

# Chatham New School offers second chances

By Kim Caraganis

Students with long-term suspensions pose a serious dilemma to the community. Currently the "Zero Tolerance" approach says that the schools must be safe and students that violate that must be removed from campus. But once out of school, if they don't have an alternative program to go to, their problems can become compounded. Exclusion from the educational system and lots of free time on their hands contribute to students falling behind academically and gravitating to illegal activities, putting them more at risk for dropping out of school and further involvement in the criminal justice system. To stop this negative progression, Chatham New School offers long-term suspended students a way to keep continue their studies and rejoin the mainstream.

In 2001, Chatham County Together! a non-profit agency known for its mentoring programs with "of promise" youth, initially received a grant from the Governor's Crime Commission to serve students who were suspended long-term and no longer permitted on school property. Thus began the collaborative partnership with Chatham County Schools to provide an alternative educational program called Chatham New School. This project has allowed youth to continue their studies during their suspension, have supervision and mentoring from caring staff and be on the



Lead teacher Andre Mapp is a native of Siler City.

PHOTO BY TRACY MCINTURFF

same time schedule as other students when they return to their home schools. Since 2001, 100 students have been provided with this service.

Chatham New School meets the academic, personal and developmental needs of Chatham County middle and high school students (grades 6-12) and follows the NC Standard Course of Study requirements. Lead teacher Andre Mapp, a native son of Siler City, joined the program in 2003. Previously he was stationed in the US Coast Guard and after returning to Chatham County, taught seventh grade at Horton Middle School. The middle school students have been few, while the majority of students are from the three high schools within Chatham County. Mapp says that

teenagers usually don't think and sometimes make really bad decisions but Chatham New School can give them the opportunity to redeem themselves and get back on track. While the students that attend need to want to be at the school and continue with this part of their education; one-on-one attention from the staff help to motivate them, and the majority of the students have done better academically and socially than in their previous school.

Initially the instruction was set for three days each week but now has been expanded to a four-day-a-week program. This year Gwen Overturf of Siler City will be adding her years of teaching experience and talents in her role as a teacher at Chatham New School.

The program provides transportation to students as well as other activities besides academics. These have included community service projects involving CORA, Habitat for Humanity, The Big Sweep and tutoring younger students. Additionally students have been able to participate in a fitness program at the Pittsboro YMCA and Yoga with Cathy Holt. Organizers believe these types of activities are important for the students and can teach give them a variety of skills to help them deal with some of the emotions and behaviors that have been obstacles to their success.

Chatham New School also depends on support and counseling from

George Greger-Holt, Student Assistance/Safe Schools Counselor as well as other agencies. The Chatham New School is located in a small three-room classroom setting near downtown Pittsboro, formerly the Pittsboro Head Start Office. People that are interested in volunteering or finding out more about this program or other Chatham County Together! services can call 542-5155, email [chathamtogether@earthlink.net](mailto:chathamtogether@earthlink.net) or visit our website: [www.chathamcountytogether.org](http://www.chathamcountytogether.org)

Kim Caraganis is Director of Chatham County Together!

# Connecting dots

By Jim Granger

What would you get if you connected the dots across the landscape of Chatham County? Chatham Education Foundation would like to suggest the object that would evolve. First, here is some background information about our organization.

Since 1992, CEF has been instrumental in starting a volunteer-fueled countywide first and second grade reading improvement program, known as Intercede to Succeed. CEF has also generated, through fund drives and grant applications, some \$240,000 to fund staff development grants and creative teaching grants, thus supplementing classroom, school, and school network activities.

Now, a new superintendent and changing Boards of Education and Commissioners face conditions that pose important challenges. Among these conditions is an explosion of development, particularly in the northeast corridor, an increasingly diverse student population and the pressures of a global economy. As a result, CEF is re-examining its path as a school system advocate and as its supplemental funding arm.

To graduate Chatham students committed to being life-long learners requires the help of the entire county to create schools as safe zones that foster learning, healthier habits, and appropriate social interaction. It also requires recruitment, development, and retention of teachers who are passion-

ate about their professional activities. This means that the 70 percent of the voters who do not have children in schools need to be involved.

CEF is supporting a countywide system of Positive Behavior Support. We also support a high school science consortium and are committed to doing the same with math. John Sheridan, head of the Northwood math department, received a staff development grant with the expectation that additional money would be available if he collaborated with other county math teachers to enrich the math curriculum and advance professionalism.

CEF also hopes to expand the adopt-a-school program, to better recognize student scholars as they transition to high school, to build an alumni association, and to recognize outstanding alumni of Chatham schools.

Our success with these objectives depends not only upon the school administration and the various county boards, but also upon other institutions of learning, the 155 county churches, and ultimately each citizen.

When you connect all of these dots you have a Roadmap to Excellence, not only for our school children but as importantly for these children as they become adults.

For information about CEF call 542-0024, email [chatedfound@earthlink.net](mailto:chatedfound@earthlink.net), or go to [www.chathameducation.org](http://www.chathameducation.org).

Jim Granger is secretary of CEF.

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