

## Alexander County Schools

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Dr. Denita Dowell-Reavis, Ed.D., Communications Director

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East Alexander Middle School is redefining what success looks like after receiving a Golden LEAF Grant from the state. Principal Lee Swanson and Assistant Principal Jessica Cook updated the Alexander County School Board at its February 3rd work session on how the funding is reshaping the school's work.

"We want people to know that kids are coming here and having a good learning experience," boasted Swanson.

The first phase of the grant work involves training in Robert Marzano's educational research, a noted authority with 40 years of study. His research aims to make a school what is called "a high reliability school"—where all students learn the content and skills they need for success in college, careers, and beyond.

Lee explains, "It gets you to measure what is the right work. So what do we need to be doing? And then, selective abandonment. What do we need to stop doing?"

As part of the grant, East and district leaders traveled to San Antonio last month to meet with 1,200 educators from around the country and world. Their goal: To create plans for systemic improvement.

Already, the East administration eliminated some redundant meetings for staff. Plus, they've brought back from Texas teacher training about how to create a safe, supportive, and collaborative culture.

"We had some professional development that our teachers are excited about," says Cook.

Cook says EAMS, like any school, has its challenges.

"We have mental health, social media, and learning loss. We all know learning loss came with Covid. We're still trying to fill that gap. We hear parents talk about that all the time," she continued.

Superintendent Dr. Bill Griffin told board members his hope is the training and redesign at East can be used in more Alexander County Schools.

He and the other attendees say one thing is clear for education in the modern day.

"We must evolve," said Griffin.

Board members commended the district and school leaders for the work in transforming East Alexander and said they look forward to hearing more good news.

The EAMS training is part of North Carolina's commitment to schools using the Golden LEAF grant. The grant amounts to what would cost the district more than one-and-a-half million dollars over five years for staff development. The Golden Leaf grants target middle schools in rural counties.

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