



**William Lenoir Middle School  
2010 School to Watch**

Schools to Watch® is an initiative launched by the **National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform** in 1999. The National Forum is an alliance of more than 60 educators, researchers, and officers of national associations and foundations dedicated to improving schools for young adolescents across the country. The National Forum's mission is to unite key stakeholders to speak with a common voice to leverage research, policy, leadership, and replicable model practices to drive middle grades reform.

In order to prepare students to be lifelong learners ready for college, career, and citizenship, the National Forum seeks to make every middle grades school academically excellent, responsive to the developmental needs and interests of young adolescents, and socially equitable.

Through the Schools to Watch® initiative, the National Forum identifies schools across the United States that are well on their way to meeting the Forum's criteria for high performance. Forum members believe that three things are true of high-performing middle-grades schools:

- They are **academically excellent**—these schools challenge all students to use their minds well.
- They are **developmentally responsive**—these schools are sensitive to the unique developmental challenges of early adolescence.
- They are **socially equitable**—these schools are democratic and fair, providing every student with high-quality teachers, resources, and supports.

To achieve this level of performance, high-performing schools establish norms, structures, and organizational arrangements to support and sustain their trajectory toward excellence. They have a sense of purpose that drives every facet of practice and decision-making (see <http://www.schoolstowatch.org>).

In 2010, William Lenoir Middle School (WLMS) received the designation of being a School to Watch. WLMS is located in Caldwell County in the town of Lenoir, North Carolina. At present, the student body consists of a diverse group of approximately 520 young adolescent students. A faculty and staff of 36 members serve these students. The current school facility was built in 1956 and first served the community as a segregated high school, Freedom High. In 1966, the seventh and eighth grades were moved from Freedom Elementary school which was just up the hill from here. At that time the school became integrated and was named Lenoir Junior High. In the 1970s, sixth graders were moved in, and ninth through twelfth grade students were moved to Lenoir High School, and the name of the school was changed to William Lenoir Middle School. The 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders were moved to Lenoir High School.

The student body is a beautiful mosaic, comprised of Caucasian (63%), African-American (20%), Hispanic (10%), Asian (1%), and Multi-Racial (6%) students. Fifty-one of the students are classified as English Language Learners, and 169 special education students, falling into 10 separate categories, are in our student population. Approximately half of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Though the students represent a broad range of strengths, cultures, and challenges, the faculty and staff have committed to “meeting the academic, emotional, social, and physical needs” of all students by demonstrating a “willingness to lead and participate in creative and proven teaching practices for the middle school” students they serve. They further have dedicated themselves to ensure that all students are “challenged academically to be critical thinkers, to be life-long learners, to work cooperatively, to assume responsibility for their learning and behaviors, to constantly evaluate their work for growth, to communicate effectively, and to be technologically prepared to meet the challenges of a constantly changing society” (see <http://sc.caldwellschools.com/education/school/school.php>). As they develop and implement programs and practices to support this vision, it is no wonder WLMS has been recognized as exemplary. This article provides descriptions of some of the programs and practices that have distinguished William Lenoir Middle School as a School to Watch.

## Academically Excellent

The mission of William Lenoir Middle School is to provide a challenging and stimulating academic learning environment:

We believe every classroom should be focused on academic growth and that our teachers should provide the highest quality of instruction. It is our belief that all children can learn and it is our responsibility to help students reach their fullest potential. We are committed to helping children be successful learners and be responsible citizens. The adolescent age group experiences inherent problems and unique challenges that confront today's youth. William Lenoir Middle School strives to meet the challenges each child brings by providing a safe and secure environment for the student's intellectual as well as emotional, social, and physical development (see <http://sc.caldwellschools.com/education/school/school.php>).

To accomplish this ambitious mission, the staff at WLMS have developed or adopted a variety of innovative practices to challenge their students to be academically excellent. For example, the staff participated in professional development related to *The Twelve Powerful Words*. These words, intended to raise test scores and close the achievement gap, are posted on a word wall in each classroom.

Teachers at William Lenoir also strive to pursue excellence by accommodating all students. Most teacher teams within the school meet frequent, often daily, to discuss their curriculum and teaching as well as student progress. If necessary the team teachers bring in students to discuss concerns and make accommodations for submitting late assignments, catching up on homework, or even after school tutoring opportunities. Teachers across each grade level also meet regularly to discuss activities in each team. In this way, cross-team collaboration occurs and often sparks ideas that can be used in other teams.

As far as community involvement, there are several ways in which William Lenoir is active. Each year, the students bring in canned goods around Thanksgiving, and a representative from Lowe's Foods comes and builds these donated items into a can tree. The food is then donated to the local soup kitchen for Christmas.

Students also participated in the Light Up Lenoir Christmas tree-decorating contest. Last year, Mrs. Lewis' 8<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies class researched Toys of the Past and then made reproductions of these toys. Their tree won first place.

William Lenoir partnered with SunTrust Bank for two years to sponsor a student bank. Students were trained by two SunTrust employees, Terri Wyatt and Michelle Hinton, who came to William Lenoir each Tuesday morning at 7:15 to supervise students as tellers, customer service representatives, and even bank managers. All students were eligible to make deposits with parental permission. At the end of the year, checks were mailed to the students' homes with their accrued interest.



### *Teacher Quality*

Teachers want to work at William Lenoir and those that teach here rarely leave to take positions at other schools. As evidence of this, there is very little teacher turnover. The teachers at William Lenoir are constantly seeking professional development. The administrators have recruited and selected teachers who are child-centered and use hands-on teaching techniques. Each year, a group of staff from WLMS attend the North Carolina Middle School Association conference to hone their skills. Often WLMS teachers are selected to make presentations at this conference. There are currently 13 teachers recognized and certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards at William Lenoir. All WLMS teachers meet the criteria to be "highly qualified."

### *A Community of Learners*

The teachers' drive to learn and achieve trickles down to the students. Students are pushed to succeed in all subjects and rewarded for their success. The William Lenoir School Motto is "Learn, Mature, and Succeed." William Lenoir prides itself on a clear sense of purpose with an emphasis on unity and high expectations for staff and students whatever their talents may be.



2009 “Doodle for Google” State Winner  
William Lenoir 7<sup>th</sup> grader, Adina Jan



WLMS News Team

### **Developmentally Responsive**

William Lenoir Middle School faculty and staff have devoted themselves to developmentally responsive practices and programs. For example, WLMS is the district leader in Project Lead the Way (PLTW):

Project Lead the Way (PLTW) prepares students to be the most innovative and productive leaders in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and to make meaningful, pioneering contributions to our world. PLTW partners with middle schools and high schools to provide a rigorous, relevant STEM education. Through an engaging, hands-on curriculum, PLTW encourages the development of problem-solving skills, critical thinking, creative and innovative reasoning, and a love of learning. The PLTW middle and high school STEM education programs give students a brighter future by providing them with a foundation and proven path to college and career success in STEM-related fields. STEM education is at the heart of today’s high-tech, high-skill global economy. For America to remain economically competitive, our next generation of leaders must develop the critical-reasoning and problem-solving skills that will help make them the most productive in the world. PLTW sparks the ingenuity, creativity, and innovation within all of our students (2010).



### Project Lead the Way

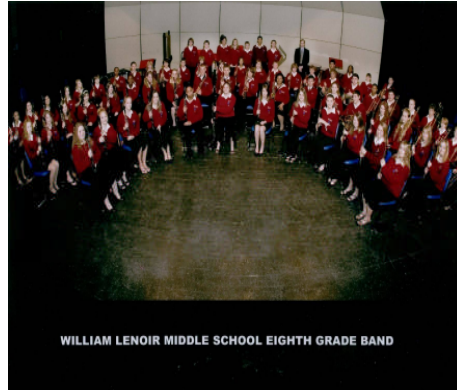
This past year PTLW was evaluated and received a Gateway to Technology School of Excellence recognition. The students are excited about this initiative and cannot wait to come to school to participate in PLTW. It helps them to recognize skills they possess which will help them in career exploration. They can begin to plan a path for the future. Our lead teacher for PLTW, Beth Fox, trains other schools in the implementation of this valuable, innovative program.

Because William Lenoir is a relatively small school, teachers and staff know the students well. This past year, we implemented an Advisor/Advisee program. Each teacher has an Advisor/Advisee group which includes 10-12 students. These groups meet each day and read, study character education, do community service, engage in intellectual and athletic competitions, and encourage healthy peer-to-peer relationships. Using a ropes course, the seventh grade has even incorporated 4H skills and team building into their AA sessions. Staff members are encouraged to incorporate their professional interests into their AA sessions. The librarian, for example, does Battle of the Books activities in her AA group, while the band director uses his AA time to coach a jazz band. By the way, the WLMS band has had 25 straight years of earning superior ratings.

At the end of the school year, students were surveyed to see how they felt about AA. The overwhelming majority was very pleased with it and wanted it to continue. We have changed the time of AA from the end of the day to the beginning of the day, which we think will work even better.



Battle of the Books 1<sup>st</sup> Place Winners 2009



WLMS Eighth Grade Band

### **Socially Equitable**

The staff and community at WLMS are always interested in providing equitable access for all students to opportunities for academic excellence. After several years of inactivity, the Student Council has been reinstated so that all students have representation when decisions are made; students' voices and ownership in decisions are critical to the success of WLMS.

WLMS boasts an active Communities In Schools (CIS) program. CIS provides mentors to students from underprivileged circumstances. These mentors function as academic tutors as well as supportive and understanding adult mentors. The CIS program is directed by Bernie Dula, a dynamic individual who has been a vital member of the WLMS community for years.



Bernie Dula, CIS Director

Kathy Lyday, media specialist, said of Ms. Dula, "Everyone loves and respects her because she helps to bolster the students' self esteem and does whatever she can to make their lives better and

their futures brighter. She has given her own money to students whose parents have lost their jobs or so a student can go and see a motivational speaker or attend a dance.”

### **Organizational Structure**

The teachers and students at William Lenoir are organized in teams. These teams are grouped heterogeneously and the teachers plan cooperatively. Team learning fosters collaborative problem solving, listening to ideas from others, and shared decision-making. Co-teaching takes place in the classes so that all students have opportunities for success. Team teachers are provided time to plan together during their regular work day. We feel that the synergizing aspect of common planning time makes for more innovative curricular ideas.



6<sup>th</sup> graders integrating Science, Art and Math

Schools to Watch are not designated as perfect schools. Rather, they are schools that are demonstrating commitment to the ideals of academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and social equity. The William Lenoir Middle School community continues to examine itself using these criteria so that they continue to provide the best possible education for the young adolescents they serve. They would not say “they have arrived”; instead, they would say “they are on an exciting journey intended to brighten the futures of students, teachers, and families in their sphere of influence.” The evidence of their success will continue to unfold in the hopefulness, confidence, and accomplishments of their students.

### **References**

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