



DURHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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CONTACT: Dr. Terri Mazingo, Associate Superintendent
Instructional Services, 560-2027

Julie Spencer, Principal
Carrington Middle School, 560-3916

Ken Barnes, Principal
Shepard Middle Magnet School, 560-3938

2 Durham Public Schools middle schools receive prestigious national recognition

DURHAM—Strong course selection, innovative character education for students, and a zest for overall academic excellence are among the reasons that Carrington Middle School and Shepard Middle Magnet School both have been named Schools to Watch by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform.

Carrington and Shepard were named Schools to Watch because of their academic excellence, responsiveness to the needs and interests of young adolescents and their commitment to helping all students achieve at high levels. In addition, each school has strong leadership, teachers who work together to improve curriculum and instruction, and a commitment to assessment and accountability in order to bring about continuous improvement.

“Carrington has a tradition of excellence, and over the last few years we have been strategic in our efforts to implement new and innovative strategies to meet the academic and social needs of our students,” said Carrington Principal Julie Spencer. “As a school, we are committed to looking at the whole child as we meet the needs of our students. Our students know that they are the center of our work and the reason why we are here.”

Spencer attributes Carrington’s selection to:

- Capturing Kids' Hearts training, which has provided a framework of strategies to personalize school for students. Teachers greet students at the classroom door with a handshake, talk about "good things" that are going on, and create social contracts to outline behavior expectations.
- A strong elective program. More than 20 options for student electives from which students can choose, including strings, Latin, reading or theater. These and many other courses provide relevant and enriching lessons.

GOALS for 2007: 95% of third-graders reading proficiently Eliminating the Achievement Gap

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- A “well-rounded” school atmosphere providing many different ways to engage students. With 15 different sports teams, an active arts department, a variety of clubs for students, and an effective after-school program.
- Teachers who are dedicated to excellence. Teachers plan together daily and meet for school-based staff development on a weekly basis. Carrington boasts a relatively low teacher turnover rate.
- A great sense of school pride from our students, teachers and parents. Students wear "boosters" (handmade spirit buttons) to show school spirit on game days. Students, teachers, and parents wear Carrington Spiritwear regularly to show off their school spirit.

“Each member of our Shepard family shares in the excitement of this honor,” said Ken Barnes, Shepard Middle School principal. “Our students are the most important members of our family and as they enter these doors today, as in every day, they know we care about them, both in and out of school. We will continue to strive to excel in providing the education our students deserve.”

Barnes cites the following elements that make his school a “School to Watch:”

- The International Baccalaureate Approaches to Learning expose students to a variety of learning activities.
- The Guidance Department serves students’ needs academically and emotionally. The school utilizes Peer Mediators, Group Support Sessions and various problem-solving tools to enable the students to work through relationship issues and improve as students.
- The Positive Behavior Support Team recognizes students at their best. This team utilizes the Panther Reward system to encourage students.
- Staff members are trained in the Capturing Kids Hearts program. This program helps each staff member to identify with students as individuals. They build on these relationships by encouraging community involvement from parents, various local universities and organizations.
- Shepard’s small population narrows the elective selections for students. However, students are able to have the opportunity to take unique electives, such as Law and Forensics. Each student is also exposed to both Spanish and French, whereas in other middle schools, students are exposed to one language. To compensate for the electives, teachers utilize after school hours to offer Drama, Dance, MSEN, Battle of the Books, Kid and Parents Reading Together, TopCats, and Odyssey of the Mind.

“We could not be more proud of these two fantastic middle schools, their principals, teachers, students and parents!” said Superintendent Carl Harris. “How exciting it is to have two middle schools that serve as models for the nation. This is just the beginning of the improvements we

will see as middle-school improvement plans continue to be developed and implemented throughout our district.”

Launched in 1999, Schools to Watch began as a program to identify middle grades schools across the country that were meeting or exceeding a set of strict criteria for excellence. The Forum developed a Web site (<http://www.schoolstowatch.org>) featuring online tours of schools, as well as detailed information about the selection criteria used in the recognition program.

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform is an alliance of 65 educators, researchers, national associations and officers of professional organizations and foundations dedicated to improving education in the middle grades.

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