

2014 TERREL H. BELL RECIPIENT

Candis Hagaman, Principal

Caldwell Early College High School
828-759-4636

chagaman@caldwellschools.com

Hudson, North Carolina

Caldwell County Schools

Superintendent Dr. Steve Stone

ssstone@caldwellschools.com

Caldwell County, North Carolina, in the Appalachian foothills, saw the region's primary source of work disappear with the decline of the American furniture industry. With barely ten percent of the population equipped with college degrees, the need to educate students for higher skilled work was clear. In 2006, Caldwell County Schools and the Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute (CCC&TI) created the Caldwell Early College High School (CECHS) on the grounds of the college. In 2010, educational reformer Candis Hagaman arrived and restructured CECHS to fully engage its almost 400 students in pursuing higher academic challenges. As a parent noted, many of the students enter CECHS lagging academically and leave ready to take on college.

Mrs. Hagaman introduced structures, both academic and social-emotional, that are enabling both students and teachers to reach high standards. Through partnerships with Caldwell County Schools, CCC&TI, Appalachian State University, and NC New Schools, Mrs. Hagaman can tap a network of resources used to increase student achievement, personalize learning experiences, and make attending college accessible to all students. In 2013, all 70 seniors graduated—with 58 Associate's degrees and more than 4,300 college credits.

Students apply to CECHS and are chosen at random. Throughout their school careers students are acknowledged through personal touches such as birthday cards, student-led conferences, and public celebrations of academic and personal successes. All students take honors and college classes and receive academic supports, such as test preparation and tutoring, to foster success. CECHS also gives students out-of-class learning experiences, using local experts and resources to provide opportunities for mentoring and service learning. To ensure that every student is known, cared for, and supported by CECHS staff, weekly English and Math Lab courses provide structured opportunities for targeted individualized remediation and enrichment based on assessment data, addressing key skill gaps in college-readiness and challenging all students to achieve. Unique seminar courses at each grade level teach life and college-ready skills and engage students in yearlong exploration of essential questions.

Teachers work across disciplines to implement innovative inquiry-based experiences which require students to read, write, think, speak, and collaborate in every class. Mrs. Hagaman reorganized structures to make the practice of teaching public, cultivating—and creating time for—a robust professional learning community through which teachers regularly network and share resources, expertise, and solutions. She also instituted Instructional Rounds for peer observations and reflections and reduced the administrative workload, freeing teachers to create rigorous and engaging learning activities for students. Through cadres and weekly staff meetings, Mrs. Hagaman worked with her teachers to create optimal learning opportunities, fine tune delivery of lessons and instruction, and promote an environment of support and encouragement.

Candis Hagaman is seen as an accessible leader who participates side-by-side with teachers and staff and yet can easily transition into decision maker and instructional leader. A model school for the North Carolina New Schools network, CECHS hosts visiting educator teams for two days of embedded, in-school professional development. The CECHS culture and structures have influenced hundreds of novice and experienced educators through the school's selection and service as a Learning Lab Initiative Model School for the North Carolina New School Lab program.