

Webb Bridge Middle School

Elizabeth Fogartie, Principal, Webb Bridge Middle School, Alpharetta, Georgia

Executive Summary

Webb Bridge Middle School opened its doors in the fall of 1996 to serve the needs of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. Since then, one of the key elements to the school's success, in fact, has been what it offers to meet the needs of those students. Academically, the school offers a wide array of instructional programs to meet the individual needs of students. All students take language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies each year. Sixth graders take reading and also experience a 9-week course in French and Spanish. Seventh and eighth graders, who qualify with state-approved reading scores, may take a full academic year of French or Spanish. Placement into advanced courses in Grades 6 through 8 is determined by the school system's continuous achievement model in math and language arts or through the state criteria for placement in the gifted program. Advanced 8th grade students may take such courses as Honors Language Arts, Honors Physical Science, Honors Algebra, and/or Honors Geometry. As part of the core curriculum, students may receive services through the talented and gifted, special education, or ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) programs. In addition, a variety of Connections classes, including band, chorus, orchestra, general music, computers, family and consumer science, art, video journalism, health, and physical education are also provided to students. Likewise, many opportunities are available for students beyond the classroom, including intramural sports like soccer, flag football, volleyball, basketball, tennis, and tumbling. Organizations such as Student Council, Junior Beta Club, Student Ambassadors, Art Club, Spanish Club, Craft Club, Math Counts, Sewing Club, Recycling Club, and the Red Cross Club are just a few of the more than 30 that are offered at Webb Bridge Middle School. In fact, the music program is one of the largest in the Fulton County School System; each major part of that program—band, chorus, and orchestra—diversifies its offerings even more to meet student need. The band director also conducts the Student Jazz Band, which plays at various functions both in and out of the school. The chorus instructor also holds an advanced girls and boys ensemble group for students who want more vocal challenges. Finally, the orchestra conductor organizes a fun group of students called "Just Fiddlin' Around," which holds its own concert each spring. Students also produce a daily television show every morning and create a yearbook every school year.

Another key ingredient in Webb Bridge Middle School's recipe for success has always been the people, particularly its strong teachers and its strong parental and community involvement. A large number of the teachers have advanced degrees in their specific fields and realize that they themselves must be lifelong learners. They realize that they need to gain insight into learning and the latest research-based instructional methods to continually serve their students. This has always been true at Webb Bridge. In terms of partnerships from outside of the school, Webb Bridge has benefited from the strong support of its parents and community through the PTA, the Local School Advisory Committee (LSAC), and the many partnerships formed with community businesses. What is particularly exceptional about the amount of parental and community involvement at Webb Bridge is that it happens every day, not simply when meetings or grade events occur. Of course, volunteers to help and then line the hallways and crowd the classrooms during Curriculum Night, Sneak-a-Peek, the fall musical, Multicultural Night, etc., but they are also a constant part of the school day.

Obviously, as previously stated, Webb Bridge Middle School is a model of success within the Fulton County School System, the state, and the nation because of the programs and the people. However, there is one other key element that has gone unmentioned: pride. The students, staff, and stakeholders at Webb Bridge Middle School recognize the school's past accomplishments, understand its present aims, and strive to meet its future aspirations. Pride is an undeniable factor that courses through the heart of the school.

Program Description

Winston Churchill, famed world leader and orator, once said, “Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.” Maintaining a positive school attitude and climate has been a priority since Webb Bridge Middle School opened its doors in 1996, the same year that the Olympics came to Atlanta, and that climate and the Olympian spirit have made the school a model of success. All efforts involve a team dynamic approach with a variety of leadership roles being shared among faculty and staff members. Important decisions and creative ideas are borne from committees with a cross section of members. At Webb Bridge Middle School, what is common is that each faculty and staff member brings a positive attitude that builds an equally positive climate where the belief that “Together Everyone Achieves More” rings true.

What is also common at Webb Bridge is the continued success of all students. The faculty and staff at Webb Bridge Middle School understand that teachers are instructional leaders whose critical charge is to get all students ready for success. In addition, they realize that educating the *whole* child is also a paramount concern. Instructionally, teachers ensure that solid strategies are used and that high instructional standards are present for every child. The faculty is committed to serving students’ needs by putting academics first, with student improvement being primary in its efforts. This is demonstrated by the most recent CRCT results; the category of “All students” in the “Meets and exceeds” category increased by at least 1%. Subgroups of learners, such as African Americans, Hispanics, and ESOL students, showed even greater strides, improving by over 15% in some categories. In addition, during the 2006–07 school year, the staff decided that the students needed to really understand what the numbers meant from the CRCT results, so “Test Talks” were created. During these talks, administrators and counselors did just that: They traveled to classrooms every day for more than 2 weeks, gave each student his/her testing results, and explained exactly what those results meant. Students then set specific goals and actions based on their individual scores. Meeting the academic needs of all students at Webb Bridge is definitely a high priority, and the results—and awareness of those results—are positively evident.

In addition, the faculty and staff recognize that part of the school’s responsibility is to enlighten students about the diverse cultures in the school and the world. For example, our ESOL students, while few in number, are a vital part of the school’s overall program. Their diverse voices and experiences fill the classrooms and enrich student learning. Along with their experienced ESOL teacher, they lend a hand when the school celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month in the fall and Asian Heritage Month in the spring. Both month-long celebrations are filled with cultural facts on the morning news broadcast, pictures of famous persons from both cultures, and many other chances to learn and celebrate. In addition to those cultural celebrations, students also enjoy Black History Month, Women’s History Month, and Exceptional Children’s Week, times when other worlds, other cultures, and other experiences are highlighted and enthusiastically observed with facts and fun. Finally, in 6th grade, each student participates in an event known as World’s Fair, the culmination of an interdisciplinary unit that challenges students to research and creatively present information about cultures around the world. On the day of the fair, each homeroom teacher’s classroom becomes a nation, and travelers journey to each room to learn about the various cultures presented. Students are experts in their nations’ food, music, décor, geography, economy, language, and crafts, and they share their cultural knowledge with all who visit their country.

Lastly, the faculty and staff realize that part of the school’s positive climate is also ensuring that the school is safe for all of its students. To accomplish that task, a series of appropriate measures is used. First, teachers use effective classroom management techniques to keep students focused on learning. New teachers, for instance, are versed on classroom management during their orientation to Webb Bridge, and veteran teacher’s dialogue with them throughout the year to lend support. Secondly, if a situation warrants administrative attention, the school administration follows and adheres to the school system’s disciplinary cycle, which was created with the help of parents who were also concerned with school safety. This cycle of steps and consequences, which is also published in the student agenda, shows students in a concrete fashion how one’s actions can affect one’s academic career, and how they themselves can create their own behavioral remedy. Two programs that have been used to highlight the importance of discipline have

been the Peer Mediation group and the Bullies and Bystanders program. The Peer Mediation group is led by the school's resource officer, a Police Department veteran, who takes great pride in having students work toward peaceful solutions. She realizes that students who can solve their own problems become more confident, compliant, and positive. The Bullies and Bystanders program, which involved the entire faculty, staff, student body, and community, also stressed working together to continue a positive school climate at Webb Bridge. By providing a pleasing, safe environment, maintaining a setting that is conducive to student participation and achievement, and welcoming all visitors and cultures, Webb Bridge Middle School has represented not only a school of excellence but also an excellent school with a most positive attitude.

Finally, Webb Bridge Middle School also demonstrates its commitment to young adolescents by celebrating their accomplishments regularly because the teachers and staff believe that a school that is a model of success first celebrates the success of its students. In terms of citizenship, two students from each homeroom are recognized every 9 weeks by their homeroom teachers as glowing examples of that characteristic. As reward, they, with their parents, attend a Citizenship Breakfast, during which each student is recognized by the principal for his or her efforts. Secondly, students are also celebrated for their service to the school and the community during the yearly awards ceremony for 8th graders. Team awards are given to students who exhibit positive attitudes and display good citizenship. Siemens, one of Webb Bridge's business partners, gives one deserving student its Most Improved Student Award, and the faculty elects one student who has demonstrated unselfish concern for the welfare of others to receive the Altruism Award. Additionally, one student citizen every month is also selected by faculty vote as the Rotary Club of Windward Student of the Month, a distinction that rewards service to school, service to community, role model behavior, humility, academic effort, and integrity.

Students at Webb Bridge are recognized for their academic pursuits, as well. Every semester, for example, Webb Bridge celebrates students who achieved honor roll status by inviting them to attend the Honor Roll Breakfast, where they are recognized for their academic accomplishments. In addition, during the aforementioned awards ceremony for 8th graders, academics are also highlighted. Honor Roll and Super Honor Roll awards are given to deserving students, and Coca-Cola, another generous business partner, presents its Academic Award of Excellence to a student who has attended Webb Bridge for all 3 years and has the highest grade point average of all 8th graders. Finally, students' academic efforts are also celebrated throughout the year in various ways within the classroom. Not only are exemplary student papers and projects displayed in every classroom, in the numerous display cases throughout the school, and in the media center, but student products and creations are also showcased through the Social Science Fair and the Science Fair, World's Fair, Desktop Stores, Authors' Fair, Technology Fair, and concerts during the year.

Webb Bridge Middle School, in summary, is a school that is definitely committed to its students. The faculty and staff collaborate to meet students' needs and take joy in celebrating their accomplishments.

High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

An old Welsh saying states, "He that would be a leader must be a bridge." This aphorism definitely applies to Webb Bridge Middle School, which since 1996 has been both a brilliant bridge of discovery for all students who have walked through its wide and welcoming halls and a leader in high academic achievement throughout the state. While nurturing the growth of the whole student has been paramount to the Webb Bridge faculty and staff, underscoring the importance of academic success has always been a critical charge as well. As a result of this emphasis, Webb Bridge Middle School has consistently sought ways to increase high academic achievement for all of its students through a strong, stable combination of people, pedagogy, and programs.

Webb Bridge Middle School's academic success is primarily founded on a firm belief in the ability of all people to learn and grow and a genuine confidence in the tenacity of the human spirit to achieve. At the front of every student agenda is the school's motto, "We're prowling for success," which

is definitely reflective of that belief. The faculty and staff have a heartfelt awareness that students have an innate hunger for knowledge as they travel across the bridge of their educational career at Webb Bridge Middle School. In other words, they are earnestly looking, or prowling, for learning and success.

As a result, teachers maintain high academic standards for all students, plan with those standards and students in mind, and celebrate their successes throughout the year. The faculty and staff believe that in order to meet the unique learning needs of their students, they must first learn about them. Therefore, at the beginning of each year, teachers at each grade level pour over assessment data and other various pieces of information from the previous year to gather vital details about their incoming students, not to learn about limitations but rather to focus on potential. In fact, this process occurs throughout the year. Teachers continually revisit and revise their plans based on the most recent student information they have. Then during common planning times and curriculum meetings, teachers craft lessons and units across grade levels and content areas to build on that potential and to satiate the innate hunger for knowledge that students possess. In 7th grade, for example, teachers plan and continually revise an interdisciplinary unit titled “Desktop Stores,” a learning project that marries math, language arts, and social studies to show students the value of creating, marketing, and selling an original product. Through this unit, they become true entrepreneurs in a real-world, functioning, free-market economy. In fact, students in 8th grade have even initiated their own interdisciplinary unit in their social studies and science classes. The idea to build and maintain a themed garden outside of the 8th grade hallway was a modest proposal that has flourished into something grand. The “Georgia Garden” began as a successful minigrant awarded to Webb Bridge by the Fulton Education Foundation and was further funded by an outpouring of support from the PTA, community, and state. Featuring native Georgia plants researched by students and arranged according to the geographical areas where they grow in Georgia, this beautiful garden’s landscaping is a sight to behold and is the product of planning, planting, and caring by all.

Just like the maintenance of the Georgia Garden, the academic bridge that all students must cross while at Webb Bridge Middle School must be maintained as well. Teachers are aware of this and realize that they themselves need to gain insight into the latest research-based instructional methods. The school’s Leadership Team, which consists of administrators, teachers, and faculty members from each grade level and curriculum area, has provided teachers with staff development in-service programs every year to inform their pedagogy and methodology so that they can better meet their students’ learning needs. For instance, teachers have been trained to utilize the 8-Step Instructional Process, which they do in specific 6th grade math classes and in all reading and language arts classes throughout the school. In addition, all teachers have been trained on differentiated instruction, inclusion teaching, writing across the curriculum, rubric development, learning-focused schools, teaching ESOL students, and the latest Georgia performance standards modules. The faculty and staff look upon these educational sessions as opportunities to learn more about the latest in their field.

As a result of the beneficial in-service trainings, teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to challenge and engage all of their students, often putting students at the helm of their own learning. Two such strategies are modeling and providing students with examples of exemplary work. For example, language arts teachers model the writing and reading processes for their students before giving assignments in those literacy areas. They realize that modeling leads to guided practice, which then leads to more successful independent practice. Teachers also use anchor papers to show students what is expected for each writing task and supply detailed rubrics to guide their efforts. Many of the rubrics are created with direct feedback from students, giving them a sense of ownership and a better understanding of the requested task and its connection to real life. These rubrics also teach students how to assess their own and others’ work more adequately. Of course, this method is not relegated to language arts classrooms. Due to Writing Across the Curriculum and Middle Grades Writing Assessment training, teachers in all content areas incorporate writing into their curricula and use rubrics liberally to help students understand what is required. The Writing Across the Curriculum training provided teachers with practical ways to infuse their lessons with moments for composition, while the Middle Grades Writing Assessment training showed the entire faculty how that particular assessment is scored, how to create lessons that are rich with writing practice, and how to score student papers. In fact, every person—from

the security officer to the principal—scored four student papers as a part of the training. The dialogue that was created by that schoolwide effort was invigorating. As a result, teachers have a greater knowledge about writing and of the writing process, which stresses constructive peer feedback, student revision, and recursive composition, so that they can more expertly pinpoint areas of need and, more importantly, students can identify them themselves.

Teachers have also been trained on differentiated instruction and technology integration, and therefore, realize how vital it is to use a variety of methods to assess student performance. In addition to the aforementioned Desktop Stores and Georgia Garden projects, students' mastery is assessed via other large-scale exhibitions, such as the annual Shakespeare Festival, World's Fair, Authors' Fair, Georgia Day, the Olympics, Georgia Heritage Day, the Social and Science Fairs, and through other units and activities that address and showcase the various learning styles reflected in a diverse student body. For instance, students in Honors Physical Science classes research the physics of roller coasters, becoming experts in that fascinating field, and then construct original, working coasters. Such hands-on, authentic performance tasks are a hallmark of the school's academic program. Perhaps even more important, students are able to communicate the purpose and reason for all of their class activities. When each teacher writes his or her "Essential Question" (a broad question that overarches a unit) on the front board, students make careful note of it and realize how everything they are doing relates.

Another consistent ingredient in success is technology. For instance, the school's media center specialist organizes and activates the Accelerated Reader program each fall so students can take tests on computers to show their understanding of great literature, and to earn great prizes as well. Teachers continually look for ways to incorporate technology into their lessons, too. The consistent goal is to enable students to excel with that instructional tool. To support their efforts, Webb Bridge has six computer labs that have been loaded with the best content-specific software, numerous Alpha Smart keyboards, Activboards, and the latest graphing calculators for math classes. Our special education students also have a computer lab designed to specifically meet their needs. Teachers have students create multimedia PowerPoint presentations, brochures, papers, and even movies using these instructional tools. In fact, we have an exciting technology-oriented class, Video Journalism, in which students use the Macintosh iMovies program to plan, film, edit, and present original public service announcements about school-related topics. Those films are then shown on the school's daily morning news broadcast. Students love seeing their work come to life on the television screen, and teachers enjoy seeing their enthusiasm and creativity grow.

Indeed, all students are viewed as valuable, growing contributors to the school's academic success, and because all students are expected to meet high standards, programs offer appropriate support, guidance, and challenge. One of the cornerstones of the academic program is the 8-Step Instructional Process. At the beginning of the year, a calendar of weekly instructional foci is created by teachers after examining assessment data from the previous year. This supportive instructional model is founded on preassessment-instruction-postassessment and either remediation or extension activities; therefore, if a student does not completely grasp a concept, he or she can immediately receive help from the teacher and peers until he or she can demonstrate mastery of that concept. If a student has shown mastery, then he or she can be further challenged through extension activities. Another supportive initiative that encourages all students in the name of literacy is WIRED, or "Webb Is Reading Educationally," a time every week when every faculty and staff member picks up a favorite novel, short story, or other piece of literature and reads, silently and eagerly. As a result of this program, students understand the importance of reading and acknowledge its impact on their academic lives. Additionally, any student who is having difficulties in his or her classes is also assisted by the school's Student Support Team (SST), which is comprised of an SST chairperson, an administrator, a guidance counselor, and the team of educators who teach that particular child. The SST meetings, which occur regularly throughout the year, call together that group with the student and his or her parents to discuss concerns they have about the student's academic performance, to come up with concrete strategies to improve that performance, and to determine when they need to meet again to follow up on the student's progress. Teachers are also required to have at least one help session every week to give students additional support in their classes and to offer them recovery work if their

grades drop significantly. Giving students that kind of support and that kind of opportunity to succeed is critical.

Webb Bridge also offers additional supportive programs for specific groups of students. For example, 6th grade students who achieved a Level 1, or “Does Not Meet the Standard” mark, on the previous year’s Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) in math are enrolled in a remedial math class that meets for an extended amount of time to help them improve their mathematical acumen. In fact, as a result of this class format and the hard work of its students, all of them performed at Level 2, “Met the Standard,” on the 2005 CRCT. In addition, any student who scores “Does Not Meet the Standard” on any part of the CRCT receives help from the guidance counselors through their monthly ACE (Academic Contract for Excellence) meetings, during which they provide test-taking strategies and content area reinforcement. The school also offers a great amount of support for our ESOL students through multiage classes that help those students tackle the difficult task of mastering a second language and support them as they embark on the challenging emotional journey into an unfamiliar culture. As a result, the ESOL population flourishes and thrives, academically and socially. Another unique population that Webb Bridge supports consistently and effectively is its special education population, which also flourishes. Not only do these students have a computer lab specifically designed to meet their learning needs, but they also have teachers who have been trained on the best practices in team teaching. Both special education and regular education teachers have attended training seminars on inclusion, and as a result the school has been able to schedule more team-taught classes. The special education students definitely benefit from the training that teachers receive. Finally, the school acknowledges that even students who have been identified as academically talented and gifted also need supportive programs. The Talented and Gifted program that serves these students is staffed by a cadre of teachers who have been highly trained on differentiating curricula in order to challenge and encourage these high achievers to continue making great strides. The students create astounding products and solutions in the TAG program classes, and many of those same students are also members of the challenging, award-winning Webb Bridge Academic Bowl team, which has won numerous local, state, and national competitions.

In conclusion, Webb Bridge Middle School is—through its exceptional people, sound pedagogy, and supportive programs—a bridge, a leader, and a model of success in high academic achievement.

Leadership

As stated in the handbook and on the Web site, faculty, staff, parents, and community members are committed to:

- provide a safe, nurturing, and positive environment where all have the opportunity to succeed
- achieve and maintain academic excellence
- meet the developmental needs of diverse learners
- challenge students to develop academic, technological, and critical-thinking skills for lifelong learning
- enable students to become contributing members of society
- promote respect and appreciation for cultural differences.

The conception of that multifaceted mission and the vision that guided it began early in 1996 during the planning for Webb Bridge Middle School. During Atlanta’s celebration of the Olympic spirit, the faculty and staff focused on establishing a theme and vision to unite and help them implement the middle school philosophy and celebrate the diversity, uniqueness, and spirit of the middle school child. An ardent search began to forge a philosophy that would reverberate through the halls of Webb Bridge Middle School. As a result of this group effort, we became the home of the Jaguars and of our mascot, Webster. We also became a place where students and teachers were always “Prowling for Success.” From the school’s inception, staff and faculty have worked closely to focus on student success, wherever it

could be found, no matter what classroom activity or after school connection highlighted students' successes. In addition, each student has always been encouraged to celebrate his or her uniqueness, while recognizing the commonality inherent in the school family. Students and faculty work together to celebrate students' diverse interests and talents and the successes that result from them. Students beam proudly because of victories at the school's Spelling and Geography Bees, raise money and spirits during the Great Atlanta Youth Walk, and watch students who are new to the school smile during the New Student Breakfast, just a few of the many celebrations at Webb Bridge. Indeed, the faculty and staff are not only prowling for success, they are striving, persevering, and celebrating it.

Planning and collaborating for success is one sure way to achieve success, and it is a hallmark of the effective programs and leadership at Webb Bridge Middle School. Such planning occurs throughout the year, and it is for that reason that students' needs are so consistently met. At the beginning of each year, the school's Leadership Team meets to revisit and revise the Strategic Plan, a document that helps highlight areas of student, stakeholder, and staff need. Assessment and stakeholder feedback is used to determine those critical areas. The chairpersons for each grade level, the Talented and Gifted program, special education, and the Connections program then take the information gathered from that initial Leadership Team meeting and collect more feedback from the teachers they work with and for. In addition, the content area chairpersons also seek input from their fellow teachers and deliver it back to the Leadership Team. As a result of these initial collaborative steps, effective professional development programs focusing on the 8-Step Instructional Process, Georgia performance standards, learning-focused schools, differentiated instruction, Literature Circles, Writing Across the Curriculum, the Middle Grades Writing Assessment, and Bullies and Bystanders have been initiated to meet the needs of both students and teachers. This critical pattern of communication and shared leadership is continued every week through grade level and content area meetings when teachers, the true architects of our success, discuss what makes the school work and what can make it work better.

Obviously, to build a strong bridge, even the most astute architects need time to think, collaborate, and plan. Our teachers are given that crucial time, and that is a key part of having shared leadership. At each grade level, teachers have a daily common planning time, which they use to discuss student concerns, collaborate on instructional ideas, and determine how their pedagogical expertise can best meet the areas of critical need emphasized by the Strategic Plan. Teachers also analyze student work in weekly team meetings, as well as through schoolwide professional development training.

Like our mission and motto, our vision of Webb Bridge Middle School was molded also from the strong support of parents through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the Local School Advisory Committee (LSAC), and membership on systemwide committees. Typical of the community involvement and support, the PTA was established and active before the school doors even opened. Its members have been strong advocates for students through their many programs. PTA volunteers help in the media center, front office, and the clinic and have assisted with the school's Book Fair, school store, and mock elections, to name just a few of their undertakings. In addition, the Local School Advisory Committee, comprised of parents, educators, and business leaders, meets regularly to discuss schoolwide issues, including the Strategic Plan. They also meet to set school goals and make plans for the future. With the collaboration of parents, the school's Leadership Team, the teachers, and Ms. Elizabeth Fogartie (principal and leader since 1996), Webb Bridge has developed and maintained a vision and mission shared by all.

Students' voices also increase the unity within the school, hone citizenship skills, and build leadership at every level. Student Ambassadors, Student Council, and the Junior Beta organization are three terrific examples of these principles at work. The Student Ambassadors, selected for their leadership and courteousness, help the school with functions throughout the year. For instance, they assist new parents and students during orientation events, usher in special guests for the quarterly Citizenship Breakfasts and annual Grandparents' Coffee, and model solid citizenship skills every day of the year. Members of the school's Student Council give voice to student concerns and issues. Every fall, 8th graders join together in the annual Election Convention, the culminating event for a social studies unit, to raise their voices and cast their votes for these students. The president of the Student Council is typically

someone seen by others as having the best understanding of student issues, and he or she meets with the principal every month to discuss those ever-evolving concerns. The Student Council also organizes events such as Spirit Days to increase student involvement and excitement. Finally, one of the most active groups of student citizens is its Junior Beta Club. Students interested in being members of this service-oriented organization must have an 88 cumulative average for two consecutive semesters, superior conduct grades, and 10 documented community service hours. This group has organized charity book drives and fundraisers to fight leukemia and polio, and individual members have accrued countless service hours by working with and for the surrounding community. Through the efforts of these organizations, students' voices are being heard.

Last, celebrating and preserving Webb Bridge Middle School's successes are also important to maintaining the shared vision and recognizing leadership. For example, when one enters the school, banners aloft in the rotunda announce, "Georgia Council for the Social Studies: 2001 Program of Excellence" and "National Junior Beta Quiz Bowl Champions: 1999–2000." This type of public acknowledgement underlines the importance of high academic achievement. One of the most outstanding awards achieved under Ms. Fogartie's leadership, with the shared vision of faculty, staff, and community, occurred in 2002 when Webb Bridge was named as a Georgia Public School of Excellence. To preserve this high honor, students celebrated by creating a wall surrounding the flagpole at the front entrance of the school. This wall illustrates Webb Bridge's story with hundreds of tiles representing everything that we celebrate on a daily basis. Included are musical notes, academic books, sports paraphernalia of every kind, computers, faculty faces, apples, and most significantly, a smiley face. This smiley face is significant because it represents the celebration of achievement at Webb Bridge. Though just a small yellow symbol of happiness, it has become much more to students at this school. When it is time for testing, for instance, it is time for smiley faces—when students feel confident that they can achieve personal excellence and that they are ready for success. As one 6th grade student stated, "I just love testing days because I'm surrounded by smiley faces wherever I go. Testing days are my best days ever!" Whether the smile is on a rug, a chair, a teacher's shirt, a banner, a pillow, a lamp, sunglasses, pencils, gumballs, or a teacher's face, students know that Webb Bridge celebrates and preserves their success.

Relationships and Parent-Community Involvement

The wise and gracious Mother Teresa once said, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love." Such sage words relate to the efforts made through our family and community partnerships, founded on the simple ideas of open communication and service. Great things do indeed happen at Webb Bridge, and they are the result of the "small things" that the faculty, parents, business partners, and other stakeholders accomplish "with great love" for students.

The key to the success of the family and community partnerships at Webb Bridge is effective two-way communication. This is accomplished through various modes of discourse. The school's Web site, for instance, provides parents with information about the school, its faculty and staff, counseling and careers, business partners, PTA, Local School Advisory Council, the Virtual Media Center, and volunteer opportunities. The site is maintained and updated regularly by the school's technology specialist to keep the community informed about the latest Webb Bridge news. The school also understands the value of direct communication and hosts transitional meetings for parents of rising 5th graders so that their concerns can be voiced and their questions answered. These meetings occur both in the spring and the fall, and this sincere communication is continued throughout the year through the weekly newsletter, *Friday Notes*, which is sent home and published on the school's Web site. Teachers communicate with parents in various ways, as well. The student agenda, which every student receives at the beginning of the year, is a tangible form of daily communication. This publication is a place where students, teachers, and parents can write down assignments, notes home, and concerns for school, as well as a place where students and parents can turn to review school policies and rules. Teachers also use computers to communicate with parents. Parents e-mail teachers on a regular basis, check teachers' Web sites to view the latest homework and test information, and examine students' grades on "ParentConnect," a program

that each parent can access from home to garner specific information about his or her student's progress in each class. Teachers update their grades continually to make sure that parents are receiving the latest information from that program. Teachers also understand the need for direct communication, and parent conferences and Student Support Team meetings are organized throughout the year whenever parents have a question or concern about their child. It is critically important to Webb Bridge Middle School's faculty and staff that they are available for and open to all communication.

In addition to providing helpful, informed communication, the faculty and staff also acknowledge the importance of receiving information, which is something that Webb Bridge's parents and stakeholders do throughout the year and through two critical parent-led organizations, the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and the Local School Advisory Council (LSAC). The PTA at Webb Bridge is a group that defines the term *active*. Its many members enthusiastically organize and facilitate the following school initiatives: school beautification, Arbor Day Ceremony, environmental education, health and safety, Red Ribbon Week, Lunch 'n' Learn, used textbook sales, supervision of the outdoor lunchroom, Career Day, Bingo Night, Talent Show, 8th Grade Dance, Olympics Day, minigrants, and the peer tutoring program. In addition, the PTA publicity chairperson also helps communicate the school's latest successes by publishing a summer newsletter, working on the PTA Web page, and documenting and photographing all major school events. The display case, which was donated by the PTA, warmly greets visitors with its vivid pictures of students at work and at play. Finally, the PTA also celebrates teachers throughout the year by organizing luncheons and surprising them with gifts, such as lovely potted flowers to announce the coming of spring. Another group that helps build a strong alliance between school and home is the Local School Advisory Council (LSAC), made up of elected teachers, parents, business partners, and Principal Fogartie. During their monthly meetings, LSAC members discuss the school's Strategic Plan, school improvement, and the community's point of view on how Webb Bridge is meeting its needs. Through the honest feedback that results from their discussions, decisions are routinely made that affect school operations.

In addition to those two very critical and public parent groups, stakeholders involve themselves in other ways. For example, parents with artistic and theatrical talents always offer their services when the school play begins each fall and when the musical starts each spring. They are often at the school long after teachers have left, painting sets and facilitating rehearsals. They also help organize speakers for special events, like the annual Georgia Heritage Day. On the annual Career Day, many of the speakers are, in fact, Webb Bridge parents, who willingly take the time to talk to students about their jobs and experiences. Finally, parents get involved in promoting student success on tests, as well. When the days of standardized testing begin, lunch schedules are impacted, and as a result, students have to wait much longer periods to enjoy time in the Webb Bridge cafeteria. Parents understand this situation and through their efforts, a snack is provided every day of standardized testing, not only to give students nutritional sustenance but also to offer them something healthy to energize their bodies and minds. During the 2006–07 school year, the school system began providing a morning snack for each student before standardized testing, but parents had already recognized that need and had already crossed that nutritional bridge.

Parents are definitely one of the most vital resources at Webb Bridge; however, many other community members also give the school their valuable time and logistical support through partnerships. The Rotary Club of Windward, for example, sponsors a moving, educational presentation by AIDS Atlanta members, who talk about their lives, the challenges they have endured, and the triumphs they have accomplished in the face of that disease. In terms of the arts program at Webb Bridge, the school works together with the School Arts Program and Young Audiences groups to plan educational and entertaining acts for the different grade levels. As a result of their coordination, acts as diverse as *Bullies and Bystanders*, an interactive drama about bullying, a Chinese dance troupe, and the Atlanta Percussion Trio have come to share their talents and enlighten students. The school has also worked with the Junior Achievement program to supplement its Careers class, a 9-week Connections class that teaches students about job-related subjects such as writing a resume and interviewing well. Finally, one of the most beneficial partnerships that Webb Bridge has entered into has been with its Partners in Education (PIE) network, a group of businesses dedicated to giving back to the school. The following is a partial listing of

PIE members and their gifts to Webb Bridge: Atlanta Bread Company (gift certificates for perfect attendance), Atlanta Workshop Players (support for drama classes and school productions), Best Little Flower Shop (flowers for special events, such as Georgia Heritage Day), Publix (food for school functions), Home Depot (materials at a discount and free delivery), Plant It Green (landscaping for the Georgia Garden), PostNet (invitations to the 8th Grade Dance), and Salomon Smith Barney (consultant for the after school Finance Club). One of the proudest moments for these partnerships was when Webb Bridge and Plant It Green received the Partnership of the Year Award from the Fulton County School System for its work with the Georgia Garden. That project illustrates the physical and emotional growth that can happen as a result of a tremendous partnership. A very recent partnership with the community that our World Languages Department undertook resulted in an exceedingly successful Multicultural Night, Webb Bridge's first such event, in April 2007. Over 400 people browsed through the International Bazaar, visiting exhibits, watching videos, and sampling food from 17 countries. Parents, students, and community groups worked together to create the artistically beautiful and educationally interactive booths. The bagpiper's strains signaled the beginning of the parade of nations, marked by students and community groups carrying the flags of the nations that represent the increasingly diverse Webb Bridge student community. The marchers led the crowd into the gymnasium for the talent portion of the evening. Students and community groups treated the audience to an array of acts, including a Chinese lantern dance, Korean percussion group, martial arts demonstration, Renaissance ballet troupe, as well a wide variety of cultural songs.

Last, one of the most ambitious and rewarding community projects that Webb Bridge has undertaken each year since 2005 has been the Taste of Webb Bridge. Each spring, students, staff, teachers, and parents munch and mingle in the gym or cafeteria with other community members as restaurants from around the area donate their time and delicious treats to everyone. Tickets, which are \$1, are all that one needs to get started; in fact, the most difficult part is deciding what to eat first. In addition, the Red Cross raffles off gift baskets and raises money (and support) for their cause; students win cakes at the cake walk, and entertainers from the student body and the community delight audiences with their talents. The event is the result of countless hours of planning and persistence by staff, parents, and business partners. Thanks to their efforts, a tremendous amount of money is raised each year for the school's educational program, the PTA, and the Red Cross. At the Taste of Webb Bridge, the school and its stakeholders show what it means to work as a team, something that the faculty and staff believe in and act on through committed communication and cooperation.

Best Practices to Share

A best practice that helps solidify success at Webb Bridge is its strong transitional program. Webb Bridge Middle School demonstrates commitment to young adolescents by communicating and working with feeder schools for this purpose. Every spring, two special transitional programs take place to help students entering Webb Bridge and those who are leaving its halls. For rising 5th graders, middle school can be a new, unfamiliar place that may cause some worry. To stave off that trepidation, students from nearby elementary schools are brought to Webb Bridge, taken on a tour of the building, and treated to a marvelous concert from its band, chorus, and orchestra. Finally, Principal Fogartie welcomes them to their future school and explains the fun and fundamentals of middle school life. In terms of Webb Bridge's rising 8th graders, high school can also be a new, unfamiliar place. Therefore, in April, they are bused to the high school and presented with the important (and comforting) information about the exciting years to come. In addition, guidance counselors organize one-on-one scheduling conferences with the high school's counselors each spring so that students can discuss course decisions and ultimately feel assured that the road ahead is clear.

Another best practice—one that helps bring together the content areas as well as the students and teachers—is the interdisciplinary unit. At Webb Bridge, our students, teachers, and staff search for knowledge and strive for success throughout the school year, and they are on the prowl in content area and grade level interdisciplinary units.

Sixth grade students, for instance, not only participate in their grade level's interdisciplinary unit—they are instrumental in creating it! Two of these projects are the Authors' Fair and the World's Fair. Authors' Fair occurs once a year and is typically held around March; however, preparations for this endeavor begin in August or September as it is a long-term unit. Each student reads five or six books by their particular author or five or six books of different genre types over a 6-month period. A different type of project is due each month for the 6 months, and each project ultimately contributes to the final tri-fold board display that each student creates in March. Examples of projects are the following: a biography of an author, an original design of a book jacket, a t-shirt advertising a book or author, a wanted poster or movie poster about a specific book or author, a 3-D project based on one of the characters, an original script written as a chapter of the book, and even a student-created video of a book excerpt. The sky is, indeed, the limit with the kinds of projects that students can create for this unit; creativity is the catalyst—and the catapult—for success! The final event is held in the gym, and all parents and grandparents are invited to attend and to behold what these eager jaguar minds have created. To add more even ambiance, our students dress up as authors or as characters from their books and answer questions that passers-by might ask.

Another outstanding 6th grade interdisciplinary unit is the World's Fair, which occurs once a year, typically in November. All 6th graders participate in it, along with about 50 parent volunteers. Each 6th grade team (6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E, 6F, 6G, or 6H) chooses a country from the social studies curriculum to represent in their classrooms, and preparations and cultural decorations begin about 1–2 weeks before. On the big day, each homeroom circulates through other classrooms to learn about the countries that are represented throughout the grade level. Students even carry passports with them all day to get the stamp of each country that they visit. Each interdisciplinary teacher remains in her or his classroom and provides an instructional activity to the visiting students about the host country. Parent volunteers take each homeroom to other classrooms and also bring in foods from each country, which students get to sample during the day. Students also get to sample songs and music from various countries during this interdisciplinary unit. The school works with the Atlanta Percussion Trio letting that stellar group know which countries will be represented at the World's Fair. The results from that partnership are phenomenal; the Trio plays music from each of those countries and also involves the students in its performance. Our students are definitely immersed in an interdisciplinary unit that involves all of the senses!

In addition, our 7th grade students are wrapped up in an interdisciplinary unit from which they really profit every year. Students and parents are invited to get a head start on their holiday shopping by visiting hundreds of specialty stores conveniently located on the 7th grade hallway. Classrooms are transformed into bustling marketplaces, hosting dozens of "Desk Top Stores," the highly anticipated culminating activity of an interdisciplinary unit in which students take a product from idea to conception, then market and sell it to student and parent shoppers. Desk Top Stores boast an impressive array of handmade products, including pottery, candles, jewelry, tie-dyed clothing, greeting cards, woven baskets, locker magnets, decorated pencils—you name it. The inventory is limited only by the creative energy and imagination of the 7th grade proprietors.

Originally an outgrowth of a unit on decimals in math class, Desk Top Stores has become an exciting interdisciplinary unit characterized by relevant, authentic assignments and assessments. Weeks before consumers peruse the final products, students have been busy applying for business licenses, submitting prototypes for approval, and creating marketing campaigns. In language arts classes, students write, edit, and produce video advertisements for their products; some are even aired on the morning broadcast show! In math classes, students calculate inventory costs, net profit and net loss, and make important business decisions related to price points. Of course, social studies concepts permeate the unit as students gain an "up close and personal" understanding of economic principles related to owning and operating their own stores—especially the law of supply and demand. The goal, after all, is to make a profit at the end of the day.

In addition to the content knowledge acquired through the various disciplines, students also gain and practice valuable life skills throughout the course of the unit, including planning, being responsible, meeting deadlines, budgeting, working with partners, and demonstrating flexibility and perseverance.

Desk Top Stores is more than an effective academic interdisciplinary unit; it's a fun, innovative way for students learn valuable lessons that will pay dividends in the future.

Finally, the 8th grade teachers strive to answer some key questions with their interdisciplinary unit. How does a school make the Coastal Plains of Georgia not plain at all? How does a school make its students realize that Georgia is more than peanuts, peaches, and poultry? At Webb Bridge Middle School, the answer is quite simple: Every spring, Webb Bridge brings the pages of the 8th grade social studies textbook to life through its energized and enlightening Georgia Heritage Day. This interdisciplinary project, which is a cornerstone of the school's state-recognized social studies program, intertwines the worlds of history and the arts with the wonderful words of speakers, singers, and storytellers from around our great state.

Before the excitement of Georgia Heritage Day can begin, a great deal of planning has to happen. A committed group of teachers, administrators, and parent volunteers meets early during the second semester to discuss the logistics of the historic day. They answer the critical questions and solve any potentially snaring situations so that the extravaganza will be a springtime success! Specifically, the team determines who will present, where in the building they will present, when they will present, and what they will need to present; in fact, they even plan the breakfast, lunch, and "gifts of gratitude" for those presenting! In terms of its presenters, in particular, Webb Bridge has been fortunate to have a wide variety, and we want our students to sample from that broad assortment. Therefore, the schedule of the day's program is also scrutinized by the team. This is where the true interdisciplinary magic happens! We understand that each student learns differently, responds to different presentation "modes," and enjoys different content areas, so we plan accordingly. We make sure that students in all groups get balanced agendas of lecture, hands-on, music, and food-related experiences. For instance, our students have enjoyed presentations about tending bee hives, storytelling, singing folk songs from the Great Depression, and understanding the Revolutionary, Civil, World, and Vietnam Wars and their impacts on Georgia. Students have also learned how to cook kudzu leaves, how to make tin can lanterns and "tussie mussies," and even how to pan for gold! Our students are enriched by these Georgia Heritage experiences—in more ways than one!

Indeed, Webb Bridge Middle School's teachers, students, and staff pull their talents and content area expertise together to make powerful and potent interdisciplinary units for authentic, cross-curricular learning. Our goal is to keep students constantly "on the prowl" for knowledge, and the interdisciplinary units that we have at Webb Bridge definitely keep them in the hunt!