

Diggs-Latham teacher named A+ Educator of the Year

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

A teacher in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School System has been named Educator of the Year for North Carolina A+ Schools.

Amanda Gordon is the visual arts teacher at Diggs-Latham Elementary A+ Magnet School and A+ coordinator at the school. She also serves as the coordinator of the AIG (Academically or Intellectually Gifted) program.

As the recipient of the prestigious award, Gordon will serve as an ambassador for the A+ School program for the next school year.

The A+ Schools Program is the largest, longest running arts-based

whole school reform effort in the nation. Since 1995, A+ Schools has been using the arts as a catalyst for



Gordon

enjoyable places to teach and learn.

Created in memory of longtime executive director The Gerry D. Howell, A+ Educator of the Year award recognizes an A+ educator who best exemplifies the values of the A+ Schools Program. A post on the program's official website

states, "Ms. Gordon's approach to teaching represents true arts integration by incorporating standards from multiple subjects in her visual arts lessons.

"Not only do her students have a beautiful art product at the end of a unit, but they have experienced group collaboration, individual work time and even opportunities to write, sing, and dance about their work and subject matter."

When she received word that she would be receiving the award, Gordon said she was at a loss for words. She said as a teacher, a lot of the work is done behind the scenes, so it's nice to get some recognition.

"I was really excited," she said. "It's a state award so it's a real honor to see my name and the school's

name publicized all over the state."

A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Gordon has spent her entire 12-year teaching career at Diggs-Latham. During a sit-down with *The Chronicle*, Gordon said the school operates like a family. She also noted since she has been at the magnet school located on Hutton Street, the arts have played a major role in helping improve student performance.

"Our arts team and specialist team have really grown over the years," said Gordon. "The students here are really growing and I think the arts has had a lot to do with that."

As the face of the A+ Schools Program, Gordon will receive \$250 worth of

classroom arts products donated by Crayola. Later this year, she will also attend NCCAT's Teacher Leadership Academy with other statewide educators, and next spring Gordon will speak during the annual A+ Leadership Conference.

Even though she has received a number of awards and recognitions over the years, including valedictorian of her high school class, Teacher of the Year in 2011, a number of classroom grants, and several blue ribbons at local fairs, just to name a few, Gordon said the Gerry D. Howell award stands out because she feels she truly earned the honor.

"This award is something that is truly earned," she said.

"With some of the other

awards, someone chose me or I was nominated. This award was more about how I represent myself."

When asked how she is able to connect with her students, Gordon mentioned growing up in a rural area, she has experienced a number of issues that her students may have. Gordon noted at an early age she developed the mindset that she could do anything that she put her mind to, and that's what she passes along to her students.

"I want to inspire my students just like several teachers inspired me," said Gordon. "I want to instill in them the drive and confidence to set goals and chase their dreams."

List of core values headed to school stakeholders

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Equity. Happiness. Optimistic. Pride. Encourage. Care. Hope.

Those are just a few of the words that were mentioned last week when the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Board of Education sat down to discuss what the "core values" will be for the district moving forward.

During an open meeting on Tuesday, May 10, board members were split into groups and asked to make a list of words they think should be associated with the overall mission of the district. Director of Communications Alexandra Hoskins encouraged board members to select words that everyone could relate to.

As an example, Hoskins told the board members in attendance to consider a bus driver who

is fully passionate and committed to driving their bus.

"They should be able to look at a list of our values and be able to draw a direct line between them and the success of the students."

"The core values offer us something that all our stakeholders know, the things that we hold dear as a district," she said. "We want the core values to permeate all aspects of what we do."

For more than an hour, board members discussed what terms they thought should represent the districts. What began as a list of more than 50 words was down to five by the end of the meeting.

After a few rounds of voting, the board decided on passionate, accountability, student centered, and inclusive. Advocate for the term "inclusive," board member David Singletary said, "Inclusive defines a



Photo by Tevin Stinson

WS/FCS Director of Communications Alexandria Hoskins discusses the importance of core values during a meeting on Tuesday, May 10. The Board of Education plans to include input from teachers, students and parents when making a list of values for the district.

different mindset. "Our core values should represent not just an effort but action," he continued. "We have to bring everybody to the table."

The five words selected by the Board of Education will be submitted to parents, teachers and students during a summit at Walkertown High School on June 15. According to Hoskins, each school in the district will send two representatives to participate. Parents are expected to participate as well.

During the summit, stakeholders will make their own list of terms. The list of terms, along with the Board of Education's five words, will be used to determine the core values for the 2016/2017 school year.

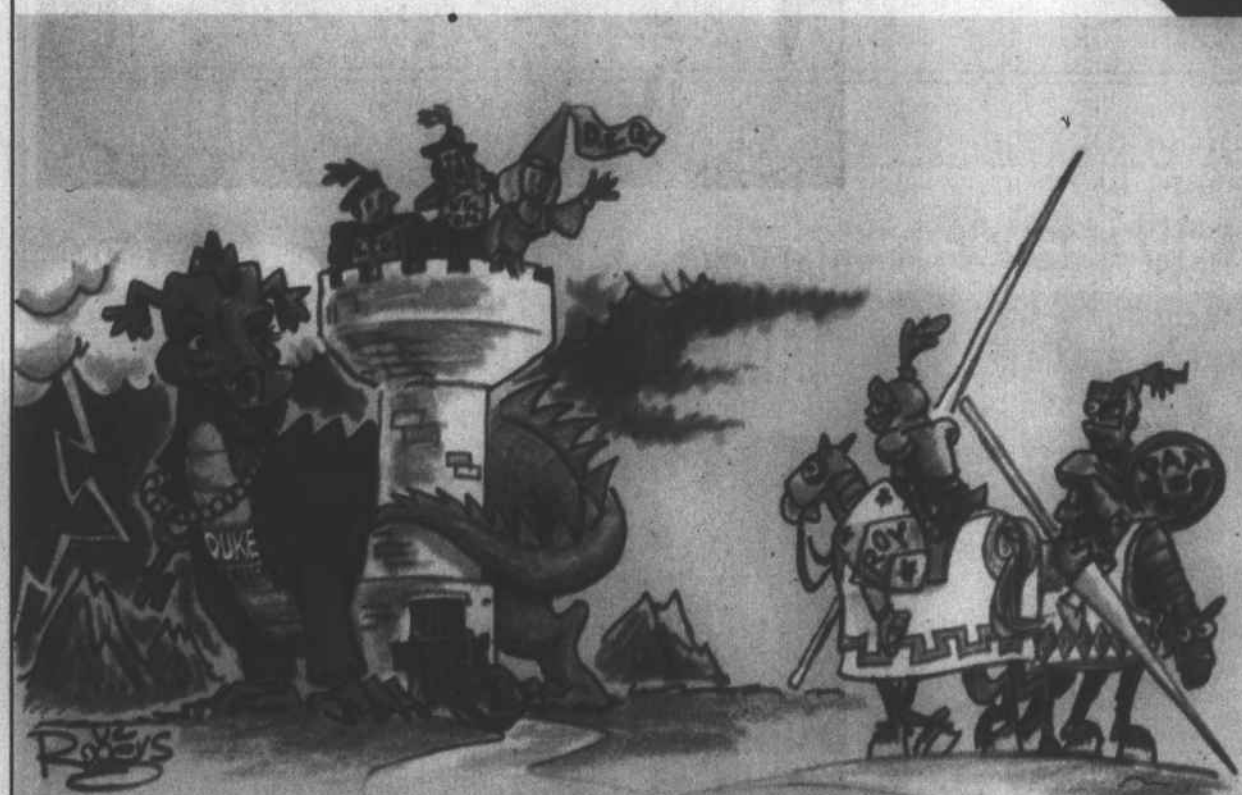
"In order to shape culture, we must build on the work done previously by goals and priorities," she said.

"This process of selecting our core values gives us an opportunity to include all stakeholders."

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