



The Buzz

FALL
2017



Thomas County Board of Education Monthly Newsletter

Dee Gaines Named Hand-In-Hand Principal

Hand-In-Hand Primary School Assistant Principal Dee Gaines assumed the role of principal on October 1 following Jeanna Mayhall's retirement.

Originally from Ochlocknee, Gaines is a graduate of Thomas County Central High School (TCHS). She holds a Bachelor of Science in Education degree from the University of Georgia, and graduated from Valdosta State University with both Masters and Specialist degrees.

Gaines brings a wealth of experience to her position. Working in the system since 2000, she has served as a special education teacher, speech language pathologist, parent involvement coordinator, special education coordinator, and assistant principal.

Gaines said, "I'm excited about the opportunity to serve the children and families of Thomas County! Hand-In-Hand Primary is a very special school filled with outstanding teachers and staff, and the children are precious to me."

"I am thankful to have the opportunity to work for a school system that values the importance of a fair and equal education for all students. I am honored to work with some of the best educators in our



Dee Gaines became Hand-In-Hand principal on October 1. On the playground is Dee Gaines (center) surrounded by kindergarten students Xalen James, from left, Sam Stewart, Destiny Hobbs, Rosie Cooper, and Blake Knisely.

state to provide the highest quality education to all of our students. I feel confident that we will continue to build on the strong foundation laid by my predecessors, Sheila Bullington and Jeanna Mayhall."

Past Hand-In-Hand Principal Jeanna Mayhall believes the Board of Education could not have made a better choice in naming Gaines principal.

"Dee has served in multiple capacities during her career with the Thomas County Schools giving her a wide array of experiences," Mayhall said. "These experiences have helped prepare her for the next step in her career. She

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Thomas County School System Names Two Assistant Principals

The Thomas County Board of Education recently approved two new assistant principals to finish out the 2017-2018 school year. Alacia Herring has been named assistant principal for Hand-In-Hand Primary School, and Ashley Lane will serve as the assistant principal at Cross Creek Elementary School.

Alacia Herring will fill the vacant assistant principal position that became available when Dee Gaines was named principal following Jeanna Mayhall's recent retirement.



ALACIA HERRING

Herring graduated from Thomas University with a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education and began her teaching career with Thomas County Schools as a first grade teacher at Garrison-Pilcher Elementary School in 2000. She holds a master's degree from Valdosta State University and an educational specialist degree from Kennesaw State University. Herring is also certified in leadership and holds a gifted endorsement.

When Herring found out she would be the assistant principal, she was "overjoyed." "Having the opportunity to work in this capacity, with my

Hand-In-Hand family, has me excited about the future," Herring said. "I simply love the children, staff, and our community."

Herring has more than 20 years' experience in education with the Thomas County School System serving as a veteran classroom teacher, an enrichment teacher, and a program coordinator. As a firm believer in continuing education, Herring is prepared with knowledge in technology, literacy development, and differentiated curriculum planning. She assisted in the facilitation and implementation of new programs, planned and participated in professional development and served on leadership and curriculum teams.

"I will strive to be a valuable resource to students, faculty, and parents. I want to build on the strong foundation of open communication and transparency," Herring said. "Hand-In-Hand has always had a family and team

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The Buzz is a 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.

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Mayhall Retires from Hand-In-Hand Primary After 29 Years

From now on when the school bell rings, Jeanna Mayhall won't know what to do with herself. For the first time in almost 30 years, the retiring Hand-In-Hand Principal won't be returning to the school campus at the break of dawn every week day. For Mayhall, who has been in the school environment her whole life, says "it will be hard to transition to the 'normal' world because my internal rhythm follows the rhythm of the school calendar."

The beloved veteran educator who just completed her 29th year in education was sent off by an adoring group of family, friends and coworkers during a recent reception held in her honor. Mayhall received many gifts and was honored by coworkers who made signs and a slideshow, performed a humorous skit and entertained her with a song written just for her.

As a product of the Thomas County School System, Mayhall graduated

as one of four valedictorians of the Central Class of 1984. She holds an Associate's Degree from Thomas College where she attended on a full academic scholarship, and received her Bachelor Degree in Special Education from Valdosta State University. Mayhall also holds a Master's Degree in Birth to 5 Education and a Specialist in Educational Leadership from Valdosta State.

Since beginning her career as a special education teacher, Mayhall has always had a special place in her heart for children with special needs.

"The reason I chose education for my career is the children," Mayhall said. "I absolutely love kids and especially children from disadvantaged families and children with special needs. I have so many great stories to tell about children that I cannot even begin to name one."

Hand-In-Hand first opened its doors on the former Magnolia campus in the Chappelle building. The school only had four classrooms, but more than doubled by the second year. By starting in that original building in 1993, Mayhall saw the program grow and develop even as the three-year old classroom serving students with special needs was transferred from Garrison-Pilcher Elementary School to the Hand-In-Hand Magnolia campus.

The first year in the new Hand-In-Hand Primary School building on the 84 bypass, Mayhall was named assistant principal under Sheila Bullington. She helped to transition the kindergarten staff from Garrison-Pilcher



Dr. Dusty Kornegay, Jeanna Mayhall, and Dr. Lisa Williams sit on a bench similar to one donated in honor of Mayhall's service to Thomas County Schools. The bench, to be located outside of Hand-In-Hand, will include a commemorative plaque.

into the new building with the existing Pre-K program.

"When we relocated, we were all so very proud of our BIG new school," Mayhall said. "I like to say that Hand-In-Hand started with very humble beginnings on the Magnolia campus and then moved to a state-of-the-art facility designed for the specific developmental needs for three- to six-year old students."

Mayhall was named principal in 2006. When she decided to take the career path of administration, her intent was to never leave the school level.

"I love children and needed to be around them," Mayhall commented. "I felt that being present in the classrooms around the children kept me focused on what needed to be done to make Hand-In-Hand a better place to educate kids."

Mayhall feels like one of her biggest accomplishments is that Hand-In-Hand has become a lighthouse for families of children with special needs.

She said, "Each and every

time that we sought to improve a service for our children with special needs, our system supported us and found a way to make it happen. No other district in our area, or in the state that I know of, provides a reverse inclusion program for three-year olds with special needs like our program. We work hard to provide inclusion support in the regular classroom as much as possible for our Pre-K students. Our staff is well-trained in supporting all students. The biggest accomplishment is that we've developed a culture of acceptance of all students."

When asked what her favorite thing was about being a principal, Mayhall had a hard time coming up with one simple answer.

"I absolutely love the daily excitement of staff and students entering the building each morning," Mayhall said. "I love the look on a child's face when he learns something new. I love the look on the teacher's face when



In addition to a reception given in her honor, Jeanna Mayhall's retirement was celebrated at a recent administrative meeting. Posing with her cake is Mayhall and Superintendent Dr. Dusty Kornegay.

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she sees a child ‘get it.’ I love the infectious laughter of the staff at Hand-In-Hand enjoying their jobs. We laugh a lot. The children are always saying something absolutely hilarious. I should’ve journaled daily and written a book.”

While Mayhall served as principal, Hand-In-Hand was recognized by Bright from the Start: Georgia’s Department of Early Care and Learning as a high quality program with the highest rating of three stars and is used often in examples of a “highly effective pre-k program.” Some of the other accomplishments during her tenure included Erin Wright being named Georgia’s Pre-K Teacher of the Year by The Georgia Association for the Education of Young Children, Susan Esra being named Early Interventionist of the Year by Georgia Association on Young

Children, and Hand-In-Hand being named Pre-K Program of the Year.

Mayhall added, “I will miss school. There is nothing like the excitement of the first day and the last day of school. I will surely miss being around children every single day, and in my job, I have formed strong bonds with my staff. I will miss being their leader. It will be hard to let go.”

Traveling and spending quality time with her husband, Michial, who also retired from the Thomas County School System, are Mayhall’s plans for the future. With three grandchildren and two of them living in Michigan, Mayhall will stay busy visiting them. Her son, Cooper, is a senior who plays baseball at Kennesaw State University so she plans to be a baseball mom and see as many games as she can.

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began her career right here at Hand-In-Hand as a speech and language pathologist.”

Mayhall added, “Dee has deep roots in our system and in our school which started from such humble beginnings. She is an excellent choice for Hand-In-Hand.”

In announcing Gaines’ appointment, Thomas County Superintendent Dusty Kornegay said, “There is no more important qualification for being a successful school leader than loving children. Dee loves children, and it shows in everything that she says and does. I was privileged to have Dee as a student when I was teaching at TCCHS, and I have enjoyed watching her grow up and build a highly successful career. She is smart, she is hard-working, and she is genuine through and through.

Hand-In-Hand will flourish under her leadership.”

Gaines’ husband, Reid, is owner of M. Reid Gaines Land Surveying. They have two sons, Marx, who is a sixth grader at Thomas County Middle School, and Graham, who is in first grade at Garrison-Pilcher Elementary. Gaines is a member of First Baptist Church and enjoys spending time outdoors with her family and friends.

Hand-In-Hand is the area’s leading primary school holding the highest quality rating by Bright from the Start: Georgia’s Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). Hand-In-Hand is the only public program to receive the three-star quality rating in the Thomasville/Thomas County area.

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environment. This is important for me to continue.”

Herring will be working with Hand-In-Hand Principal Dee Gaines in facilitating the school vision and mission.

Herring added, “I always admired Dee’s passion and leadership for Hand-In-Hand when she was assistant principal. I am very happy to be working with her and feel our leadership styles complement each other. We have a unified vision for moving the school forward. It is very reassuring to know that I have someone like Dee for support in my new position.”

Ashley Lane will be

filling the assistant principal seat at Cross Creek Elementary vacated by Brecca Pope who is



ASHLEY LANE

joining the Board of Education as Director of Administrative Services.

Lane holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Early Childhood education from Georgia Southern University. She continued her education at Valdosta State University where she received both master’s and education specialist degrees.

Lane has worked in the Thomas County School System for more than 15 years. She began her career with the system as a second-grade teacher at Garrison-Pilcher Elementary School and also worked there as

an instructional technology specialist. She joins Cross Creek after serving as the school system’s virtual coordinator where she was responsible for promoting and overseeing enrollment, providing training and support for parents and students, monitoring progress and maintaining student records.

Lane said she was “honored to accept this position.”

“I knew that I would be joining a school that had an outstanding leadership team and wonderful teachers,” Lane said. “One thing that I’ve noticed about Cross Creek is how supportive and encouraging the teachers are with all of the students, particularly during testing times. The staff at Cross Creek exudes a positive energy and genuine love for helping all students succeed.”

Lane has served on the school level leadership team for many years of her career.

“Each of my roles has contributed to my growth and versatility for school administration,” Lane said. “I am grateful to have worked with many colleagues along the way that have encouraged me to move forward in my career. I have always enjoyed working with all of the staff and students at the school level, as I did with technology. The role of the administrator will allow me the opportunity to provide a positive impact on an entire school.”

CPR and First Aid will be offered during the from 4:00 - 8:00 p.m. at Hand-In-Hand Primary School on the following dates:
November 28, 2017 CPR
January 23, 2018 First Aid
Please sign up on PExpress to attend!



Pope Takes on New Role at Thomas County Schools



As part of Thomas County School System's succession planning, Mrs. Brecca Pope (far right) is assuming the duties of Dr. Lisa Williams who will become superintendent of Thomas County Schools effective June 1.

The Thomas County Board of Education has approved the appointment of Brecca Pope to the position of Director of Administrative Services at the Board of Education. Pope comes to the board office from Cross Creek Elementary School

where she served as assistant principal for the past six years.

"I am very thankful for the opportunity to serve the students and staff of Thomas County Schools in this capacity," Pope said. "As an educator, I recognize

the benefits of lifelong learning and look forward to my new role as Director of Administrative Services."

In her new role, Pope will assume many of the duties currently assigned to Dr. Lisa Williams as Dr. Williams prepares to transition into her new role as superintendent designee.

Pope has worked with the Thomas County School System since 1999 following one year of employment as a speech and language pathologist in Jefferson County (Alabama). She served in Thomas County as a Speech Language Pathologist at Cross Creek, as assistant principal at Hand-In-Hand Primary School, and as assistant principal at Cross Creek.

"One of the biggest adjustments as I transition from a school level administrator to the board office will be not seeing students every day," Pope

added. "After spending the past 19 years in Thomas County Schools, I have had the chance to watch students progress through each school and on to college. The students who were in kindergarten the first year I was an administrator at Hand-In-Hand are now juniors at Thomas County Central High School. I love the idea that I will now be able to assist those same students as they prepare for graduation!"

Pope is a graduate of Thomas County Central High School and holds three degrees from Valdosta State University (Bachelors, Masters, and Educational Specialist).

"Mrs. Pope has strong ties to our system and a wealth of school-based experience which will make her extremely valuable to the district office administrative team," Thomas County Schools Superintendent Dr. Dusty Kornegay said. "She began her duties at the district office following fall break."

Garrison-Pilcher Elementary Holds Reading Rally

It was all blue and gold for the students at Garrison-Pilcher Elementary School as students celebrated the end of their first nine-week term with a pep rally for reading and literacy.

"This has become an annual event," said Darlene Cook, Garrison-Pilcher Media Specialist. "We have such a wonderful morning full of activities that support reading. Volunteers from the community come to read to our students, and Thomas County Central High School students are on campus to help create that pep rally atmosphere."

Thomas County Central's band members, cheerleaders, and football players come to interact with the younger ones getting them excited about

reading and literacy as well as being a Yellow Jacket. Thomas University basketball players were also on campus cheering on the kids and encouraging them to read.

"I really liked the football players autographing my book the best," said second-grader Dakota Law. "I loved all those books that people read to us, too."

The event begins with students choosing a free book provided by proceeds from the recently held book fairs. The students then proceed to the track where they have the pep rally, popcorn, photos, autographs by the athletes, and of course reading books. Community volunteers help with all these activities.



Students in Donna Sellars' class include Kaylei Mainprize, Jasper Fulghum, Colin Cantrell, Ja'Leyah Coleman, Kaylee Bennefield, Eli Kipper, Annde McKenzie, Kayleigh Hubbard, Raylynn Fykes, Courtlyn Speigner, and Evelyn Wright-Barwick.

"This is just an awesome event," said Richard Potter, Assistant Principal of Garrison-Pilcher. "We appreciate the collaboration between our school and TCCHS. The

interaction between our students and the high school students is very important. They see the rewards of being a good student and definitely want to be a Yellow Jacket."

TCCHS Senior Named a Commended Student

TCCHS Principal, Trista Jones, has announced that Sierra Stephens has been named a Commended Student in the 2018 National Merit Scholarship Program. Stephens placed among the top five percent of more than 1.6 million students who entered the 2018 competition by taking the 2016 Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.

A Letter of Commendation

from the school and National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC), which conducts the program, was presented by the principal to the scholastically talented senior. About 34,000 Commended Students throughout the nation are being recognized for their exceptional academic promise.

Stephens plans to attend Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee, where she has already been accepted with

a scholarship. She wants to study biology, but wants to also continue her education in music.

Very involved in the band program, Stephens plays for the concert and jazz bands, and she also leads the marching band as drum major. She is a part of the Georgia Secretary of State Student Ambassadors, a civil service and civic awareness club, as well as the National Honor Society.



A Letter of Commendation from TCCHS and National Merit Scholarship Corporation was presented by Principal Trista Jones (right) to Sierra Stephens.

Thomas County Middle School's Davis Elected to Leadership Position



Current GVATA president Hannah Elrick (left) presents a plaque to Audrey Davis for her service as the area director and welcomes her as the president-elect.

Audrey Davis, Agricultural Education Teacher at Thomas County Middle School, has been named president-elect for the Georgia Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association (GVATA). Davis will become president next year to lead the organization and become the face of GVATA, representing the organization in academic and legislative outings.

Davis has been a member of GVATA for five years when she joined at the start of her teaching career. She believes that the organization has helped her in her teaching role

at the middle school.

"One of the greatest benefits is the support I receive from fellow agriculture teachers," Davis said. "Many schools only employ one agriculture teacher so GVATA provides a time for collaboration within our field and offers numerous opportunities for professional development at our two annual conferences. I am always encouraged when I attend a GVATA function, and I am able to bring that motivation back to my students and our program."

In order to serve as

president, Davis had to serve as an area director. She was elected as an area director in 2015 and served for two years in that capacity. She was responsible for member registration, assisting at conferences, securing vendors, and representing the teachers in her area of Southwest Georgia. She was also able to attend regional and national conferences.

As president-elect, Davis is responsible for organizing the summer and mid-winter conferences and assisting the president of GVATA when necessary.

"This was truly an honor to be elected," Davis said. "My peers encouraged me to seek the position, and their support was very meaningful."

One of Davis' goals for serving as president is to continue the tradition of success in the organization that was established decades ago.

"Agriculture Education is continuing to grow as we add new programs all across the state, and I want to ensure that we maintain fully-funded high quality programs," Davis said. "I also want to educate and encourage our membership

to take advantage of all the opportunities we provide them through our organization."

Davis' three-year term includes serving as president-elect, president, and past president. As past president, she will continue to provide leadership and serve as a liaison for the Georgia Future Farmers of America (FFA) Alumni and the Georgia FFA Foundation.

Davis added, "The agricultural education program is like one big family. We have several organizations such as FFA and GVATA that collaborate to accomplish our purpose. FFA is designed to be a leadership organization for students interested in agriculture, and GVATA is the leadership organization for agricultural teachers."

The mission of the GVATA is to provide agricultural education for the global community through visionary leadership, advocacy and service. GVATA serves as the professional organization for agriculture teachers in Georgia, and is affiliated with the National Association of Agricultural Educators.

STAR-WORTHY PERFORMANCE - TCCHS students Stephen Sykes and Emily Brooks were named to the Region 1 AAAAA All Star Cast for their performances in the Georgia High School Association Region 1 AAAAA One Act Competition. The Drama Department performed "Almost Maine," which consisted of several 10 minute scenes exploring the themes of love and loss in a small Maine town on a January Friday night. The Region 1 AAAAA All Star Cast is comprised of students whose performances stood out to the judges during each individual show.



TCMS Students Sign REACH Georgia Scholarship Contracts



Students signing from left to right are Sania Virgil, Yadira Perdomo-Badillo, Levi McClelland, Patricia Diego, and Zamiah Hart. Parents and guardians Connie Williams, from left, Sonia Badillo, Chris McClelland, Paulina Francisco, and Shulonda Hart look on.



SOLAR OVENS AT CROSS CREEK- Third-grade students in Holly Hurst's and Melissa O'Neal's classes recently cooked s'mores in solar ovens. The ovens were made while the classes were studying heat. Pictured from left to right are Anna Brooks, Matthew Devries, Dontavious Pickett, Ella Grace Smith, and Perrin Harper.



HAND-IN-HAND CELEBRATES GEORGIA'S PRE-K WEEK - Community members visited children at Hand-In-Hand the week of October 2-6 hosted by Voices for Georgia's Children and its partners to celebrate quality early education and the Georgia Pre-K Program. Guest readers during the week included Thomas County Schools Superintendent Dusty Kornegay (pictured above), local attorney Vann Parrott, Georgia Representative Darlene Taylor, and Thomasville City Council Member Don Sims.

During the recent Statewide Signing Day, Governor Nathan Deal welcomed five Thomas County Middle School (TCMS) students to the Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH) Georgia program, a needs-based scholarship designed to promote academic success and expand access to higher education. The TCMS students chosen to join REACH Georgia are Patricia Diego, Zamiah Hart, Chris McClelland, Yadira Perdomo-Badillo, and Sania Virgil.

As a part of the program, students signed contracts to agree to meet attendance and behavior requirements, maintain a certain grade point average, participate in REACH Georgia related activities, and meet weekly with a mentor. Their parents or guardians also signed contracts to support their student through their education.

Nancy Rogers, TCMS MERIT teacher and Thomas County Schools' Teacher of the Year, spoke to the group and encouraged them to take advantage of this "tremendous opportunity."

"Everything worth having

in life requires dedication, sacrifice, and commitment, and the pursuit of higher education is no exception," Rogers said. "There will be challenges and struggles along the way, but overcoming them is what builds character. As you sit here today, your world is full of possibilities, and you will have all the tools you need to achieve anything you set your mind to."

When these scholars graduate from high school, they will receive up to a \$10,000 scholarship to be used at a HOPE eligible Georgia two or four-year college.

REACH Georgia was initially launched in 2012 at Georgia Institute of Technology and was only offered to five school systems. Prior to the signing the students watched a welcome message from Governor Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal.

"This program is a strategic investment in our students and our state, opening doors for youth in Georgia who may not have the opportunity to seek postsecondary education due to financial constraints," said Deal.