Knox ES STEM Academy media specialist Leslie Hicks started Read Across America week in an exciting way: finding out that she had been selected as the CCSD 2022 Media Specialist of the Year.

Leslie Hicks was in the middle of teaching a technology lesson to a class of fifth-graders when in walked Superintendent of Schools Dr. Brian V. Hightower to share the exciting news and present her with a commemorative plaque and an iPad sponsored by CCSD partner Credit Union of Georgia.

"When I first saw Carrie McGowan enter the media center, I just thought she was taking pictures of Read Across America Week and students, so you can imagine my surprise when I saw Dr. Hightower, Dr. Holmes, my administrators and Joy Silk enter," Leslie said. "I was so surprised, and my mind was racing just thinking 'No way! Is this really happening?' The cherry on top was when I saw my husband and children walk in. They have been such a huge part of my media journey from building things for the media center, helping with decorating, and so much more – it really is a family affair!"

"I remember thinking, 'I cannot believe I have been selected for this honor out of this amazing group of media specialists!' I really could not be as effective in this role without the collaboration and support of my media specialist professional learning community. They are such an encouraging, hardworking, innovative group that is always working together and striving to create impactful experiences for our CCSD students," she added. "I feel very honored to represent this group with this award."

All CCSD school media specialists were eligible for the award, and Leslie was selected as the winner from a pool of outstanding nominees by a judging committee of retired educators and community leaders. She now advances to represent CCSD in the Regional competition, from which she could move on to the State contest.

Leslie stood out for her vision and philosophy for her library, as well as her use of technology. She believes the media center is ever-changing and should move and shift to meet the needs of its patrons.

"It is the largest classroom in every school with the largest class size: the entire student and staff population," Leslie said. "The library is not just a place for books; it's a place for learning!"

Leslie spends a great deal of her time integrating technology into her lessons, as she believes it is essential in preparing them to be "future ready." She teaches lessons in how to use resources for research and best practices for digital citizenship and effective use of technology. This school year, she took on new goals including: helping all students earn Microsoft Kids certification by increasing their technology literacy skills, and promoting reading through Beanstack app reading challenges with incentives and rewards for dedicated readers.

According to Knox ES STEM Academy Principal Jennifer McIntosh, "the media center is the heartbeat of our building, and Mrs. Hicks creates this engaging environment for our students because she is dedicated to the mission to cultivate curiosity, critical thinking and create real world connections. Once inside, a child has an opportunity to anchor our daily news, collaborate with a group of friends in the Lightbulb Lab, research and investigate problems, become engulfed in one of the thousands of books and so much more! Mrs. Hicks is a risk taker, trail blazer and innovator. Her enthusiasm for both books and learning are contagious."
Q & A with CCSD 2022 Teacher of the Year Finalist — Gina Haggerty

Hickory Flat ES fourth-grade teacher Gina Haggerty has 23 years of teaching experience, with four years in her current role.

Q. How did you feel when Dr. Hightower walked into your classroom to surprise you with the news that you had been selected as one of the four TOTY Finalists?

A. We had just returned from lunch and started our lesson. Mrs. Estep walked through the door and announced our special visitors. We were all motionless, and I was grinning from ear to ear. I was shocked and thought this could not be true! As Dr. Hightower spoke to my students about this accomplishment, a feeling of happiness came over me. I was speechless. I looked over at Mrs. Estep and whispered, “Is this real?” There are so many wonderful teachers at Hickory Flat, and I was lucky to represent them. The most memorable part of the experience was when my students crowded in for a giant hug and a selfie with Dr. Hightower, Dr. Murdock, Mrs. Estep and me.

Q. What led you to become a teacher?

A. Nelson Mandela once said, “As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.” My third-grade teacher Mrs. Bennett believed in me. She was a strong advocate for getting me the help I needed. She helped me learn to read and saw my potential. She taught me strategies and gave me tools for success. She was warm, enthusiastic and caring. More importantly, she believed in me and invested in my future. Mrs. Bennett motivated me to become a teacher. She gave me the desire to love learning and to help others. Her light gave me permission to do the same!

Q. Most memorable or rewarding teaching experience this year?

A. One of my students was sitting alone at recess; this was unusual for him. I went and sat with him and asked him if he was OK. At first, he sat quietly and shrugged his shoulders. After sitting with him for a minute he opened up and said some kids told him he was annoying them. I told him that I was sorry that someone made him feel bad. Then, I asked if he wanted to walk around the playground with me. We walked and talked until it was time to line up. It took his mind off what had happened. At the end of the day, he gave me a big hug and said, “Thank you for spending time with me at recess. I enjoyed talking with you. It made my day.” This was the perfect ending to my day!

Q. What have you learned from the past two years, as it relates to teaching during a pandemic?

A. Teaching during a pandemic was challenging, but teaching after a pandemic is even more difficult. Watching students struggle with regulating emotions has been the hardest part of this pandemic. More than ever, teachers need to know how to properly help children through trauma.

Q. What teaching advice would you give to our newer teachers?

A. Find the joy in all that you do! Do not ignore the negative, instead grow from it. Give yourself grace and celebrate successes. Keep a journal and reflect on your experiences. Focus on classroom management, building relationships and establishing routines before academics. Collaboration with teammates is critical. Rely on your team and ask questions.

Q. Outside of work, how do you enjoy spending your time?

A. Family is especially important to me, and spending time with them always brings me joy! Game night with friends and family is sure to make everyone happy. Family dinners, cheering on my kids during basketball or debate, and holiday traditions are just a few of the things that warm my heart.

Q & A with CCSD 2022 Teacher of the Year Finalist — Jon Gustin

Cherokee HS environmental science teacher Jon Gustin has 13 years of teaching experience, with 10 years in his current role.

Q. How did you feel when Dr. Hightower walked into your classroom to surprise you with the news that you had been selected as one of the four TOTY Finalists?

A. Jon Gustin has 13 years of teaching experience, with 10 years in his current role.

Q. What led you to become a teacher?

A. Jon Gustin has 13 years of teaching experience, with 10 years in his current role.

Q. Most memorable or rewarding teaching experience this year?

A. Jon Gustin has 13 years of teaching experience, with 10 years in his current role.

Q. What have you learned from the past two years, as it relates to teaching during a pandemic?

A. Jon Gustin has 13 years of teaching experience, with 10 years in his current role.

Q. What teaching advice would you give to our newer teachers?

A. Jon Gustin has 13 years of teaching experience, with 10 years in his current role.

Q. Outside of work, how do you enjoy spending your time?

A. Jon Gustin has 13 years of teaching experience, with 10 years in his current role.

Q. What have you learned from the past two years, as it relates to teaching during a pandemic?

A. Jon Gustin has 13 years of teaching experience, with 10 years in his current role.

Q. What teaching advice would you give to our newer teachers?

A. Jon Gustin has 13 years of teaching experience, with 10 years in his current role.

Q. Outside of work, how do you enjoy spending your time?

A. Jon Gustin has 13 years of teaching experience, with 10 years in his current role.
Q & A with CCSD 2022 Teacher of the Year Finalist — Emily Mickel

Little River ES art teacher Emily Mickel has 23 years of teaching experience, with seven in her current role.

Q. How did you feel when Dr. Hightower walked into your classroom to surprise you with the news that you had been selected as one of the four TOTY Finalists?
A. I felt a whirlwind of emotions: surprise, happiness, nervousness and excitement. It was an overwhelming feeling of being so grateful, and I felt very honored.

Q. What led you to become a teacher?
A. When I was little, my sister and I played school. We set up classrooms in our basement. My sister’s name was “Mrs. VanDolan,” and I was “Mrs. Landon.” I should have known then that I was destined to become a teacher. As a freshman in college, I intended to major in business. When I was taking an accounting class, I was so bored. My dad said to do what I love, and so I switched my major to art education.

Q. Most memorable or rewarding teaching experience this year?
A. I have morning duty. It is a rush to get to school and be prepared by 7 a.m. for over 300 students in the cafeteria who come every morning to get breakfast. Often when I return to my room after breakfast duty, students have dropped off pictures, notes and paintings by my door. It is so rewarding to receive these presents and start my day of teaching with such bright, happy, loving gifts and notes.

Q. What have you learned from the past two years, as it relates to teaching during a pandemic?
A. While teaching during a pandemic has been challenging, it has renewed my commitment to learning new strategies and using different instructional technology while maintaining a mostly positive attitude. I try to find ways to improve as a teacher and believe the pandemic has forced me to look at and evaluate many of my teaching practices. My takeaway from these past two years is a call to improve personally and rise to the challenge to help students further succeed, regardless of circumstances.

Q. What teaching advice would you give to our newer teachers?
A. Teaching has lots of ups and downs. If you are having a rough day, remember the many wonderful things about teaching. Remember how the students love you and what an impact that you are making sometimes when you don’t even realize it.

Q. Outside of work, how do you enjoy spending your time?
A. I love spending time with my family and friends, painting, making cards and reading.
Swap and Share: Creative Instructional Strategies Submitted by Classroom Teachers

"Footprints"

By: Dean Rusk Middle School teacher Keisha Morris

“We all leave footprints as we journey through life--make sure yours are worth following.” - Bob Teague

When I worked on the RCD committee a few years ago to bring new life to our middle school ELA curriculum, I never could have foreseen the products my students would create during our recent unit. It was an informational unit, but we focused on the speaking and listening standards within the Georgia Performance Standards. So many middle schoolers feel unheard – often, parents tell them what to do and what to think. Teachers tell them where to go and how to behave. They are rarely given opportunities to share their hopes, dreams and goals for their world after eighth grade. This unit (Unit 4) is built to allow them to voice their concerns for our world and their plan on how to make the world a better place.

It begins with collaborative analysis of paired texts – a speech and an informational article on the same topic. Students focus on identifying the central idea and writing objective summaries of these texts since this step is crucial to understanding informational texts. They then move into speech analysis, beginning with famous movie speeches. Because the final product is a TEDTalk, students then are given the task of evaluating a TEDTalk of their choosing. The eighth-grade ELA team provides a plethora of choices – from scientific endeavors to saving animals to children’s rights; the kicker is that all speeches are presented by teenagers. What better way for our students to see that public speaking is not an impossible feat if you are speaking on something about which you are knowledgeable and passionate? One-pagers are created using Canva, PowerPoint or the students’ own artistic talents. I am always impressed with the caliber of work presented during this step.

The final tasks of the unit revolve around the composition and presentation of the speeches based on the footprints they wish to leave on the world. We spend a few days talking about the impact others have made on the world and how we want to be remembered. The students develop a real sense of self during this process. They are given the chance to share ideas through small group collaboration, and this sharing breeds confidence. Students are finally given the chance to be heard. The last step is the culmination of all their challenging work. I love creating real-world scenarios in my classroom, so why not decorate the room as a TEDTalk theater? The students are greeted with directional signs in the hallway pointing to the "TEDTalk theater. There is a “Now Filming” sign on the door. Desks are set up in rows, and students are given the choice of a TEDTalk podium or a full "stage" at the front of the room. They dress for success, and they speak. They speak their hearts and their ideas. They speak with confidence and pride because they know they are leaving a footprint while also tackling one of the most dreaded fears in the world -- public speaking.

There is no doubt that this group will leave many footprints on the world as they travel. I am excited that I get to be a part of their journey!
#CCSDfam

Newlyweds: Karley and Matthew Abernathy  
Wedding Date: November 6, 2021  
School: Karley teaches at R.M. Moore ES STEM Academy.

Name: Hogan Audrey Jones  
Birthdate: November 18, 2021  
Parents: Alex and Jen Jones  
School: Jen is the ILS at Boston ES.

Newlyweds: Ben and Haley Owen  
Wedding Date: November 20, 2021  
School: Haley teaches at R.M. Moore ES STEM Academy and Ben teaches at Creekview HS.

Name: Simon Martin Mendoza  
Birthdate: November 13, 2021  
Parents: Danielle Mabeus and Irving Mendoza  
School: Danielle is the counselor at Bascomb ES.

Name: Tinley Grace Southerland  
Birthdate: November 18, 2021  
Parents: Corey and Erin Southerland  
School: Erin teaches at R.M. Moore ES STEM Academy.

Name: Hogan Audrey Jones  
Birthdate: November 18, 2021  
Parents: Alex and Jen Jones  
School: Jen is the ILS at Boston ES.

Newlyweds: Karley and Matthew Abernathy  
Wedding Date: November 6, 2021  
School: Karley teaches at R.M. Moore ES STEM Academy.

If you recently got married or had a baby, we'd love to share your pics and information in this section of the District Delegate.  
Here’s what we need from you:

- Submit photos [here](#) by the 27th of each month. Photos should be recent.

- If you are sharing a baby photo, we need: your baby’s name and birthdate, your name and work location, and your spouse’s name (if he or she works for CCSD, indicate where). If you are sharing a wedding photo, we need: your name and where you work, the wedding date, and your spouse’s name (if he or she works for CCSD, indicate where).
Describe your art and how you discovered and developed it:
Handcraft has always been a part of my life. My father, in his 70s, still creates wood art for family members. My mother, also in her 70s, still has her sewing room. Other members of my family, including my sister and my aunts, have always been involved in some type of handcraft activity. I have always had a keen interest in painting and creating something from almost nothing. It is that passion that has motivated me into designing and sewing clothes, curtains, holiday decorations, and memories bears.

How did you discover your gift? How did it evolve?
I always knew I could make anything if I put my mind to it. However, it wasn’t until I was approached by a coworker, Stacy Baker, about making something that would preserve the memory of her father-in-law. She mentioned that she had seen the idea and asked if I could make that for her. I had no doubt that I was able to produce what she wanted. However, it wasn’t until I actually saw and touched the collection of the shirts when I realized the importance of what I was about to do. This was much more than making a bear out of some ordinary material. This was about reliving the memory of a lost precious loved one through my creation. That sparked an entirely new interest in me. It was no longer about the paid hours. It became about seeing the look in my customers’ eyes when they saw their loved ones attire on my creation. It became about holding the bear as if they were holding someone one more time. It was about reliving memories and making new ones every day. That became priceless and awakened an entirely new passion in my line of work. Today, I have been able to bring those memories to over 100 individuals all over the country. I would not be able to do this with out the support of my husband, Dr. Mark Nazemzadeh (who teaches sixth-grade at Creekland MS). He has supported me every weekend, while I am tucked away in my sewing room. He understands my love of sewing bears and even has bought my bears from me as gifts for his co workers.

Who/what inspires you?
Although my mother taught me how to sew, I got my inspirations from my grandmother. I still remember her hand sewing her quilts while talking to her favorite TV soap opera characters as if they were actually in the room with her. She created some of the most beautiful pieces out of literally nothing, some of which are still with us.

Who inspires your creations?
My biggest inspirations come from my customers. The idea of reliving the memories of a lost loved one is the most rewarding experience I can ever have. That is something that I will never refuse.

What’s your favorite experience with the memory bears?
Every one of my creations has been unique in its own way. Each piece has served a different purpose for a special someone. Therefore, my most favorite of my creation is the next piece, which will bring joy, tears and laughter to my new customer. The one to the right was particularly special because a very special lady asked me to make a friend for her only daughter out of her baby clothes. Her reaction to her new friend is absolutely priceless.

What is your why? What does your art mean to you?
In our busy days, we tend to lose the importance of reflecting on the events of the past. We fill our lives with material, which we leave behind after our days have come and gone. I have found a way to make these materials important, once again, perhaps even more than their initial purpose long after we are gone.

Why are the arts important in school?
The best way that I can describe it is this - imagine the purpose of the education as a means to create a house. The core classes such as math, reading, science and social studies serve as the foundation - the walls, the floor, and perhaps the roof. Arts personalize each finished house. They make it possible to add a human aspect to what is otherwise a collection of brick and mortar.

See more at: https://www.facebook.com/Karenskeepsakesmemoriesmade