



Briarlake Elementary School kindergarten student Candice Swope, from left, uses sign language to ask a question from teacher Ran-di Shoemaker as first-grader Marie Harris watches. The Decatur school helps hearing-impaired students from 6-14 years old learn basic skills and integrates them into a mainstream school environment. (Staff photo by Donna Williams)

# Dekalb's Briarlake has sign of the time

By Brad Hundt  
Neighbor Staff Writer

There are a small number of Dekalb students who can't hear verbal instructions from their teachers.

But a unique program at Briarlake Elementary School in Decatur helps ease their learning burden. Serving a handful of children ages 6-14 throughout the county, the school helps hearing-impaired children learn basic skills while exposing and integrating them into a mainstream school environment.

"Each child's program depends on their abilities," said Ran Schoenberger, who heads the program. "All of the children who put into the class have intellectual talents."

Ms. Schoenberger added, however, that many of the mainstream students at Briarlake are proficient at the sign language used by those with profound hearing impairments.

"It's a beautiful language. I creative," Ms. Schoenberger.

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# Signing

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Among the classes' creative ends, she said, is a "signing choir" which performs periodic concerts. The spectacle of several children "signing" along with singing is "beautiful" she said.

A seven-year veteran of the elementary school classroom, Ms. Schoenberger left the mainstream classroom in search of new challenges.

"They're lots of problems," Ms. Schoenberger said. "But it's exciting. You can see where you're making strides. You go home tired, but you know you've done something worthwhile."



Staff photo by Donna Williams  
**OVERCOMING OBSTACLES:** Briarlake Elementary School teacher Polly Simpson, from left, gives a lesson to hearing-impaired students Joy Swope and Jaime Bass using sign language.

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## Dancing for Springtime

May was Spring Festival time at Briarlake School and to celebrate this occasion, the primary three students performed four enlightening dances around the May Pole for an audience of 450 parents and students. The activities, according to Miss Alice Bulloch, principal, were performed as an enrichment exercise for the physical education and the music program. Mrs. Harriet Davis, Mrs. Nancy Dickey, Miss Anne Montgomery, and Mrs. Annie L. Braswell, Primary Teachers, organized the May Pole activities with the students. Margaret Ward and Freddy Serrano (above) were partners in the May Pole Dance.

*DeKalb County Elementary Schools  
Briarlake School*

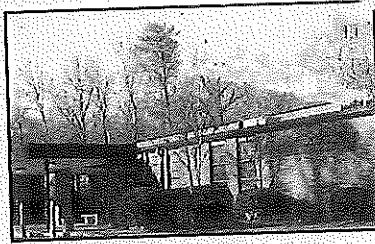
# Briarlake Elementary School Named Georgia School of Excellence

DeKalb County's Briarlake Elementary School has been named a Georgia School of Excellence in an announcement by State Superintendent of Schools Linda C. Schrenko.

"Being selected as a Georgia School of Excellence is one of the highest honors our public schools can receive," Superintendent Schrenko said. "The Georgia Schools of Excellence program brings together students, teachers, and administrators, along with those in the community, to achieve a common goal—a better education for the children in their schools. I am pleased to commend these schools for their hard work and dedication."

Briarlake Elementary currently serves 343 students in grades Pre-K (age 4) through five in regular education, and from pre-school (age 3) through grade five in hearing impaired special education. Briarlake helped pioneer the concept and practice of mainstreaming students with hearing impairments more than a decade ago, serving as a model for school districts across the nation.

Briarlake students excel in academics as validated by test



Briarlake Elementary School

scores and consistently rank in the top quartile nationally. The Briarlake PTA has had 100 percent membership for the past five years.

The combination of caring parents, staff, Partners in Education, and the community join together to support the learning of each individual child.

The Schools of Excellence (SOE) program began in 1984. The nomination process for the SOE program focuses on several vital areas: student focus and support; school organization and culture; challenging standards and curriculum; active teaching and learning; professional community; leadership and educational vitality; school, family, and community partnerships; and indicators of success. Each local school district is in-

ited to nominate one elementary school, one junior high or middle school, and one high school to the SOE program. It is possible for 33 schools to be named Georgia Schools of Excellence each year: one elementary, one middle or junior high school, and one high school from each of Georgia's 11 congressional districts. During October 2001, a panel of highly qualified educators reviewed each nominee.

The reviewers participated in a training session in order to ensure a higher degree of quality and consistency in rating applications. Each school's application was read and evaluated by individuals who signed assurances indicating that they had no connection with the school in question.

Each SOE finalist had a site visit and was evaluated against the available performance data in the department that indicated whether significant improvement had been made. The 16 winners in Georgia will be honored this April at a banquet hosted by Superintendent Schrenko.

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