Knowledge Matters

Local educators got the chance to sit down with state officials and share the impact switching to high-quality instructional materials has made in improving literacy and enhancing student engagement when the Knowledge Matters campaign traveled to Haywood Monday, February 10 and 11. Haywood was one of three school districts selected for “work they are doing to foster students’ love of reading and writing through the adoption of new English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum.”

A roundtable discussion held Monday morning at Haywood Elementary School gave teachers and parents the chance to speak directly to national instructional experts, representatives from the Tennessee Department of Education, such as Education Commissioner Dr. Penny Schwinn, and state officials, like Representative Chris Hurt, about the new instructional materials adopted in the district.

“Our schools have embraced the challenge of strong literacy curriculum in K-12 and our community will reap the long-term benefits of broad, shared, and sustained knowledge that is vital to strong citizenship,” explained Haywood County Schools Superintendent Joey Hassell.

A majority of the teachers present spoke to how the new material has given them more time to effectively focus on the needs of their students and has given them the assurance that the material they’re teaching is held to a high standard. Now, teachers say, the rigor of the work aligns with state expectations.

“I think your community is in really, really good shape,” Barbara Davidson, Executive Director of the Knowledge Matters Campaign, said after hearing the uplifting stories those in attendance shared. Commissioner Schwinn agreed, commenting that the growth Haywood has seen is evident.

“Reading is the greatest gift that our schools can give our students, and we will remain constant in improving literacy across our schools,” said Hassell.

During the campaign visit, visitors also observed classrooms at HES and East Side Intermediate, reviewed student work and interviewed principals and teachers.

“The Knowledge Matters School Tour's mantra is ‘find the good and praise it.’ Our schools, our teachers, staff, and students are growing daily, and it was certainly impactful to be praised by the visit of the Knowledge Matters team and senior leaders from the Tennessee Department of Education including Commissioner Schwinn,” commented Hassell. “It is a strong affirmation for Haywood County Schools to be recognized by a national organization promoting the restoration of wonder and excitement in our literacy classrooms.”