

Principals Inspiring By Example

2 Educators Are Honored For Diligence and Spirit

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Margaret Huckaby was the principal of Heritage High School in Leesburg even before it opened in 2002. As the "construction principal," Huckaby monitored the school's building, hired staff members, bought equipment and planned the curriculum a year before the doors opened.

She even delivered doughnuts and coffee at 2 a.m. to construction workers rushing to meet an inspection deadline.

These days, she still logs long hours. She is often in her office at 7 a.m. and makes regular, spirited appearances at high school sporting events and after-school activities.

That dedication and enthusiasm helped Huckaby earn this year's Washington Post Distinguished Educational Leadership Award for Loudoun County. Huckaby, 46, was nominated by students, parents and school officials who called her an "ideal" educator and a "strong leader."

"She leads by example," guidance director Jeannine Cummings wrote in a recommendation letter. Students commended Huckaby's positive attitude and ability to inspire the best in others.

Huckaby, who lives in Fairfax County, said teaching has always been her passion.

"I had great teachers in elementary and high school and always wanted to follow in their footsteps," she said.

Huckaby earned a music degree from Miami University in Ohio and began teaching music in Arlington County public schools in 1982.

In 1998, she became principal of Manassas Park High School in Prince William County and took the helm of Heritage in 2001.

Since then, enrollment has nearly doubled. During her tenure, she has overseen the implementation of several programs, including "Success Night," which offers tips to struggling students and their parents.

Huckaby said the work is well worth it.

"It's a lot of fun to see kids come in as 14-year-olds and graduate as young adults. They go through a tremendous change, and to be part of that and help facilitate it makes it worthwhile," she said.

Craig Carscallen, principal of Southeastern Alternative School in Midland, said he is motivated by a similar desire to see troubled students succeed. His dedication earned him the Washington Post's Distinguished Educational Leadership Award for Fauquier County.

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Carscallen said he always wanted to be an educator but took a roundabout way to get there.

"I was trying to follow in my father's footsteps, who was a teacher, but I got sidetracked early on with a family crisis, and it took me years to get back to it," he said.

After earning an engineering degree from Washington International College, Carscallen joined Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1976. He was a Presbyterian pastor in Maryland and Pennsylvania before getting a master's degree in education from the University of Virginia in 1997.

Carscallen's decision in 2001 to head an alternative school was a matter of timing and personal interest.

"It was attractive for me, and it worked for the school. It enabled me to be somewhat creative and design the program," Carscallen said.

Students at Southeastern Alternative School said they view "Mr. C" as more of a friend than an administrator. Staff members agreed.

"When the student body has had a bad day, he's there for the staff with a listening ear, a good book on the topic and a jar of jelly beans," school counselor Margreta Grady wrote in a recommendation letter. Others said that unwavering patience has been a hallmark of Carscallen's five-year tenure.

Carscallen, 60, credited his age and experience.

"I've got a lot of years on me. Serving as a pastor for people, I've been through some of our culture's traumas. You're in the high and lows of their lives. And I love kids. It makes it easy for me to work in this situation."

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