



Florence City Schools

Reaching the Top



A focus on the arts

Formed in 1890, the Florence City School system has had a longstanding commitment to academic success for students in the Shoals. In recent years, the district has taken its success to new levels, adding new programs and technology, rethinking its approach to modern instruction and earning a spot as one of the top school systems in the state and the nation.

“Our goal is to give students a deep, cutting-edge curriculum and extracurricular offerings that will allow them to succeed at every level, and in doing that, to become the top-ranked school system in Alabama and among the top in the United States,” says Superintendent Janet Womack.

In the Florence City Schools (FCS), talented student actors, artists and musicians find a place

to thrive. Students who want the skills needed to go straight to work have wide-ranging options. High-achieving students, determined athletes and curious learners all reach their potential and find opportunities to be challenged. With a rigorous instructional program, FCS offers 20 advanced placement courses, 65 career technical offerings, 14 competitive sports with 63 teams and education from the “cradle to career,” Womack says. The district includes a Blue Ribbon School, two Alabama Torchbearer Schools and was one of only two districts in Alabama declared by the State Board of Education as an Innovative School District in 2011.

Rethinking Instruction

The FCS mission, redeveloped in 2012, is to “empower students to explore, create, challenge, innovate and lead.” This new focus represents a fundamental shift in the way teachers teach and students learn, leading to increased success.

“It’s no longer enough to provide students with information and have them spout that information back to you,” Womack says. “In today’s world, students need to know how to apply that information to any situation and create something new. The teacher becomes more of a facilitator, and the students become members of a classroom think tank. Through collaboration and the use of innovative tools, students arrive at solutions to problems. It’s about engaging the student; once they are engaged, they will rise to the occasion.”

Engaging students through technology





To engineer this shift in teaching approaches, FCS is committed to continual professional development. With ongoing training, teachers now focus on instructional methods that encourage critical thinking, problem solving, collaborative leading, analysis, creativity, adaptability and entrepreneurialism.

Incorporating Technology

New technologies play a vital role in FCS' mission of educating students for a changing world. The district became the first in the Shoals area to implement a full digital curriculum and a one-to-one initiative. Every student in Kindergarten through second grade is provided an iPad, and students in grades three through 12 receive a Chromebook. This allows both students and teachers access to the latest learning tools and methods.

Implementing such an initiative requires an unwavering commitment to teacher training. "It's not just about having the technology tools available; we have to be able to engage students with them," Womack says. "And we invest in our employees as well as our students by ensuring that teachers know how to use the technology and integrate it into their classrooms."

Adding Programs

In an effort to provide all the resources students need to reach their potential, FCS regularly adds new programs, activities and initiatives. The system launched its Florence Academy of Fine Arts (FAFA), which is located within Florence High School, in 2013. Students admitted to FAFA have expanded opportunities to major in their choice of Performing Arts, Visual Arts or Digital Arts.

For student athletes, FCS regularly expands its athletic programs. In recent years, the school district has added an indoor athletic facility and launched Alabama's first public high school equestrian team.

The rigorous academic program is the hallmark of Florence City Schools, grades K-12. The commitment to academics continues to grow through Advanced Placement offerings, dual-enrollment opportunities with both Northwest-Shoals Community College and the University of North Alabama, and Florence Virtual School serving grades 7-12.

Building Community

Along with its commitment to educating local students, FCS is dedicated to providing an educated workforce for employers in the Shoals area. To that end, system leaders have strong relationships with the local business community and enjoy its long-term support. The 12 for Life program with Southwire Corporation is an example of a powerful school-business partnership: Southwire has invested more than \$1 million in the project, and students benefit every day from learning and profiting through jobs at the student-run manufacturing facility.

In addition to playing an active role in the business community, FCS endeavors to build strong relationships with district parents. For the past 20 years, FCS has received the national "What Parents Want Award" from SchoolMatch.

"We see education as a vital partnership," Womack says. "It takes a connection between home and school to make students successful."

The district works to communicate openly and regularly with students, parents, faculty and administration through the district's Facebook page, Twitter feed and its websites: FlorenceK12.org, GoFlorenceFalcons.com and GoFAFA.org. 🎵

LEFT: Rigorous curriculum through inquiry-based instruction

RIGHT: Developing college- and career-ready students