

Reflections on Foundational Beginnings: 2019 FFE Nominees Tea

Mrs. Amason, Foundation Trustees, Superintendent Means, Nominees and guests, it is an honor to address this group of CCSD's very best. And it is inspiring to see so many young professionals passionately committed to the education of all our children.

C. J. asked if I would be willing to share my reflections on the Foundation's beginning, and specifically on three awards which I had a part in establishing:

- The Frusanna S. Booth Chair for Teachers of English and Language Arts
- The Freida M. Thomas Teacher of Promise Award
- The Kathryn H. Hug Instructional Leadership Award

Two of these, the Thomas and Hug Awards, will be presented this year.

I recognize that I have reached that age when you are invited to address a group because you are one of the few remaining who still remember its beginning. But I want to thank C.J. for this opportunity, because it sent me searching through documents to pin down memories that had grown dim and renewed a sense of gratitude for the extraordinary professionals and community members I was privileged to learn from during my twenty-three years with the Clarke County School District.

As I reflected on a way to organize this task, it seemed that storytelling was the best approach, for our memories are filtered through the lens of our own experience. I served in three different roles with the district, and in each of them, there were people who believed in me, challenged, inspired, coached, and shaped me. As nominees, you are likely here today because someone provided you that kind of mentoring and support, and you have paid it forward to your own students and peers.

When I joined the school district in 1974, Dr. Charles McDaniel was in his fifth year as superintendent. Since coming, he had succeeded in eliminating an

inherited \$1 million deficit and bringing the school district into compliance with federal desegregation guidelines. To eliminate the deficit, among other cuts, school librarians had been removed along with many systemwide staff. Federal Title I and Title IV funds, created by the Civil Rights Act of 1965 to provide a quality education for students from disadvantaged populations, were valuable supplements to local funds in these lean times.

Although the district had worked with local black leaders to comply with desegregation guidelines, and “freedom of choice” plans, major progress occurred when the district adopted a plan to divide the county into pie-shaped wedges, and bus students from the inner city out to white schools. Using this method, elementary schools were integrated in '67-'68, middle schools in '68-'69, and the high schools in '69-'70.

When a group of local parents took the district to court, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled against the use of busing to desegregate schools. In 1971, the district joined Charlotte Mecklenburg and the Montgomery County School District in Mobile, Alabama, to petition the U.S. Supreme Court for permission to bus students to achieve full integration. In a landmark case, the Court supported busing as a means of desegregating schools. Though there was resistance on both sides, and some white families moved their children to private schools, most people were willing to try to make it work in hopes of providing a better education for all students. Unlike many southern school districts, Clarke County was never under court order to integrate its schools.

It was in this context that Dr. Frusanna Booth, Director of Instruction, a former high school English teacher, mother of four adult daughters, and wife of a mathematics teacher at Cedar Shoals H.S., interviewed me for a new position as Coordinator of Staff Development and Language Arts, funded through a Title IV, Adoption/Adaption Grant for curriculum revision and new state funds for staff development training.

Having taught junior high language arts in Greenville, SC, followed by four years as an instructor of freshman English at UGA, I had been a stay-at-home mom for two years after the birth of our second child. When my mother died suddenly, my fifteen-year-old sister came to live with us, making it necessary for me to seek full-time employment. I applied for an English teaching position and was told that a teacher from one of the two high schools would likely be leading a new project to coordinate a federal grant and an opening would occur.

When I received a call for an interview with Dr. Booth, I had no idea why she was interested in my application. What followed was the most intense and exciting interview I could imagine. I had no experience in leadership beyond the classroom, but Dr. Booth saw something in me that caused her to take a risk in hiring me to coordinate that federal grant. I laughed and told my husband that when I went into her office, I didn't know what staff development was, and when I came out, I was in charge of it!

In the five years that followed, Dr. Booth mentored my growth and served as a role model as we worked cooperatively with the English Education faculty at UGA and teacher representatives from all grade levels. In summer workshops led by UGA faculty, with stipends and graduate course credit as incentives, teachers learned new methodology, shared ideas, revised curriculum, and selected textbooks and materials to support reading, composition, and oral communication. During the next three school years, I worked with principals and teacher leaders to implement these new practices and materials, learning along with them.

In addition to these responsibilities, I was charged with leading the district's first effort to gain accreditation for all its elementary schools. As a part of that effort, Dr. Booth and I co-chaired a committee to create an evaluation instrument to describe the performance criteria for teaching in the district. Once again, we relied on the resources of UGA in determining the research basis for our criteria, and representative teachers and principals, both black and white, were involved. At the end of the accrediting process, all the elementary schools qualified. At the district level, there was one exception: my T-5 certificate did not qualify me for

the leadership role I had been performing. I needed to pursue L-5 certification in leadership for curriculum and supervision.

In these years of close cooperation with Dr. Booth, I watched as she modeled leadership and group process, including the stakeholders---principals, teachers, UGA personnel, textbook publishers, state and regional education agency consultants, parents and community members. Principles I learned from her include:

- Everything that goes out in the name of the Clarke County School District must be of the highest quality. “Everything you do is a self-portrait; sign your work with excellence.”
- Our relationships with the University of Georgia and other partnerships are valuable resources to be nurtured and maintained.
- Principals have the most influence on what goes on within a building--be certain to include them in all decision-making.
- Teachers determine the quality of instruction children receive. Our job is to provide the training, resources, and support they need to be successful.
- Don’t ask of others what you are not willing to do yourself.
- Always provide coffee and refreshments when you plan a workshop!

In August, 1977, Dr. McDaniel was appointed State School Superintendent, eventually taking Werner Rogers, Director of Personnel, and Don Hight, Director of Business Services, with him to the State Department of Education. Dr. Frusanna Booth retired in 1978 after twelve years of service to Clarke County. I enrolled in the doctoral program in Curriculum and Supervision at UGA to satisfy the SACS requirement that I attain proper certification for leadership.

Dr. Booth saw leadership potential in me, took a chance on hiring me in this new role, gave me challenging assignments, and saw to it that I succeeded as she mentored, shaped, and molded me. In our last meeting, she shared the hope that I would become a principal on my return to the district.

The Frusanna S. Booth Chair for Teachers of English & Language Arts was established in the early 90's by her four daughters, the Foundation, and me to honor her legacy.

In August 1981, I returned from educational leave to be named principal of Alps Road Elementary School. In the previous year, a new school, Timothy Road Elementary, had been built to relieve overcrowding at Alps and other nearby schools, leaving Alps much smaller, and in the minds of some of the staff and parents, having lost many of its "best teachers and students." In addition, the rezoning resulted in groups of new students at Alps whose parents weren't sure they wanted them there. The principal of many years, Mr. Wilcher, had also retired. Morale was low.

I was secretly terrified because I had never taught elementary school. The most I had learned about being a principal came from my children's excellent principal, Lola Wells Finn, at Gaines Elementary. How fortunate I had been to work with so many elementary teachers and principals during the past five years of staff development and language arts curriculum implementation! I might not know about buses, buildings and budgets, but I knew instruction.

One of the most challenging and critical roles of a principal is hiring teachers. Because the school was smaller, we often had to share specialist teachers in music, art, physical education, and gifted resource with other schools. After three years of frustration and turnover as part-time people became full-time at the other school, I had the great good fortune of finding Freida Thomas, with a background as a social worker in Louisiana and a missionary to the bush people in Yucatan. Mrs. Thomas had reared three sons while gaining certification in gifted education, including experience with Dr. Paul Torrance's Future Problem Solving Program. Currently she was substituting in schools on the east side of town. My interview with her was much like Dr. Booth's interview with me. This bright, enthusiastic, energetic, empathetic, funny woman clearly had the "right stuff" needed to bring the Alps Road program for gifted students to a new level and to attract parents who wanted their children to be challenged academically. She did

not disappoint. But more about her later. First, a look at the beginning of the Foundation for Excellence.

The winds of change were blowing once again across the nation, and in Clarke County. Dr. Carol Purvis became superintendent in March 1982, with a reputation for excellent leadership in Bibb County Schools. Fortunately, Dr. C.B. Lord, associate director of instruction for UGA's Georgia Center for Continuing Education, was a member of the Clarke County Board of Education, beginning in 1981 and serving as president from 1983-86.

Dr. Lord believed that Clarke County schools had the best teachers anywhere and was instrumental, along with Cardee Kilpatrick and Vernon Payne, in bringing the Foundation for Excellence into being so that "all members of the Athens community could have a direct impact on the present and future of public education in Clarke County." He is reputed to have sketched the idea out on a paper napkin during lunch one day. In truth, he had the support of fellow board members and the enthusiastic support of Dr. Purvis, who was eager to launch programs to enhance the school district's reputation for excellence.

The Foundation for Excellence in Public Education Board of Trustees held its first meeting on July 21, 1983, with Dr. Lord serving as president of both the Board of Education and the Foundation. The FFE Board was made up almost entirely of BOE members with Dr. Purvis serving as secretary. The next year, trustees separated the role of BOE chair and FFE Trustees chair, with LaGrange Dupree becoming president, Dr. Lord remaining a trustee, and Cardee Kilpatrick becoming the founding Executive Director. A committee was named to develop a selection process for initial teaching excellence awards. I was honored to serve with trustees on that committee, along with Sherry Malone, Barnett Shoals Principal, and Helen Westbrook, then Director of Instruction. In 1985, three teachers were named Teachers of Excellence using that process. All were from eastside schools, all were Caucasian- this was not by design.

From the first, funding priorities took center stage with a broad base of funding needed. In that year, contributions totaled \$6,500, including \$1,500 donated by

the Junior League, making \$500 awards possible for each of the three Teachers of Excellence. New sources of funding appeared in 1986. The Citizens for Public Education offered support from their first BBQ, netting \$5,000 for the Foundation. The Athens Jaycees transferred unused building funds in the amount of \$12,000 to the FFE to be used for scholarships to students at each high school who wanted to become teachers. And for the first time, five Athens banks contributed \$500 each to fund awards which, with continued support from the Junior League, made it possible to make six Teacher of Excellence Awards: this time representing both east and west side schools, but still all Caucasian.

Examining these early awards and the process, the Foundation adopted Six Guidelines for Foundation Recognition emphasizing the desire to recognize excellence in all areas of education and allow flexibility in awards as the Foundation grew.

The 1987 awards reflected this desire: five Teachers of Excellence were honored, two of which were African-American, and represented both east and west side schools. Mini-Grants were introduced to recognize innovative teaching and encourage excellence in all areas of education, as stated in the new guidelines. Ten (\$200) grants were awarded, totaling \$2,000 in all.

The Howard Stroud Service Award was established by the BOE and given to Mr. Stroud to honor his service as Acting Superintendent during the search which named Dr. Purvis in 1982. Criteria included putting service to the district above personal ambition. This award opened nominations to non-certified staff in addition to certificated. Jeff Foster, Head Custodian at Alps Road Elementary, was the next recipient of the award.

Refinement of the TOE selection process provided continuity for selection committee members and allowed nomination packets to be re-submitted to encourage a wide pool of nominees.

As the leadership structure of the Foundation Board of Trustees evolved, the number of BOE members was reduced to one and the remaining trustees were

retired district professionals, parents or former parents of district children, and community business partners, no more than two of whom might live outside the county. Ex-officio members moved from the original Superintendent, Community Relations Liaison, Acting Secretary, and Board Attorney to include an Executive Director, Historian, Past-President, and Executive Director, emeritus. That structure continues to evolve today.

In succeeding years, the number and amounts of mini-grants continued to grow as a valuable and popular way to encourage excellent teaching at all levels. From ten beginning grants totaling \$200 each, the Foundation currently awards an average of \$10,000 per year in grants, eleven of them named and endowed, while including \$2,000 in general, non-endowed grants.

In 1993, two new teaching *chairs*, later to become “specialist teaching awards,” were approved, pending full funding: The Frusanna S. Booth Chair in English Language Arts and the Lamar Dodd Chair in Fine Arts (endowed by C.L. Moorehead in 1995). These *chairs* set a precedent for two-year awards of \$750 (now \$1,250) each and became an incentive for retaining excellent teachers. Currently there are eight such fully-endowed *chairs*, among fifteen different categories of fully-funded faculty and staff awards.

The Foundation’s capacity to recognize and promote excellence increased with scholarships in memory of beloved educators and family members, and in honor of retiring professionals. Community businesses like Coca-cola, Certainteed, Nakanishi, Del Mar and Citi-group made sizeable donations to support mini-grants. Letter writing campaigns for Foundation Membership and donations, coupled with an increased presence of Foundation Trustees in assigned schools, gave the Foundation more visibility, and more financial support.

Awards, Grants, and Scholarships began to proliferate, and in 2003, John Whitehead became Treasurer for the Foundation, and set his sights on the goal of endowing ALL named awards permanently, rather than having to piece them together from the various gifts large and small each year. A concerted effort was made to find donors to fully fund awards, and John established an advisory

committee to develop policies and guidelines to govern the many grants and awards and provide investment advice. The Twentieth Anniversary “20/20 Campaign” of 2005, honored past recipients of FFE Awards and solicited campaign donations in any amount containing “20.” The campaign netted \$20,750.00. From that solid foundation, the Foundation’s fiscal base has grown from \$6,500 in 1985 to a portfolio valued at almost \$1,000,000 today.

During that time of increasing financial stability and a budget surplus from endowment investments, several new awards were named. Among them, the Freida M. Thomas Teacher of Promise Award for a teacher with fewer than five years’ experience, endowed by her husband George, following her death in 2004.

Freida Thomas, already a highly successful teacher for academically gifted students at Alps Road Elementary, first rose to prominence as a teacher leader on our school’s team at a Phi Delta Kappa workshop on teacher empowerment and school-based management. There, along with other topnotch teachers and administrators, black and white, the group hammered out our organizational structure and by-laws for a very successful school leadership team. During her twenty-year tenure, Freida, by virtue of her sharp intellect, deep knowledge base, and rapport with colleagues, was an influential participant in that work, and in such school-wide efforts as School of Excellence and Pay for Performance awards.

Over time she was

- twice voted teacher of the year by her colleagues
- honored as a Teacher of Excellence by the Foundation
- earned National Teacher Certification
- built the Alps Future Problem-Solving Program into one of national prominence, her 5th grade teams winning 3 state bowl titles, capping it with an International Bowl Win against teams from most states and several foreign countries
- hosted site visits organized by the US State Department for foreign government delegations, including Japan, Egypt, and New Zealand, who

were seeking “how to” guidance for implementing problem solving and creative thinking into their classroom curricula.

After her death in 2004,

- CCSD named the media center at the new Alps Road Elementary School for her.
- The Georgia Future Problem Solving Program created the Freida M. Thomas Coach of the Year award to honor her.

In a school with many excellent “teacher leaders,” Frieda Thomas was a “leader among leaders,” and I was proud to call her my colleague and friend.

This same year, 2004, The Kathryn H. Hug Instructional Leadership Award was endowed to honor Dr. Hug’s superb leadership skills. As a teacher of English at Clarke Central, Associate Principal at Cedar Shoals, Coordinator of Professional Development, and Associate Superintendent for Instruction, Dr. Hug modeled exemplary leadership skills that advanced the knowledge, understanding, growth, and confidence of everyone within her reach. She unselfishly nurtured the leadership capacity of others, while consistently and successfully leading the school district, school staffs, and students through uncharted paths of academic excellence. Most prominent was a collaborative effort with Dr. Carl Glickman at UGA in the 21st Century Project and the implementation of strategic planning at the district and school levels which laid the foundation for CCSD’s future.

I had the privilege of working with Kathy as Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Assessment from ’94-’96. The Standards-based education reform movement had begun with the recommendations of A Nation at Risk in 1983, calling for a rigorous curriculum based on academic standards for what students should know and be able to do. These standards were to be used to guide other system components: curriculum, assessments, textbook adoption, and professional development. I was charged with the task of leading curriculum revision using content standards of national professional organizations, beginning

with NCTM standards in Mathematics and continuing through Science and Health and Human Sexuality.

Considering the size of the task, Kathy immediately offered the support of our RESA Generalist, Dr. Marty Carter, who was assigned to Clarke County two days each week. That example of unselfish support remains with me today as a special gift, not only for the work to be done, but for the friendship that developed from working with Marty Carter.

Kathy was one of the few people I've known who operated at the top of Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* as a "fully-actualized" person, reaching her full potential in every area. She was creative, organized, resourceful, more focused on others than herself, extremely gifted at generating ideas, leading groups and synthesizing material. Self-discipline came naturally to her. She laughed easily and could be playful, comfortable with others' differences, non-judgmental and accepting. She loved her work, and was continuously learning and growing, and helping others to do so as well.

We all strove to be like her, and we learned never to lead a meeting without a chart for recording group process and a notebook of resources to guide us. For all these reasons and more, it was a pleasure to recommend an Instructional Leadership Award in her honor and to assist with its funding. In 2004, Dr. Maxine Easom was the first recipient of that award, and Dr. Hug and her husband Bill flew from their new home in Henderson, NV, to be present for the occasion.

Looking back, in light of the extremes to which the accountability movement has gone to "leave no child untested," to shrink the curriculum to things which can be tightly taught and measured, to steal time from quality learning and discovery experiences, in essence to take much of the joy from teaching and learning, It is a delightful task to look back on the Foundation's mission "to encourage, recognize and reward excellence in the Clarke County School District," and to know that Dr. Lord's stated goal to bring the Foundation into being so that "all members of the Athens community could have a direct impact on the present and future of public education in Clarke County" continues to be met in new and innovative ways.

I congratulate the current and past leadership of the Foundation in systematizing the process of making awards, of sound financial management, of effective use of modern technology in Foundation activities, of modernizing awards ceremonies and making them more interactive and student-centered, of persisting in recognizing that excellence is not limited to one racial or ethnic group, and expanding the involvement of community partners and friends. I am amazed at what you've accomplished in these thirty-six years and honored to have had a small part in it.

As I look out at this diverse, multi-cultural group before me, all here because you have demonstrated excellence in your role of teaching and supporting the education of all the children in the Clarke County School District, I realize that I have been given the rare gift of seeing the vision of early pioneers in establishing an excellent unified school system come to fruition.

Thank you for allowing me to be with you tonight.

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