson Middle School MathCounts coach, Mrs. Betty Tabony, to practice solving intricate math problems based on the math SOL for grades 6-8. The first challenge for students is to learn to read the problem carefully to discern what is really being asked. Often a seemingly impossible problem turns out to be logically simple. The problems involve geometry, probability, statistics, algebra, and even the Pythagorean theorem. Students gain great confidence when they are able to get the correct answer to a problem that at first seems incomprehensible!

For more information about both competitions, explore the websites at [www.idodi.org](http://www.idodi.org) and [www.mathcounts.org](http://www.mathcounts.org).

## *Nelson Academy of Virtual Learning (NAVL)*

School division staff will begin accepting new applications later this spring for 2007 - 08 school year enrollment in the **Nelson Academy of Virtual Learning**. This innovative, new program was launched in November of 2006. The program provides yet another viable choice for parents in the education of their children. This public virtual school program is an option for students who are better served outside the traditional classroom but still want to take advantage of a high-quality public school program offered by the Nelson County Public School Division. Examples of students who might take part in this program include: home-schooled students, religiously exempted students, home-bound students, students with severe medical conditions, and mobile families. Students may enroll on a part-time or full time basis.

This program combines home instruction and public schooling. Parents work with their children at home using a comprehensive curriculum and learning system designed for independent and virtual learning. Each child is assigned a licensed teacher who is available to answer questions and provide support, advice, and instruction. All lesson planning programs, books and instructional materials are supplied to the families for the subjects of English/language arts, math, science, history, art and music. Currently, NAVL has 50 students enrolled. For additional information or an enrollment packet please contact Tammy Ponton at 434-263-7100.



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The Nelson County School Board and administrative staff would like to thank our anonymous donor for their generous contribution in support of this volume of the Nelson School News.

Helping Hands.....



## Seeking Newsletter Sponsors

If you or your business would like to sponsor all or part of our school division newsletter, please contact Kathy Hughes at 263-7100 for more information.

## School Board Members

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