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Three educators named Georgia’s top counselors

The Georgia School Counselors Association recently selected three Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) educators as the state’s top counseling professionals, recognizing them for the support they provide to Gwinnett students. The three Gwinnett counseling professionals will be formally recognized during the Georgia School Counselor Association Annual State Conference in Athens on Thursday, November 4.

The organization named Dr. Dana Edwards of Grayson Elementary as the 2010 Georgia Elementary Counselor of the Year, Kelly Flower of Five Forks Middle as the 2010 Georgia Middle Counselor of the Year, and Karen Griffith of Berkeley Lake Elementary as the 2010 Georgia Counselor Writer of the Year. Ms. Griffith, the 2008 Georgia Elementary Counselor of the Year and a finalist for the 2009 National Elementary Counselor of the Year title, is now being recognized for her published work. Her book is titled “Creative Small Groups, Ready-to-Use Lessons for Grades K-5.”

Dr. Edwards, Mrs. Flower, and Ms. Griffith, earned Georgia’s top counseling honors after being named county level and Region 2 winners earlier this year. Gwinnett County counselors are consistently among the most recognized in the country in state and national honors. In 2009, three Gwinnett educators also were named state winners.

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Dr. Dana Edwards, Grayson Elementary
2010 Georgia Elementary School Counselor of the Year

A veteran counselor for more than two decades, Dr. Dana Edwards feels the counseling profession is a noble one. “Being a school counselor is a calling,” she says. “It requires managing your time and resources, utilizing flexibility, and serving a large community of learners.”

In her mind, that community of learners extends beyond children. As a servant leader she not only supports students, but also provides support to teachers. Her goal is to minimize the barriers to learning, while also finding ways to minimize the barriers to teaching. She explains, “My job is to help others feel encouraged, become self-reliant, and build a sense of belonging and community.”

Grayson Elementary teacher Lynn King acknowledges the support provided by Dr. Edwards, saying, “Her knowledge, combined with her genuine concern for others, make her an outstanding example in the field of school counseling.”

In addition to providing assistance to students and teachers, Dr. Edwards is well-known for her active role within her professional community. A member of several local and national counseling organizations, including the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), she seeks to share best practices with colleagues. Recently, she was invited to be the featured speaker during ASCA’s annual national conference to share details from an article she published in the ASCA School Counselor Magazine. Dr. Edwards also lead Grayson Elementary’s work to receive national recognition for implementing ASCA’s national model in the school’s guidance program.

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Kelly Flower, Five Forks Middle
2010 Gwinnett County Middle School Counselor of the Year

As the 7th grade counselor at Five Forks Middle, Kelly Flower is known as an educator who is very focused on supporting her students. Administrators at the school share that “Kelly Flower is a counselor on a mission… a mission to reach out and positively impact the students and community of Five Forks Middle School. She has a generous and giving spirit that manifests itself in everything she does. She is deeply committed to her mission, and her mission is one that puts the students at Five Forks as her number one priority.”

In her work, Mrs. Flower prepares her students to be independent learners, removing barriers to learning while creating a nurturing school climate. She says, “I believe that students are most successful when they are self-motivated and invested in their personal goals and academic achievements, when parents are involved in their children’s learning, and when I exemplify empathy, encouragement, optimism, patience, understanding, and passion for helping others.”

Mrs. Flower has created and implemented a number of programs which support Five Forks Middle students both academically, emotionally, and behaviorally. One of those programs is the “Blazin’ Bronco Program,” which focuses on the top 10 traits of a successful student. The program recognizes students who exemplify the traits of respect, honesty, optimism, encouragement, punctuality, organization, obedience, motivation, responsibility, and academic excellence. Since the implementation of the program in 2008, Five Forks has seen an improvement in student behavior.

Photographs of Gwinnett’s top counselors are available upon request.
For more about the award winners and the counselor’s role in GCPS, news media representatives can contact Dianne Thompson, director of advisement and counseling, at 770-277-4488.