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<http://www2.hickoryrecord.com/content/2009/feb/12/hickory-teachers-star-state-video/news-local/>
<http://tinyurl.com/hickorybright>



Hickory teachers to star in state video

By [Sarah Newell Williamson](#) | Hickory Daily Record

The success Rebecca Morford has had teaching kindergartners may soon be expanded to other teachers across the state.

Morford is one of 168 teachers across North Carolina who was selected to participate in Project Bright IDEA (Interest Development Early Abilities) 2, which is designed to increase the number of gifted students from underserved populations by crafting a new type of classroom curriculum for kindergarten through second-grade students.

Margaret Gayle, project director for Project Bright IDEA, said teachers must design an integrated, concept-based unit with thinking skills that include explaining, classifying, identifying and describing, among others. The units also must go along with the state standard course of study.

"We try to teach all children as if they fit into the top third of the class, and they rise to that expectation level," Gayle said. "We try to get teachers to identify honors students at first grade, but we don't usually break them out into gifted classes until third grade."

Morford, who's taught kindergarten for 15 years, said she likes to base the lessons on science using concepts. Wednesday, she had students learning about birds through hands-on experiments. Students could make their own birds out of feathers, Styrofoam balls, clay and pipe cleaners or they could see which beaks might work better to get food, trying out a turkey baster, tongs, a staple remover or clips. They also guessed

what season might be most difficult for a bird to find food.

"The kids do task rotations, and each one is geared toward a different type of learning. There's interpersonal with feelings, mastery learning with facts, self-expression with a creative outlet and an understanding learner who compares and contrasts," Morford said. "The kids will gravitate to their strength, but you want to give them exposure to all of them."

Christine Lange, program specialist for kindergarten through second grade for Hickory Public Schools, said the Project Bright IDEA helps children who may not have otherwise become honors students develop into honors students, and at an earlier age.

According to research that's been accumulated as the project was being conducted, 10 percent of underrepresented populations of third-graders who graduated from a non-Bright IDEA's class were nominated for gifted and talented programs in six counties that were monitored. However, in the Bright IDEA's second grade graduating class, 24 percent were nominated for gifted and talented programs.

Several of the teachers who have participated in the five-year project were picked to be in an instructional video being produced by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Morford and two other teachers at Viewmont Elementary who have participated in Project Bright IDEA, second-grade teachers Jenn Riddle and Melanie Gray, will be in the video, which is being filmed today.

Gayle said Morford was selected because of her dedication to the project.

"Rebecca Morford really embraced it and implemented the practices," she said. "Not all of the teachers want to or can sustain the level that she has. And she's received the support that she's needed from Hickory City Schools, as well."

Riddle and Gray were selected because they show other elements of the project, Gayle said. She added Hickory Public Schools has incorporated the thinking-skills component from the project into all of its kindergarten through fifth-grade curriculum.

Gayle said the video will be used to show other principals and teachers about the teaching methods used in Project Bright IDEA.

"We'll also show some clips to national policymakers and some state education board members who make decisions about policies and programs," she said.

Other schools systems featured in the video are Guilford County Schools and Thomasville City Schools, Gayle said.

Morford said she's happy she was chosen for the video, and to be in the five-year project in general, which is concluding its final year.

"It's an honor to be selected and learn a new method, and have research to back up the new method," she said.

She added she thinks the project's teaching methods really work.

"The students really use vocabulary, and can really express themselves," Morford said. "They are able to use reasons why something is the way it is. A student is able to talk about the bird he made, and why it needs another leg to stand on, so it won't wobble over. They can think things through. I can see a difference in writing, thinking and problem solving."

Gayle said this is the last year of research.

"This was a research project, instead of a program," she said.

Gayle added it could be turned into a statewide model in the coming years.

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Reader Comments

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Posted by (proudmarinewife) on 02/12/2009 at 07:49 am.

My 6 year old son is in Mrs. Morford's class this year. She is an absolute wonderful teacher and we could not have asked for a better school or teacher for his first year. We are very impressed with our son's progress this year. He is reading and writing, spelling words, and is excited to learn about different science methods. I am looking forward to my 3 year old son going to Viewmont Elementary and hopefully have Mrs. Morford as well! She's the best and I would encourage any family moving to the Viewmont area to go and meet Mrs. Jolly the principal and their child's teachers. They are all truly the best. Go Viewmont Bears! And thank God for teachers like Mrs. Morford! Go Room 10!!

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Posted by (Crafty_Witch) on 02/12/2009 at 08:07 am.

Mrs. Morford sounds like a great teacher. ProudMarineWife has repeatedly told me how much her son loves his teacher. She likes her too. => We need more teachers like this AND we need to pay them better. Education is the foundation of this country. We are no longer educating our children. We are teaching them to take out-dated and useless (yes, they are USELESS) end-of-

grade tests. I applaud teachers who are trying to actually TEACH their students instead of just teaching them how to take a test. Teaching a child how to take a test is NOT preparing them for the future. It used to be about educating children, not just testing them. You GO Mrs. Morford!!

Posted by (siskbr) on 02/12/2009 at 09:14 am.

I have had the wonderful learning experience of teaching next door to Mrs. Morford for the past seven years. I have been in her classroom on numerous occasions to find children independently working as well as small groups. Mrs. Morford's teaching style of assuring EACH child's learning is evidenced by her use of volunteers, individual instruction and intricate planning. I am fortunate to have her as my "teaching neighbor" and the expertise she brings when we collaborate.

Posted by (MO3) on 02/12/2009 at 09:28 am.

I agree with you Crafty Witch. I hated 4th grade each year my children went through because they spent half the year preparing for the writing test..in EVERY class. My children have been fortunate to have mostly good teachers...there have been a few I could've done without...but for the most part they've been good. I'm glad someone has figured out how to teach each child. Good work!

Posted by (cparker) on 02/12/2009 at 09:14 pm.

my son goes to viewmont, and we had a foster son who had mrs morford in kindergarten. his almost immediate improvement was such a joy to witness. i also encourage others in the viewmont area to go and meet ms jolly and mr staley, and tour the school. my son has loved every minute of his time there. i cant believe next year will be his last!

Posted by (eldebo) on 02/13/2009 at 06:43 am.

There are so many wonderful teachers in all of our city and county schools that are NOT recognized who need to be affirmed also. They do an extraordinary job every day and I applaud them. It is no small thing for a teacher to attach herself (or himself) to a classroom full of children every year ..teach them ..love them... watch them grow and then let them go. How do they do this year after year? They truly are devoted to teaching and helping children and we need to encourage them at every opportunity.