

Charlotte Native Runs Model School In Connecticut

Rick Walker
Special To The Post

Fox Middle School Principal Erline Patrick is a strong leader and disciplinarian, who runs a model school, at a time when our nation is reexamining its educational system. She also has firm opinions about teacher evaluation procedures and the merit pay issue.

Many groups and individuals, including a contingent of Japanese educators, and tennis pro Arthur Ashe, have visited her school. Doris Turner, supervisor of music in the Simsbury School System, said after her visit last month, "Fox Middle has the answer to many questions, problems and concerns that plague the inner cities of America, and the leadership Mrs. Patrick provides sets the tone in the building for high scholarship."



ERLINE MAJOR PATRICK
...Fox Middle School principal

Before she came in 1978, some 70 percent of the students were reading below grade level, and the school did not have a program for the gifted and talented. Today the majority of the students at the Hartford North End school are performing at grade level, and many of them are doing much better.

Some 250 of the 1300 students in the school are capable of doing college work in one to three areas based on the results of the Metropolitan Achievement Test. "Scores are up in Hartford for sixth, seventh and eighth graders," Patrick notes. "Ours have been steadily rising for the past five years."

Patrick is a former science teacher and administrative assistant responsible for discipline at Hartford Public High School. She was a member of a committee which revised the school system's suspen-

sion policy. But discipline alone is not enough, she also has compassion. One parent, Peggy Beecham, wrote: "I have never seen so many loving and caring people working together to help others. Thank you for the time and patience you have shown me and my son Jeffrey. I feel the attendance program is much needed in all of the schools."

resource teacher.

Billie Cox, the resource teacher for the gifted and talented, credits the students' proficiency to the fact that they learn writing before they learn reading and other subjects. She says Patrick has bolstered the morale in the school and created a safe learning

environment.

Hailing from Charlotte, North Carolina, she started singing at the age of five, and was writing music and starring in a radio show by the age of 10. As an actress, she has performed ballads and jazz pieces on TV and received the most outstanding artist award from the Charlotte Jazz Society.

While at the University of Hartford's College of Education and Allied Services earning her master's degree and sixth year certificate, she interned in the Teacher Corps program, jointly administered by the university and the Hartford School system. In 1970, as a Teacher Corps unit leader, she started the first alternate learning center in the city for seventh and eighth

graders. School system officials were so impressed with her work that they asked her to transfer her internship to Fox Middle. After helping to plan and open this school, she went on to do the same for Hartford's Quirk middle school.

"The Teacher Corps abolished by the Reagan Administration a year ago was a great resource for teacher training and mak-

ing teachers available for urban schools," says Patrick, the University's first black woman regent. "We could use this type of resource today."

Fox Middle is the first Hartford secondary school to enter the state's Effective Schools Program (ESP), says Patrick. A school must have at least 15 percent of its students living below the poverty level to qualify for the program. There may be even more than that percentage at Fox Middle, since well over half of the students receive free lunches.

ESP UMBRELLA

"We had been practicing under the ESP umbrella for three years before joining the program in 1982. It is designed to improve teachers' attitudes and raise expectations regarding students by proving that a positive school environment can counteract the effect of a negative home environment. For many years educators believed that this was not possible, and in many urban schools this is still true. They still feel that the home environment has an overwhelming influence on the school environment, and that many or most of their students are therefore hindered in their learning capabilities."

Patrick sees this mindset as a complex, attitudinal problem which is ingrained in the American educational system.

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