

Special Feature: Creswell, A Historic Highland Landmark



By Sammie
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Creswell Elementary

School has been the educational beacon for students in the Highland area since 1922. The exterior of the main building retains its old-school character as a tall, fortified brick building with concrete molding. Within the last fifteen years, a Pre-K and Kindergarten wing has been added to the school and the library was completely remodeled in 2006. Ms. Chandler, the library clerk, preserves a piece of the library's history, a single brick from the original floor encased in a small wooden frame made from the original molding. Other remnants from days of old set the Creswell Elementary School building apart from most schools in Shreveport. If you look closely, you can still see the chiseled "BOYS" and "GIRLS" signs above the side entrances of the school. Creswell has also been featured in a number of films, including *Premonition* starring Sandra Bullock.

If you drive or walk by Creswell on any given school morning, you can see the school security guard, Mr. Nesby, vigilantly watching the students as they get off buses, climb out of cars,



Creswell Elementary School, Circa 1922

and walk off the sidewalks into the brightly lit Creswell school building. Teachers standing duty—even the principal, Mrs. Tracy Harris, smile and greet students as they walk in. Getting the school day off to a great start is a crucial key to success at Creswell.

Teachers and administrators at Creswell take pride in going above and beyond for the students. The battle cry for many workers at Creswell is, "It's not about us, it's about the children."

Students at Creswell have the unique opportunity to go to a school that celebrates cultural diversity. Creswell is the center school for the ESL program and has been since the early 1990s. Before it became the center school, Creswell initiated the itinerate program around 1980 for ESL teachers to serve the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) student population. The school was chosen as the center school for this unique program because its district, the Highland area, had the largest LEP population in Caddo. Cheryl Rubin, the ESL coordinator for Caddo Parish, hopes that "we will continue to highlight the diversity that makes our country rich." She adds, "Everyone has their own background and traditions that enrich us all." A while later, Ms. Rubin's, the bilingual ESL secretary, Maria Austin, and I had an enlightening conversation about the beauty of embracing cultural diversity. "For so long we've been told that we're all alike, but we're not. We're different—and that's okay," says Rubin. "We all have similarities



Cheryl Rubin, ESL Coordinator

that span across all ethnicities, but we see them through different eyes and we express them differently. Our children are at an advantage because they learn to appreciate the similarities and differences of students from other cultures."

Enrichment programs available for students at Creswell include the Elementary National Honors Society and the Discoveries program taught by Ms. Baker. She encourages her students to "think outside the box" through games, and to develop their creative skills through drawing or by describing pictures from different perspectives. "I think kids are so geared toward testing that they don't get an opportunity to learn and play on their own, and so I try to give them time to research and do their own thing and that way they can develop their own learning," says Baker. The music program at Creswell has an Honors Choir that sings at festivals and nursing homes, mostly during the holidays. "[The choir] is rewarding because the patients cry and then the students cry. It's a wonderful and difficult thing to see, but the children *need* to see it," says Ms. Amy Shepp, music teacher at Creswell.

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Amy Schepp, Music Teacher

“They need to see how they can impact the community.” Other extra curricular organizations are: the 4-H club, boy’s basketball team, the girl’s cheerleading squad, and the Lunch Bunch Reading Club.

Creswell works in collaboration with outside organizations to provide services for students as well. “Various organizations, businesses, and neighbors within the community invest in the progress of our school,” says Ms. Beverly Martin-Green, guidance counselor. Some of these organizations are: Noel Methodist Church, VA Hospital, A Plus at King’s Highway Church, the Shreveport Police Dept., Brookshire’s, VOA, YELP, FDDOC, and Dr. Haskell to name a few.

Third grade teacher Ms. Cyndi Authement has been teaching for twenty-two years and is still inspired by the everyday miracles that happen in her classroom. One student in her reading group could only read eleven words a minute when he came to Creswell. “Today, he read *ninety* words in a minute,” she reported excitedly. Achievements like this are what invigorate Ms. Authement day after day. Bottom line: she wants her students to show *progress*. “[Particular students] may not be doing well on testing, they may not be doing well on grades, but you can

see the achievements that they are making during the day.” Ms. Authement pushes her third graders to very edge of their zone of proximal development. She introduces concepts to them that are above their grade level. “Some of them will catch on, and some of them won’t, but when their taught this skill again in a later grade, they can say, ‘I’ve seen this before, I’ve learned this.’ I taught fifth grade last year and had one student who is now in Junior High come up to me and say, ‘You know that thing we did in your class last year? They’re teaching me that in school right now and I already know how to do it.’”

Creswell also has a thriving music and art department. The colorful creations made by students in Ms. Nichols’s art class usually place in the annual Art-break competition. The music teacher, Ms. Amy Schepp, has been at Creswell for five years. During this time she has been a recipient of the KTBS “One Class at a Time” grant which she used to purchase a music rug and additional instruments and supplies for her classroom. She says that one of the best things about working at Creswell is the diversity of students. “We do some songs or some activities, and maybe there’ll be some Spanish in it and those kids just light up. We’ve done some different activities with Asian cultures and they’ll hear some Chinese or Korean, and they’re like, ‘I know that song, I did that song back where I’m from,’ so, they really like that.” In the process, American children also get to learn songs from other countries. Students practice math skills to count musical notes and

beats, and reading skills to participate in sing-alongs. “Every subject—math, social studies, science, reading—can be involved in music,” says Schepp, “I try to be an interdisciplinary teacher.” Her vision for the music program at Creswell is to have a classroom set of instruments for every student and to revive the dying art of American Folk songs. “When I came here there were five instruments, now there are twenty,” she said with a smile, “So I have a few more to go.”

This is Principal Tracy Harris’s second year and counting at Creswell. “The staff and students were friendly and cordial. I was welcomed with open arms. I feel I have been supported and included as a part of the Creswell family,” says Harris. Her visions for the school is that Creswell will continue to strive toward a higher school performance score (SPS) and provide more positive activities for the students. The current SPS for Creswell is 76.2. “Our goal is to move closer and closer to 100,” says Harris. With the supportive staff, diligent teachers, and hard-working students, I believe that Creswell is well on its way to reaching its goal.

***Editor’s note: to read Sammie’s full article please go to Restorehighland.org.*



Photo by Greg Pearson/The Times