

Cobe Creek Elementary School



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To Whom It May Concern:

Ms. Baldwin's classroom is unique in several ways. She shows the students that she genuinely cares for them and their learning, and then challenges them to meet their unrealized potential. She does this by integrating the various subjects she teaches, showing students not only what they need to know but why they need to know it, how their various kinds of knowledge fit together, and how their knowledge can be applied. In addition, she is an expert at differentiating different learning levels: she knows exactly how to challenge a bright, underachieving student, and exactly where to meet the student who is truly struggling with the material.

In Auburn, Alabama, in the 1990s, she taught and earned tenure at a suburban school with a mixture of middle-class and poor students, and then taught an all-African-American and largely low-income population in Tuskegee, Alabama. These very different teaching experiences solidified her skill and reputation as a teacher who could reach and inspire not only high-achieving students who had grown up with all the advantages conducive to a good education, but also students who found in her class a place to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes that were not supported at home or in the community.

Ms. Baldwin measures success by assessing the attitudes toward class activities that students present each day and altering the structure of lessons accordingly. She conferences with students weekly, setting individual goals based on pretests, classroom response, and previous end-of-grade tests. This has resulted not only in higher test scores but also in enthusiasm in the classroom throughout the year. She has found that integrating the arts, career development, and current events into the general curriculum teaches students the importance of preparing themselves to be lifelong learners. She does not "teach to the test," but nevertheless higher test scores result from her creative approach to teaching, because students approach the test with confidence in their knowledge. There is ample evidence that Ms. Baldwin's success as a teacher is felt years later. For example, several years ago she happened to run into a former student who was doing graduate work in environmental science at Duke University; this student told Ms. Baldwin that her fifth-grade class had sparked an interest in this subject that continued into graduate school.

Ms. Baldwin has always integrated the arts into her classroom teaching, but she took on that challenge full time from 1995 to 2001, developing a touring program called "Learning Through Song," which she took to child development centers, daycares, libraries, schools, museums, festivals, and community centers in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. Drawing on her considerable talent as a musician, and combining that with her classroom teaching experience, she combined songs, books, stories, musical instruments, and movement in a fun and educational program for children. She also presented workshops to teachers, parents, librarians, and child care providers on how to address general curriculum objectives by integrating subject matter and the arts.

In this teacher's classroom, students are eager to listen, put forth maximum effort, and reach their potential. For this reason, they perform higher than other students at the same grade level and display more positive attitudes toward daily learning activities and lessons. Ms. Baldwin wants them to smile, laugh, and enjoy learning.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Sherrill
Principal