

Harris looks to lead Carter G. Woodson School into the future

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

If you would have told Greensboro native Ben Harris eight years ago that he would become the principal at Carter G. Woodson School (CGWS), he probably would've laughed in your face. At the time Harris, who has a law degree from North Carolina Central University School of Law, was working as a practicing attorney with Legal Aid of North Carolina. Although he did have experience as a teacher, working in the field of education didn't seem like something that intrigued him.

Harris said one day Hazel Mack, CGWS founder and former attorney with Legal Aid of North Carolina, sent an email to all the attorneys looking for volunteers who would be willing to help with mock trials being held at the school.

He volunteered. And the rest is history. What started as a one-time thing morphed into much more. "I came over here just to volunteer and we ran into Ms. Mack's sister, Ms. Hopkins," Harris related while sitting in his office last week.

"I don't know what

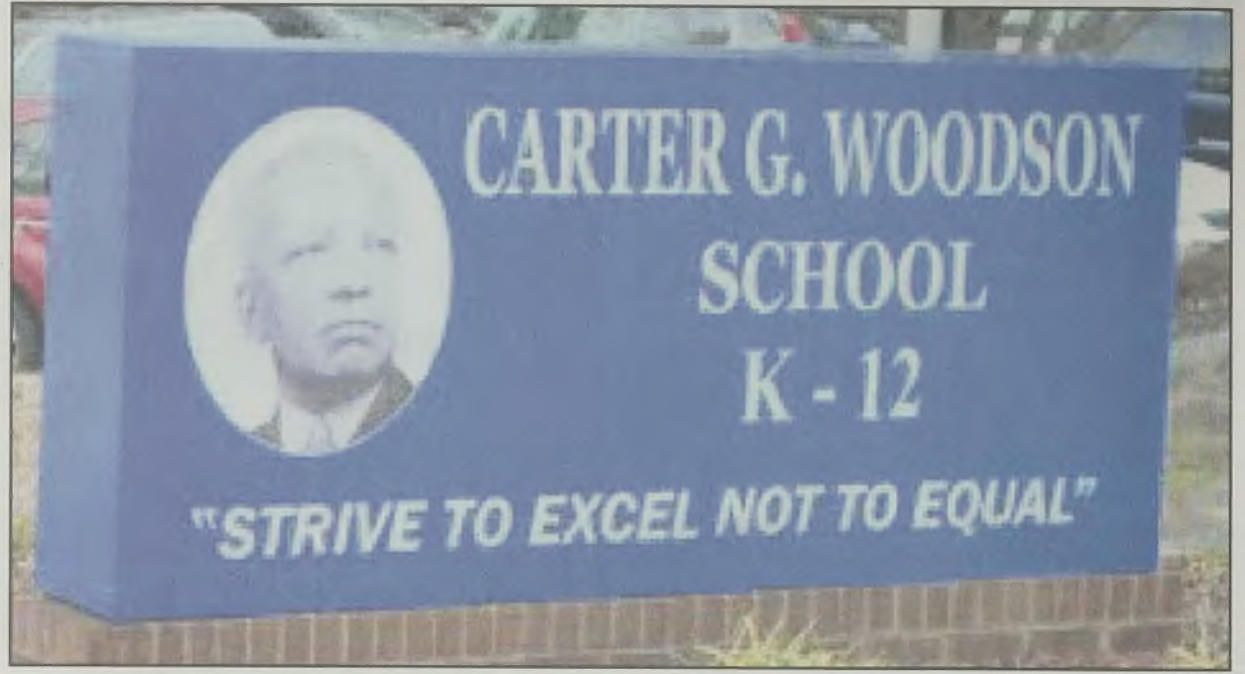
she saw in me, but we started talking and she put this bug in my ear about coming over to Carter G. Woodson."

Harris said when Ruth Hopkins, who was the executive director of the school at the time, initially asked, he wasn't sure if he would do it, but she was very persuasive and he decided to take a position at the school and he's been there ever since. "At the time, I was a young attorney and I was not trying to do that," Harris laughed.

"But Ms. Hopkins was convincing, so I decided to take a position over here in 2012 and I've been here ever since."

During his tenure at CGWS, Harris has served as high school director, school director, and a teacher. Last winter Harris added executive director/principal to that list when he took over for Hopkins, who retired. When asked what made him stick around for nearly a decade, Harris said people like Ms. Mack and Ms. Hopkins are what inspired him to stay and try to make a difference.

"When you see somebody that's so dedicated to helping the community, it becomes like an infectious disease. It makes you



want to continue to work and continue to help the community," Harris said. "Ms. Mack and Ms. Hopkins have been real leaders in this community and just seeing their passion and dedication is what really keeps me doing the work."

Under his leadership, Harris said his main goal is to maintain the rich history and legacy of CGWS. Harris said, "Carter G. has a legacy here in Winston-Salem and it has a standard and whoever is working here, we have to maintain that standard."

Carter G. Woodson is a public charter school that has been serving stu-

dents in grades K-12 since 1997. The school offers free tuition and bus transportation to and from any neighborhood in the city. Rooted in tradition and evolving to remain competitive for the 21st century, CGWS provides an academic standard of excellence that differs from the traditional classroom. Along with the major core courses of math, English, etc., CGWS also offers courses in art, liberal arts, culture, agriculture, and sustainable living.

Harris said what sets CGWS apart from other schools is the focus they put on the human element

of education. He said oftentimes in the traditional school setting, too much focus is put on test scores instead of making sure students have what they need to be successful.

"For education to be what it can ultimately be, it involves understanding the human element," Harris continued. "Sometimes the conversation can get really lofty about test scores and about curriculum. All these things matter, but it's about the human being and what that person needs to be the best they can be, and I think at Carter G. Woodson, we attempt the very difficult

work of finding out who a person is and how we can try to make that person the best they can become."

When looking toward the future of CGWS, Harris said the best is yet to come. He said with the board he has behind him, he's confident that CGWS will continue to grow and carry on the legacy. He said, "In five years you're going to see an exploding student population, you're going to see building expansion, a new cafeteria, upgraded technology and more student success."

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