
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

George Washington Carver Elementary School
Richmond Public Schools
Richmond, Virginia

Transcript: Data, Diligence, and Drive

Narrator: George Washington Carver Elementary School opened in 1886. Today it serves mostly students living in nearby Gilpin Court, one of the largest public housing projects in the East. In 2016 it was the highest performing elementary school in Richmond, Virginia. School principal Kiwana Yates is principal.

Kiwana Yates, Principal: When I first became principal in 2012, my vision was for George Washington Carver to become a National Blue Ribbon School. Now some people laughed and said, "Yates, do you really think Carver will become a Blue Ribbon School?" I said, "I do really believe."

Grade 2 Classroom: Teacher: "What do you believe, you guys?" Students: "I believe in myself and my ability to do my best." Teacher: "So show me you can do your best! Let's go."

Kiwana Yates: So we try to think with the end in mind. So I do push them. We kind of focus on people do what you inspect and not what you expect. So, you can set all of the expectations that you want, but if you don't inspect them there is no true resolve.

Narrator: Stephanie Burgess was a fourth-grade math teacher at Carver who retrained as a math instructional specialist.

Stephanie Burgess, Math Instructional Specialist: As a 4th grade teacher we looked at who passed, what range, and how we would remediate. Now we have a spreadsheet and our differentiation of instruction is based on the data. So biweekly the teachers give the students a test, and the information is put on the data matrix. We use other things as well, but this is a good way of knowing who needs help with what, and how we can differentiate, remediate, and re-teach objectives and skills.

Narrator: A fifth-grade class plays Math Jeopardy to solidify math skills. Evette Cartwright is the teacher.

Grade 5 Classroom: Teacher: "Let's look at a computation, okay? 100 points—add carefully 685 plus 637. What is it we're going to make sure we do? Make sure all of our numbers are what?" Students: "Lined up." Teacher: "Lined up. Okay." Teacher: "What did you come up with, Corey?" Student: "One thousand twenty-two." Teacher: "1022—did anybody do it on

paper?" Students: "Yeah!" Teacher: What did you come up with? Students: "One thousand twenty-two." Teacher: "Excellent job!"

Evette Cartwright, Grade 5 Teacher: We use Math Jeopardy as well as Science Jeopardy as a means for remediation. It gives us a chance for students to work collaboratively with each other. Students that are weak in certain objectives often get assistance from students that are stronger.

Grade 5 Student: The teachers here are very...They want you to be the best you can be.

Stephanie Burgess: You know, students like being on top. They like that whole idea of, you know, we're doing great but they want to do better.

Narrator: Anchor charts help students recognize goals and review concepts. Fifth-grade teacher Chari Brown describes how she uses them.

Chari Brown, Grade 5 Teacher: This is a typical anchor chart—this one is not laminated. So what we do is, I teach a concept, we kind of go over it, we rehearse it, we make sure that we understand exactly what it is that the kids need to know, and then from what they've learned, we construct our anchor charts.

Kiwana Yates: We try to focus on "I Can" statements. What the students will be able to do. We want to emphasize and stress to the students that we are focusing on the targets. So, I push the students constantly, I push the teachers constantly. And we get into the questions of why is this that way? What can you do? What is the end result? What could you have done differently?

Narrator: Sharita Kaufman is the ELA coach.

Sharita Kaufman, ELA coach: Dr. Yates always encourages us to observe other teachers, so teachers all have the opportunity to observe each other, you know, in real-life situations and see how they handle

Kiwana Yates: As the teachers started collaborating and working with each other, they started truly developing PLCs. Now some people say, "Oh, a PLC, we're having a PLC today. No, we are a Professional Learning Community. And that's the way we look at ourselves at George Washington Carver.

Narrator: Carver receives support from Communities in Schools, a national nonprofit network of assistance to high-poverty schools. Willnette Lightfoot coordinates the program at Carver.

Willnette Lightfoot: All of our students are on free and reduced lunch. A lot of our students have endured a great deal of trauma. A lot of them are coming to school with hunger issues. So, when they get to school, they have someone here from Communities in Schools to help coordinate some resources for them. They have a mentor that comes. They have teachers that care about them.

Narrator: Carver Promise is a mentoring program that draws primarily college students to Carver to form one-on-one relationships with students. It is the largest such mentoring program in the state.

Willnette Lightfoot: Every student has a mentor, every student from first to fifth grade. That provides a lot of stability for our students, to have a mentor, to have someone come once a week, sometimes twice depending upon their schedule, to come consistently to see just them. "This is my mentor." That's what you hear a lot of students say.

Narrator: Principal Yates and the staff also removed a host of distractions. Students today eat breakfast in the classroom rather than the cafeteria.

Kiwana Yates: This is our second year of doing breakfast in the classroom, it's an initiative that the district actually started, and I thought, you know, what a great way to get our students actively engaged, get them focused on instruction from the very beginning. We do not have bells and the loudspeaker, the intercom system, is only used in emergency purposes only. There are ways that we can communicate. We can call on the phone. But we need to focus on instruction. And we need to focus on intentional instruction without having any interruptions.

I grew up in Brooklyn, New York in Gowanus Housing Projects, and in high school I graduated as Valedictorian from Benjamin Bannecker Academy for Community Development. So just to be a mentor for them and let them know that, you know, the end results are out there and nothing can stop us. We are on our way up.