
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

Skyland Elementary School
Greer, South Carolina
Greenville Public Schools

Teaching with Art and Heart: A Rural School Reaches the Whole Child

Narrator: Skyland Elementary School services 730 students in rural South Carolina. Dr. Carolyn Styles has been principal since 1997.

Dr. Carolyn Styles, Principal: I grew up in a rural area very close to here. And I grew up in a high-poverty family. So, I understand not only as an educator but also because I grew up that way. We have a food pantry here at our school. We also have a clothes closet. Our community knows that we really care about them and we care about their families. And that has everything to do with having a positive school climate.

Narrator: All students converge at the school intersection before going to their classes.

Dr. Styles: And the administrative team stands there every single morning, waving, speaking, giving hugs, and helping hands. So, we get to put our eyes on every single child every day. Sometimes we have children who come to school who are not quite ready. We know as educators that from the very first day a child arrives either they're on target to learn or they are already delayed.

Narrator: Stephanie Smith provides reading interventions.

Stephanie Smith, Reading Interventionist: The reading intervention program plays a key role in closing the achievement gap at Skyland. The students are identified early and that way we can really work on their reading skills in a small-group setting. When they first come into reading intervention, they re-read a book from the previous day. A lot of time I have them use their Tubaloo, which is a hear-me sound phone where they hold the phone up to their ear and they can hear themselves reading.

Narrator: Support Facilitator, Anna Lindley, runs "Morning Math."

Anna Lindley, Support Facilitator: The math lab is from 7:45 to 8:10 every morning. Students are identified throughout the school year if the teacher feels that they may be slipping a little bit with some of their math skills. And so, the students come, with parent permission of course, to work on mainly fundamentals.

Narrator: The arts have played a key role in Skyland's success.

Dr. Styles: True learning requires engagement. We reached out to our performing arts center, the Peace Center for Performing Arts many years ago and participated in training where we worked with

artists to support our teachers in learning how to engage students to help them be more active in the learning process.

Narrator: Third grade teacher, Angie Lewis, trained at the Greenville Peace Center. Here she integrates art into a math lesson on quadrilaterals.

Angie Lewis, Grade 3 Teacher: The arts-integrated approach is a very successful way to create a positive learning environment, a structured learning environment, and also where students can be engaged in developmentally appropriate activities where they not only excel academically, but most importantly, socially. They also can thrive in this setting because they are encouraged to be creative and inventive and imaginative.

Narrator: Music teacher, Carol Godfrey, formerly taught at the high school level.

Carol Godfrey, Music Teacher: Today was a lesson on *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon*, and using Orff instructions and percussion instruments, and song to help tell the story. There's a huge body of research that tells us how important rhythm and even steady beat skills are to children and language development and the development of the ability to read, and to read fluently.

Narrator: Godfrey teaches folk dances to connect students to the past and to sharpen their cognitive skills.

Carol Godfrey: We do these folk dances for two reasons. There's a musical reason: I want them to be tuneful, beatful, artful students. That helps them with the beat part. But also, it encourages them to think about, "Oh, this is how maybe my great-grandparents or my relatives, you know, a hundred years ago had fun at family gatherings and this is how they connected with people in the community. I'll call it for a while then I'll back away and say, "You're on your own." And they really have to think ahead, sort of like a chess game, always thinking, "What's next?" And that's just great for their brains, it's great for their beatfulness, it's great for strategic thinking.

Narrator: Principal Styles reflects on two decades of successful school leadership.

Dr. Styles: Despite many changes, there's one thing that remains constant: Children flourish when they are supported emotionally, socially, physically, and academically by people who genuinely love and care about them. This remains the core of our philosophy and inspires us to continue our work as educators. It is indeed the key to all success.