The Power of Story: Creating Soul in a School

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The Power of Story: Creating Soul in a School

Chestatee Elementary, Forsyth County Schools
Introductions

**Dr. Polly Tennies, Principal**
9 years as Principal
33 years in education

**Meg Killingsworth, Family Engagement Coordinator**
5 years as Family Engagement Coordinator
22 years in education
Let’s Meet the Audience!

Raise Your Hand and Get Ready for a Selfie!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principals?</th>
<th>Assistant Principals?</th>
<th>Social Workers/Counselors?</th>
<th>Family Engagement Coordinators?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers?</td>
<td>Other School Staff?</td>
<td>Private Sector?</td>
<td>Other?</td>
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The History of Chestatee...

9 years ago....

- Title I School
- Parent involvement in academics was low.
- New principal after several principals in a short amount of time.
- Many Family Engagement Coordinators over a short amount of time.
- Lowest academic scores in county even though our staff was working very hard.
What Changed?

- We had a principal with a vision for a turnaround school.
- The principal set the bar with staff for creating a warm, welcoming climate.
- Families felt welcomed at our school.
- 2015 began the adventure of Chestatee becoming an award winning school.
Over Time...

- Family engagement became the priority.
- We started working very hard to get to know our families and their needs.
- We spent time training our staff on working with families.

As a result, family engagement increased greatly in our school. There is a power in stories. Stories have been a huge part of our success.
“People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” – Theodore Roosevelt
Step 1: Learn the Stories

How We Learned the Stories:

Friendly faces for the school: receptionist, office staff, family engagement coordinator, counselors, social worker, admin

Welcome families in: morning walk-ins, volunteering, class parties and special programs

Share team, family need surveys

Have a designated space for parents family members

Welcome for lunch every day

Donations for personal needs: social worker closet, gift cards, Blessings in a Backpack
Friendly Faces
Welcoming Families In

Our January Coffee Chat is tomorrow from 9:00-10:00 in the Family Resource Room. Join Dr. Tennies, Meg and other families for a cup of coffee if you can!
Special Programs, Volunteers, Parties
Space Designated for Families

Share team, family need surveys
Blessings in a Backpack and Food Pantry
Social Worker Closet/ Personal Needs
Visitors at Lunch
Step 2: Teach Staff Social/Emotional Intelligence Skills through Stories

We share stories to teach skills like building compassion and empathy, listening, less teacher talk, and being non-judgmental. It’s important for the staff to learn not to make assumptions and not to judge.

https://www.smore.com/pkf27-the-connection

Most teachers come from middle class families and may not understand families in poverty. Free poverty simulation that gets teachers thinking: http://playspent.org
We get permission to share our families’ stories

These stories told things like why homework wasn’t done or folders weren’t checked, why families don’t come to events, how kids are their parents’ greatest joy, and challenges and perceptions toward schools in general.
How Staff Can Learn the Stories

**Teach staff:**

- Listen/ have conversations
- Ask questions and encourage 2 way conversations.
- Invite families in
- Don’t judge
- Always be kind
- Use video messages to build trust
- Share pictures
Example of Sharing Stories with a Lesson- Faculty Meeting

Our Families Care, but Sometimes They Don't Come: Why?

1. Conflicts from work or other obligations
2. Lack of time
3. Transportation issues
4. In crisis (basic needs aren't met with food and bills)
5. Bad experiences with school growing up
6. Some feel stupid at school or have a fear of feeling stupid in the meeting
7. Some feel overwhelmed, have more than 1 child at Chestatee, or don't like crowds
8. Child is doing well so they don't feel they need this
9. This meeting isn't for "them"

Taking Away Barriers/ 3 Solutions We Can Offer

1. Ideally, we want families to come to the APTT night. But sometimes that won't work. Makeup Sessions with Meg can be a great solution to get them the data and materials to help. – Shorter sessions with flexible times
   - Helpful when a parent has more than 1 child at our school
   - Done individually or in small groups to ease fears
2. Church donation money can help pay for transportation or dinner if that will help get them here. Talk to Meg if that comes up.
3. Extension activities are offered for each grade level. Pump up the relationship and partnership aspects of APTT for parents who complain that they don't need this program.
Training Staff with a Newsletter

The Power of Videos: https://www.smore.com/yd52z

Get to Know Their Stories: https://www.smore.com/pkf27

Think Like a Parent. Talk Like a Parent: https://www.smore.com/60rd3

Reaching the Unreachable: https://www.smore.com/z450v

Communicating with Families: https://www.smore.com/4fb1u-the-connection
Share Your Story with the District Office and Beyond
Step 3: Share the School’s Story and Happenings

If you don’t tell your school’s story, how will people know it?

Sharing the good builds community.

When you share successes, positives, pictures, and videos, people rally for your school.

https://www.facebook.com/ChestateeES/
Video Messages to Welcome

https://www.facebook.com/pg/ChestateeES/videos/?ref=page_internal
FB Friday Show: Every Friday

Meet Dr. Bearden and hear why he thinks it is important for families to be involved in their students’ learning. Also, hear what to expect for our APTTT nights that are just around the corner. K-2 APTT: September 14th
3-5 APTT: September 21st

For the Love of Chestatee: FB Friday

For the Love of Chestatee: FB Friday
Get to know some of our new teachers, Ms. Smurr, Ms. Hamby, and Mrs. Cox on this week’s show, and find out why they LOVE Chestatee! We hope you have a nice break, and we'll see you back at school on Wednesday 2/19.
Congratulations to our oratorical winner, Parker and 1st runner up, Bailey! Shout out to ALL the 5th students who worked so hard to prepare for this morning’s oratorical contest. Thank you to our judges Kristen Glass, Darla Light and Lee Anne Rice and our amazing 5th grade teachers that made this such a fabulous event!

We celebrated students who show the 100% Accountable Mindset at our High Flyer Ceremony this morning! Thank you to our partners in education, Community Cup and Wendy’s for providing treat coupons for these great students!
IT IS A POSITIVE OFFICE REFERRAL DAY!!!!

Congratulations to these students for being called to the office for a Positive Office Referral!

Students get “written up” for showing great SEAs!!

S=Strategies
E=Effort
A=Attitude

Thank you for showing the SEAs and Chestatee Way!

Thank you Chestatee PTO for a wonderful Snowflake Ball!!!
Showing Staff’s Kind, Funny, Human Side
Recognizing Special Staff Members

We are proud to announce Leslie Butler as our Teacher of the Month for January!
Mrs. Butler teaches kindergarten at Chestatee and has taught kindergarten for 5 years. This is her 13th year teaching at Chestatee, but she has taught 18 years altogether. Mrs. Butler holds a B.S. from Southern Polytechnic State University and earned a M.Ed. from North Georgia College and State University.
Leslie and her husband, Jason, have two children and live in the Chestatee community. See More

Would you like to show a Chestatee teacher or staff member some love in February? Use this link to help! We LOVE reading your nominations!

Teacher/Staff Member of the Month Nomination Form

PURPOSE: To recognize and celebrate the exemplary teaching and contributions by Chestatee Elementary teachers and staff. Any teacher or staff member, regardless of experience, is eligible for recognition. Please fill out the following nomination form.

First & Last Name of Nominated Teacher:

DOCSS.GOOGLES.COM
Teacher of the Year

Meet Mrs. Lori Faulkner, our Chestatee Teacher of the Year! Mrs. Faulkner is one of our ESOL teachers on the Academic Support Team. Join today's discussion to get to know her and learn more about this great lady! We are thankful to have Mrs. Faulkner at Chestatee and glad she will represent our school at the district level.
Monday’s Meet and Greet: Meeting New Staff During the Summer

Jasmine Flores will be joining the Academic Support Team as a Title I teacher. This is her first year teaching. Jasmine student taught in second grade. She was born and raised in Gainesville, Georgia and loves to visit her family in Mexico. Her gift to teaching is her ability to connect with each individual student.
Tuesday’s Team: Meet Fourth Grade
We are the fourth grade team, and we are so excited! In fourth grade, students will have 2 teachers. One teacher will teach math and science while the other teaches language arts and social studies. We pride ourselves on getting students ready for fifth grade and middle school. You can look forward to student-led conferences this year where students will attend... See More
Tuesday’s Team: First Grade

We are first grade, and we LOVE to read! We will partner with our families to help all students become better readers. We tie many of our concepts to literature to help students improve writing skills also. This year, we will get to learn about interesting science and social studies topics such as weather, magnetism, map skills, and the economy. 3 big events that pa... See More
Special Recognition and Awards
Special Events
Thanking Our Community

A big thanks to Causey Orthodontics for sponsoring our Watch D.O.G.S. program with a donation! We appreciate our Partners in Education!
Encouraging Partners in Education
A Letter From Dr. Tennies, Our Principal

March is the time of year where it really starts to fly! We have 9 weeks left of school, and summer will be here again. Wait! What?? Where did this year go? I need it to slow down a little so that I have time to do what I need to get done!

As this month begins, we are also beginning to think about next year. At Chestee, our families’ input is key. We have 2 special invitations for input that begin this month:

1. Title I Planning and Input

With Title I funding, we have hundreds of thousands of extra dollars we can spend on needed resources. We always want to know where you think the money needs to go. Extra staff, special programs, technology, and family engagement are just a few of the choices. Families also have a 1% set aside from the county. This money can only be used on items families need and want to help with family engagement. Our Family Resource Room items, APTT, and resources such as childcare, translation or transportation at events also count in the set aside. By completing the Title I Planning and Input survey, you are voicing your opinion on where the money should go. We have in person meetings planned on 3/16-3/18 and an on-line opportunity open through March 20. We would love for you to take the time to share your thoughts.
In Conclusion

Stories are a powerful tool in increasing family engagement because knowing them creates empathy and understanding. Empathy and understanding build trust. Sharing the school’s story builds community. Stories build soul! Stories ultimately improve family engagement.

1. Learn the stories.
2. Train staff using stories.
3. Share your school’s story.
Don't forget to complete the session evaluation!
Let us know how it goes!

Contact Information

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QR Code for Presentation