

South Newton Elementary School

Grades PreK–5, Public/Suburban • Newton, North Carolina • Newton–Conover City Schools

The Secret of Getting an A: *Three B's*

Observing the *Three B's* has produced A's in academics and character at South Newton Elementary School in Newton, North Carolina. The *Three B's*—*Be Respectful, Be Responsible, and Be Safe and Orderly*—have been the guiding spirit of the school since 2002, when teachers, administrators, and the School Leadership Team, during a retreat in the North Carolina mountains, forged a plan for student success. Since new attendance boundaries had shifted the school's demographics, the participants realized they had to address diverse student needs and possible disciplinary problems. A Title I school with 64 percent of its students on free or reduced lunch, South



Newton has achieved amazing results with the introduction of the *Three B's*, the soul of its character education program. Not only has the school met Adequate Yearly Progress goals, but it can also boast of a dramatic decrease in disciplinary referrals.

Inextricably tied to the *Three B's* is the Golden Rule that is repeated daily throughout the school day. In fact, in interviews with teachers, students, and

parents, the concepts of love and caring pop up frequently. Mary Watson, Title I teacher, comments that she “wouldn't want to be anywhere else. Everyone who works here truly cares.” Melanie, a first grader, says, “Our teachers teach out of love,” and another student by the name of Melanie, a fifth grader, observes, “Everybody here is a friend. People treat people how they want to be treated.” Perhaps the most poignant tale is that of a mother who had a life-threatening health condition that necessitated sudden hospitalization. The principal and her caring staff immediately went into action, not only chauffeuring the woman's son to and from school but also taking both of her children overnight or over the weekend if necessary.

This strategy of the *Three B's*, reinforced by the Golden Rule, forms the foundation for South Newton's approach to character education, which relies strongly on the power of positive relationships. Vibrant former principal Sarah Ferrell Temple, a passionate leader, says, “This initiative was a grass-roots effort, not a top-down mandate, so as principal I have never had to force involvement.” All teachers have participated in a study of Ruby Payne's book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, to help them nurture their learners. Among the many exciting programs the school has developed that fuse academics with character building are a second-grade community project, a third-grade space project, a fourth-grade pet project, and a fifth-grade ropes course and news team.

Just as South Newton teachers model the Golden Rule, they expect their charges to practice it in all their endeavors. Giving back to the community through service is one way of demonstrating kindness and compassion. Community projects run the

CHARACTER EDUCATION WORKS AT South Newton

- Success in meeting Adequate Yearly Progress goals
- Highest-ever fourth-grade writing test scores
- Marked decrease in disciplinary referrals since 2004

Sarah Ferrell Temple, Former Principal

gamut from creating and maintaining a nature trail to conducting many fundraisers for charitable causes. Within the school, students demonstrate good citizenship through peer tutoring, writing letters to ill children, recycling, and serving on the Safety Patrol.

When the site visitors asked Barbara McGee, a retired South Newton teacher who still volunteered while battling cancer, to describe the school, she immediately responded, “South Newton has a spirit of love for children and their needs.” This valiant woman died shortly after her school was named a National Finalist, but her “spirit of love” will continue to permeate the caring atmosphere that makes South Newton a special place.

REFERENCE

Payne, R. *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc., 2005.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Shelly L. Cornwell, Principal
South Newton Elementary School
306 West I Street
Newton, NC 28658

Telephone: (828) 464-4061
E-mail: shelly_cornwell@nccs.k12.nc.us
Web site: www.nccs.k12.nc.us/snewton/snewton.html