

Dear Dr. McCrea,

...I wanted to move from Michigan to take on something new. I wanted a challenge. I got one teaching in Prince Georges County Public schools in Suitland, Maryland. Prince Georges County is the 19th largest school district in the United States.

If anyone had an interesting and exciting first year, it was the first-year teachers out here by Washington D.C. For my first year, I had my first Code Red lock down of the schools for three weeks because of the two snipers who decided to shoot up the DC area. One boy who was shot went to a Prince Georges County public school. It is only 20 minutes away from where I teach. It was a very humbling and eye-opening experience. You were always looking over your shoulder. We had police officers at our school every day when the kids got on and off the busses.

After the snipers, we had the war in Iraq that put us on the highest terror alert. This alert canceled all field trips for the months of March and April.

The school I teach at is a mile from the entrance of Andrews Air Force Base. We teach while listening to jet after jet take off from the base. The highlight was seeing Air Force One take off once.

I had 21 first graders. I am in a school where for the first time ever, I was the minority. Our school is made up of 98 percent African-American and 2 percent Caucasian. Of the 30-plus teachers, four of us were Caucasian. The school is almost 70 percent free lunch. The area was very poor. Our school did not have a library that was open to the students. We had a room with books in it, but the door was locked. We had to purchase most supplies for the classroom with our own money. We were allotted two packages of paper to make copies, which came out to 2 sheets per student, per day. I really learned to do more with less this year.

Grand Valley did a good job preparing us for the educational aspect of teaching but what I learned from my first year is that you are EVERYTHING to every child in your room. I was called "mom," "grandma" and other names. They look to you for everything and more. I was a teacher first, but also a mom, nurse, friend, disciplinarian, foe, adversary, etc. I was called names from students that most aren't called by adults.

What I would say to first year teachers is that you need to "stay organized". If for one day you are not on the top of your game, it takes a while to get back on track. I would also say to "ask questions." My biggest downfall this year was not asking enough questions.

I do have to say that all my students progressed in all areas of academics.

One last story: I had a boy who came into the classroom who could not read a word on the first grade sight word list. When I tested him in May, he knew 25 out of 30. It made me SO happy!

Thank you, Dr. McCrea.
Sara Porter

S.O.E. Academic Department Updates...

The three academic departments which comprise the School of Education – Curriculum & Instruction, Foundations & Technology and Leadership & Human Services – are constantly moving forward with initiatives, programs and course offerings to better facilitate future and current teaching practices. Following are brief updates on each department:

Foundations & Technology

A second mobile computer lab is being inaugurated for use with the ED 205 (Computers in Education) course, the Educational Technology graduate program and the S.O.E. The first mobile computer cart is located in Mackinac Hall on the Allendale campus and has 32 computers. The new cart has 24 computers for use at 512 Eberhard Center.

A continuing review of Foundations courses is underway with particular emphasis being placed on graduate Foundations requirements. Faculty – including department head David Bair, Susan Carson, Cynthia Mader, Andrew Topper and Jolanda Westerhof-Shultz – are continuing to meet and discuss and develop proposals for improvements.

Additional on-line selections for courses are being offered. Many of the Educational Technology and Library Media courses are offered on-line, as well as a section of Current Issues in Education. At the undergraduate level, several sections of ED 205 and one section of ED 225 are offered on-line in an effort to serve a broader range of students.

Leadership & Human Services

Department head John Shinsky reports that

the Educational Leadership program continues to grow with a majority of the students attaining administrative positions.

The Undergraduate and Graduate Teacher Education program has been successfully restructured based on extensive involvement from faculty. The 2003 summer LD camp – headed by Jim Grant and Joe Fisher – had more than 80 students participating in it.

Special Education Administration faculty are working closely with the Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) to update the competencies for Special Education administrators when providing leadership in the field.

Curriculum & Instruction

Several initiatives involving school mentoring and partnerships are underway in Curriculum & Instruction.

One of the biggest partnerships is The Urban Teacher Academy, which involves teacher assisting and student teaching science majors working within an urban setting to create positive learning experiences for students. Faculty are also actively engaged within these schools with in-service teachers using current best practices and assisting them with mentoring services.

The School of Education is developing projects and partnerships with school districts and is working with Grand Rapids Public Schools on an Instruction Model for high schools.

The School of Education is surveying former students to obtain their input and insights concerning various aspects of their preparation.



Forest Grove Elementary School teacher Robert Smith, left, enjoys the fruits – and pepperonis – of his labor with student Sarah Patmos.

Joining In To Acknowledge 'Cool Teachers'

The School of Education has joined public television station WGUV and the division of Continuing Education to help honor "Cool Teachers" throughout West Michigan.

Now in its 10th year, WGUV's Cool Teacher Award is a fun and tasty way to promote outstanding classroom practices and recognize some of the top teachers in West Michigan. Three teachers a month – selected from submissions by their students – are chosen to be recognized and

honored with a classroom pizza party. Along with the pizza party, the winning teacher and the student that provided the nomination receive tickets for an Amtrak train ride from Grand Rapids to Chicago – and back.

Robert Smith, a fifth-grade teacher at Forest Grove Elementary School in Hudsonville, was one of the October recipients of the award. He was nominated as a "Cool Teacher" by fifth-grade student Sarah Patmos.