

Nelson School News

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Volume 9, Issue 1

Winter 2009

Superintendent's Message

Dear Parents and Friends:

Although cold and uninviting, the winter season brings with it many experiences which create warm memories for both children and adults. In particular, the months of November and December accentuate the needs of the less fortunate. The people of Nelson County are well known for their generous spirit and gladly give of themselves to worthy causes and their fellow citizens in times of need.



For some students, service learning is a unique way to experience the pleasure of helping others. The concept of service learning has gained national attention in recent years and can be defined simply as a learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service within the learned curriculum so that instruction and reflection enrich civic responsibility while strengthening communities.

In fact, millions of students across the country were involved in service learning projects last year, and I am happy to report that *service learning is alive and well in Nelson County*. Recently, I had the wonderful opportunity to work along side Nelson County High School students at the local food pantry. The work was arduous, but the students happily provided valuable labor for an organization that provides support for the community.

A Nelson County High School senior stated to me on this day, "I like volunteering because it makes me feel good." Through service learning, students and others experienced the joy of helping others. Please consider service learning in your household as we work together to strengthen the community.

I wish all of you a healthy and prosperous New Year!

Roger D. Collins, Division Superintendent

2009-10 Budget

Recently, Public School Divisions across the Commonwealth of Virginia were given dire news of significant reductions in funding for the 2009-10 fiscal year. Given the state of the economy, this came as no surprise though this was, indeed, unwelcome news. From using the numbers in Governor Kaine's proposed budget, Nelson County stands to receive almost \$1 million less in state and federal funding for next year's school operations. In addition to the revenue shortfall that we will undoubtedly experience, the School Board and Administration will also have to grapple with increases in the cost of basic operations due to inflation and other increases.

The School Board and Administration realize that a budget deficit of this magnitude cannot be made up without significant sacrifice, or alterations, in daily operations unless there is additional money to offset the shortfall from another revenue source. Over the coming weeks, the School Board and Administration will be meeting to develop a plan to deal with this sizable funding reduction. Staff will be looking at additional ways to reduce expenditures to balance the budget yet minimize, to the greatest extent possible, the negative effect on children in the classroom. Staffing levels, student programs, course offerings, bus routes, etc. will all be reviewed to determine where possible savings could be found.

We invite you to be an active part of the process, advocating for Nelson County's youth, as we chart the course for the challenging days ahead. Please plan to join us in the discussion as we welcome your input and encourage your support.

Career and Technical Education

Career and Technical Education plays a vital role in preparing students for life beyond high school. Career and Technical Education classes help young adults acquire skills and knowledge needed to obtain a job, to transition into post secondary education, and to practice workplace experiences. Nelson County Public Schools' Career and Technical Education programs offer students the opportunity to explore career opportunities in the fields of agriculture, auto mechanics, building trades, business and information technology, family and consumer science, health occupations, and horticulture.

Career and Technical Education provides a link to the business world and to the community. The Division Career and Technical Education Advisory Committee held their first meeting on November 10, 2008. In attendance were representatives from various businesses, community members, parents, and most importantly, former students and present and former staff. The focus of the advisory meeting was to highlight program accomplishments, develop local plans for each program area, and plan for future course offerings to meet the needs of the business community.

Future goals for Career and Technical Education include:

- Expansion of course offerings , including the addition of on-line courses
- Continuation of the mentorship program
- Publicizing the numerous aspects of Career and Technical Education
- Integration of financial literacy
- Persistence in highlighting workplace readiness skills
- Creation of additional business partnerships



Education is a collaborative effort. Teamed with academic knowledge and workplace training, Career and Technical Education prepares students to extend their learning beyond high school. A balanced high school program can move students into a community college, a four-year institution, a vocational school, or into the workplace with the skills necessary to be successful. The mission of Career and Technical Education is to guide students on the path to a promising future.

Historic Visitors



Recent visitors to the third grade classes at Tye River Elementary School were Christopher Columbus, Juan Ponce de Leon, Jacques Cartier, and Christopher Newport who instructed students “in person” about the **Exploration of the Americas SOL**. Well.....not exactly.

Each TRES third grade teacher, Beth Cann, Anne Krieger, Kim Price, and Elizabeth Shephard, dressed up as one of these explorers to present “living” history to their students. The students traveled to each “explorer’s” classroom where they learned about the host’s country of origin, the reason for the exploration, the area explored, and the accomplishments and outcomes of the trip. In order to present their information, these teachers prepared maps and used media technology, and the students used interactive notebooks to record their learned information. After each presentation, the third graders completed a short quiz before proceeding to the next “explorer’s” classroom. These teachers who presented this SOL brought history to life for their students in a fun, creative, and engaging way.



Visit our Website: www.nelson.k12.va.us



Do the Math

The importance of math for Nelson students is unquestionable in the present world. It is a crucial skill that not only leads to success in school but also creates an informed citizen who succeeds in his or her chosen career and who is prepared to use it in every day life.

As parents, it is important to realize that the mathematics instruction your child receives may be very different from the mathematics instruction you received in your own school experiences. Today mathematics in schools is no longer just simple, basic arithmetic as perhaps you were taught; it is richer in problem-solving, reasoning, and communication as well as making mathematical connections with the real world. In addition, technology has influenced the way math is taught making it more complex, yet more fascinating.

Following is a list of the Top Ten Tips for Parents looking for help with math from the Learning First Alliance Website:

1. **There is nothing to fear but fear itself.** Encourage your child to develop a love of math through supporting his or her performance, helping with school projects, and discussing homework.
2. **Stay informed.** Keep yourself apprised of the specific academic standards that children are required to meet at each grade level.
3. **Make sure your child takes advanced courses.** Encourage your child to master algebra and geometry by the end of the ninth grade. The mathematics subjects that a student masters in the middle grades have a strong effect on whether he or she will be able to take the higher levels of mathematics necessary for admission to college or for an increasing number of technical jobs.
4. **Be a champion for challenge.** A challenging math curriculum can stimulate a child to learn more and can positively influence growth in other areas of his or her education.
5. **Make math fun.** Spend time with your child on simple board games, puzzles, and activities that encourage better attitudes and stronger math/computation skills.
6. **Mix in math.** The kitchen is filled with tasty opportunities to teach fractional measurements, like doubling and dividing cookie recipes.
7. **Use real world examples to teach math.** Point out ways that people use math every day: to pay bills, balance their checkbooks, figure out their net earnings, compute fuel use and mileage on family trips, and tips at restaurants.
8. **Prepare for a profession.** Let your child know what vocations require a sound base in mathematics. Careers in carpentry, landscaping, medicine, pharmacy, aeronautics, and meteorology all require strong math skills.
9. **Tune into technology.** Encourage your child to use computers and the Internet at home, your local library, and after-school programs for tasks like developing charts, graphs, maps, and spreadsheets.
10. **Encourage your child to solve problems.** Provide assistance, but let him or her figure it out alone. Problem solving is a lifetime skill.

As with any subject, have a positive attitude with your child. Remind him or her that anyone can learn math. Extend praise when efforts are made, and share in the excitement when he or she solves something for the first time. When errors are made, turn them into a learning opportunity. Also, remember the old adage, "Practice Makes Perfect" and when practice is combined with a positive attitude, your child will achieve eventual success in math.

Positive Attitude + Practice = Success



iPODs in Instruction



Have you ever witnessed young people walking through the mall while listening to their favorite tunes with ear buds in their ears? Have you bought an MP3 player for your child and wondered why all kids **MUST** have one of these contraptions? Nelson Middle School administrators wondered the same thing and consequently decided to jump on board with this trend and enhance learning in classrooms.

iPODs have been quite popular for a few years now, and can be seen in almost every teenager's hand. At NMS, teachers are on their way to taking what students enjoy and incorporating it into their learning by using these handy devices. The school has a classroom set of iPODs which can be used to listen to learning lessons, watch podcasts, view streaming videos, work through a science experiment, observe other classrooms around the world, or even podcast their own learning for the world to see. There are many cutting edge uses for these clever learning tools that can connect with students on many different levels. With staff training underway, the teachers at Nelson Middle are thrilled about using these to expand learning experiences for their students!

The "Write" Stuff

At Rockfish River Elementary School, writing is a significant aspect of the curriculum. Each grade level works on writing strategies, and all students have opportunities to provide writing samples throughout the year. Through class discussions, oral reading, and language arts lessons, teachers provide the kind of atmosphere that promotes creativity and writing opportunities from kindergarten through fifth grade. This year these students are involved in a unique opportunity to turn every child into a published author.

From kindergarten through fifth grade, RRES students are participating in a writing project utilizing *Student Treasures*, a program that motivates students to learn through publishing. Students in kindergarten through grade two are individually contributing writing samples to be included in a classroom book. In grades three through five, each student is writing and illustrating his/her own book to be published. *Student Treasures* is providing the school with all of the needed materials free of charge, along with the opportunity for parents to purchase the books that are published.

The publishing program is aligned with Nelson County's goals and objectives for writing and assists in meeting learning objectives by connecting this educational writing enrichment project with core curriculum standards set by the Department of Education. Through enhancement of the traditional writing curriculum, Rockfish River teachers are striving to further develop their students' skills in preparation for the Standards of Learning writing test in fifth grade and to provide opportunities for real world communication. This experience is beneficial in building student confidence in his or her skills, while turning each student into a published author. The finished product, a hardcover book, is a tremendous incentive to get students excited about the writing process. Nothing motivates students as well as seeing their writing published! Therefore, the process of creating, writing, and illustrating a book becomes both rewarding and fun.

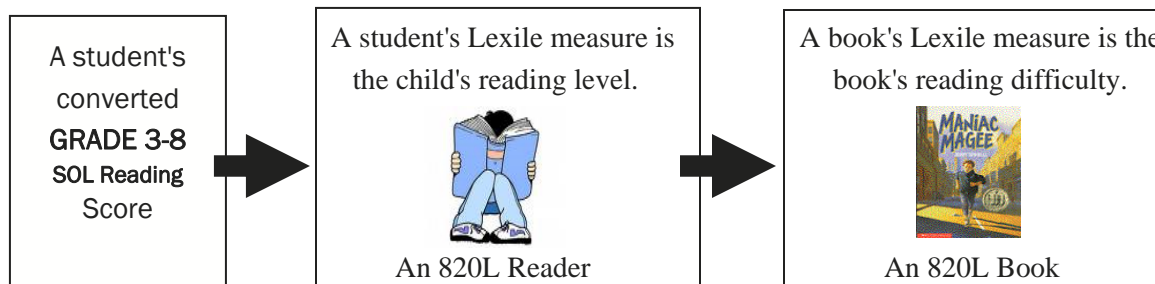
At home, parents can cultivate writing by providing basic supplies and comfortable surroundings. An appealing environment that supplies a student's basic writing needs is not only helpful but also motivating. Families should make homes literature rich, motivate children to keep a journal, and encourage them to write passages about family trips. Hopefully this project, along with excellent daily instruction and parental encouragement, will motivate students to find the writers inside themselves.



A New Toolkit

The Lexile Toolkit can help adults select books which will strengthen a child's reading skills by giving books a classification system that corresponds to a child's SOL score in reading. An online calculator automatically converts your child's SOL score into a "Lexile measure." Then, parents can be assured that any book classified with your child's Lexile measure is appropriate for his or her reading level. Not only are such books suitable for your child's reading level, but reading books can also help to improve your child's reading skills! Currently, over 100,000 books and tens of millions of articles have Lexile ratings and may be found in local libraries and bookstores.

A Lexile score measures reading comprehension and text difficulty on one scale.



Lexile measures typically range from around 200L to 1700L. Books with a Lexile measure within a range of 100 points above or below your child's measure could be an appropriate reading level book for him or her. By matching your child's Lexile measure to a corresponding book, that child will have the opportunity to practice reading with material he or she can comprehend, yet find challenging. Children are more likely to practice reading under these conditions. As children practice and find success, they gain confidence in their reading abilities. Selecting books on a child's reading level also helps to eliminate boredom or frustration. To this end, it also is important to consider background knowledge and particular interests when selecting which books would be best suited for your child.

To find your child's Lexile measure: Type your child's reading SOL score (grade 3-8 only) from last spring into the "Calculator" located on the website at the Virginia Department of Education (see below). The "Calculator and Conversion" link is highlighted on the page. Beginning in spring 2009, each student's Lexile measure (grades 3-8) will be printed directly on the Reading SOL Parent Report.

To find a book with your child's Lexile measure: Go to the last website listed below, and click on "FIND A BOOK." Enter your child's Lexile measure, and then use the search engine to find books suited to your child's areas of interest. The results are filled with rich resources. You will find a list of books matching your child's Lexile measure as well as information about the books, such as summaries, reader comments, and local stores and libraries where you can find the book. Choose the books that you want by placing them in an electronic "Book Bag" which can be printed to take to the store or library nearest you!

This resource is invaluable because it provides an easy way to track reading growth as you and your child set reading goals. Reading twenty minutes each day, trying new books, and carving out time to read together can help your child reach higher reading levels. When your child hits a goal, celebrate!

Keep in mind that Lexile measures do not address age appropriateness, text quality, a child's interests, background knowledge, or reading context and purpose. Parents should monitor and discuss with their child all specific reading materials.

Great VIDEO explaining Lexile resources to parents:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/info_centers/sol/lexile/at_home/parent_session_skin.swf

Convert a student's reading SOL score to the corresponding Lexile measure

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/info_centers/sol/lexile/index.shtml

Find a book based upon a Lexile Measure

<http://www.lexile.com/findabook/>

"Rudy" Ruritan

The painting and printmaking students at Nelson County High School were excited about using their skills in a project for the Massie's Mill Ruritan Club. The organization purchased a new trailer and asked these students to paint three sides of it. On two sides, the students painted on the club's seal, and on the front, they painted the club's mascot, "Rudy Ruritan," an adorable teddy bear. To place the designs on the trailer, the students used handmade stencils; the process required attention to detail, precision, and patience.

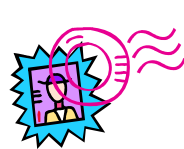


However, the class was thrilled and honored to have been given such an opportunity. The Massie's Mill Ruritan Club will be making a donation of three hundred dollars to the Nelson County High School Art Department as a gesture of gratitude for the effort. Nelson County High School students were happy to be a part of a community in which collaborative efforts like this take place!



School Board Members

Central District:	Stuart Armstrong, 270 Sawmill Creek Drive, Nellysford, VA 22958	(434) 361-9203
North District:	John Kirchner, 218 Blundell Hollow Rd., Afton, VA 22920	(434) 361-2553
South District:	Jane B. Mays, 29 Dave's Place, Arrington, VA 22922	(434) 263-8181
East District:	Cindy Lachance, 141 Drumheller Lane, Shipman, VA 22971	(434) 263-8668
West District:	David Parr, P O Box 598, Piney River, VA 22964	(434) 277-5265



This issue of **Nelson School News** is also available on our web-site and can be printed individually as needed. The move from postal delivery to an electronic news-letter version is a cost savings measure.



Thank you for your continued interest in school division news.

Administration

Nelson County School Board Office
 84 Courthouse Square
 P.O. Box 276
 Lovingston, VA 22949
Phone: (434) 263-7100
Superintendent: Dr. Roger Collins
www.nelson.k12.va.us

School Transportation Office & Maintenance Department
 620 Drumheller Orchard Lane
 Lovingston, VA 22949
Phone: (434) 263-5095
Trans. Supervisor: Mr. Gary Wade
Maint. Supervisor: Mr. Tim Rutherford

Rockfish River Elementary School
 200 Chapel Hollow Road
 Afton, VA 22920
Phone: (434) 361-1791
Principal: Mrs. Nita Hughes
Asst. Principal: Ms. Kim Candler

Tye River Elementary School
 5198 Thomas Nelson Highway
 Arrington, VA 22922
Phone: (434) 263-8960
Principal: Mr. Greg Hill
Asst. Principal: Mrs. Sharon Williams

Nelson Middle School
 6925 Thomas Nelson Highway
 Lovingston, VA 22949
Phone: (434) 263-4801
Principal: Mr. Jody Ray
Asst. Principal: Mrs. Amber Hartzog

Nelson County High School
 6919 Thomas Nelson Highway
 Lovingston, VA 22949
Phone: (434) 263-8317
Principal: Mrs. Emma Wardlaw
Asst. Principal: Dr. Edward Grumbach



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