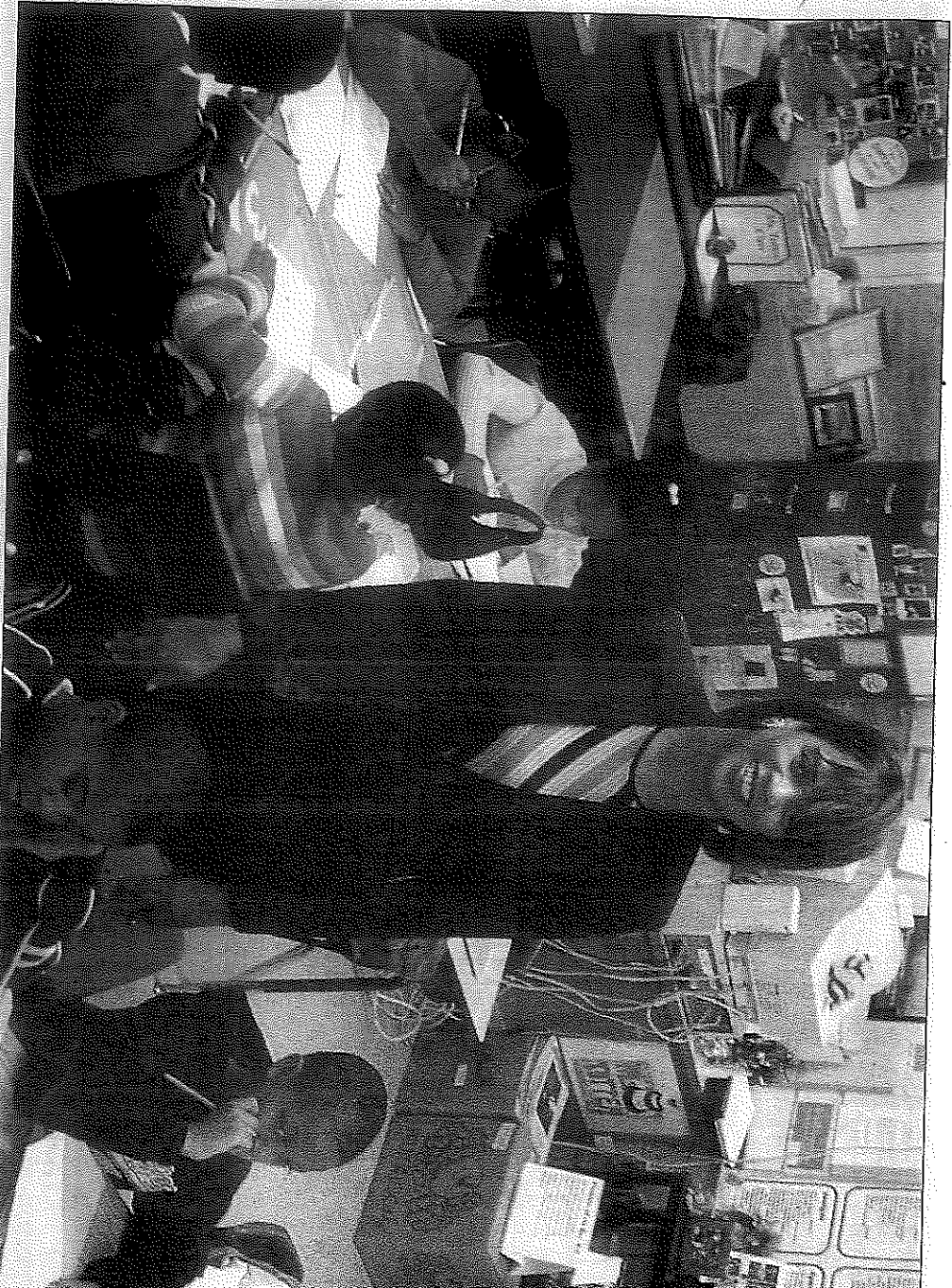


Subject Files Box 82 Kelley Lake Elementary



Linda Woodard takes a break in a busy classroom at Kelley Lake Elementary.

Staff

Kelley Lake principal a victor in score wars

By Noreen Lewis Cochran
DeKalb Neighbor Staff Writer

8/13/02

Linda Woodard, new principal at Kelley Lake Elementary School in Decatur, boosted fourth-grade scores on a standardized test to claim the title of most-improved school in the DeKalb County school system.

In 2000, Kelley Lake was named one of the worst schools in Georgia, based on the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests taken in April.

"We wanted to be off that list," Ms. Woodard said. In 2001, the school improved its score by 32 points in reading, 23 points in English/language arts and 16 points in math.

Her approach to going from worst to first had the strategy of a military operation.

"When it comes to getting results, I can be military," Mrs. Woodard said. "I have a soft touch, but firm. The teachers knew I would lead them in the right direction."

Her rigorous plan included holding three-hour reading workshops, increasing parental involvement, reducing test anxiety by simulating the test environment and making sure the Kelley Lake pre-kindergarten through third grades mastered their skills before being promoted.

Mrs. Woodard has previously served as assistant principal at the school where her role gave her influence over the curriculum. She gives credit to all 36 teachers in the test success.

"We had a lot of communication, a lot of staff development," Mrs. Woodard said.

Classes have nicknames such as Busy Bees and Blooming Butterflies. Student of the month pennants decorate the hallway, which is painted in Kelly-green stripes. Classrooms are crammed with colorful items celebrating reading successes. In the next of this sensory meal-storm, Mrs. Woodard's joints fall, calm and very much at home.

"I have a passion for kids," said Mrs. Woodard. "They're innocent and open and curious."

Mrs. Woodard has been an educator for 21 years, but she has known her calling most of her life.

"I consider myself a natural-born teacher," said the Florida native.

Family tradition almost dictated a career in nursing, the profession of her mother and two sisters. While at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, she worked part-time with her mother at Gadsden County Hospital.

Reading to children in the pediatric ward led to switching her major from nursing to education during her sophomore year.

"My mother did not take it well," Mrs. Woodard said. "But she was very supportive."

The future Mrs. Woodard met her husband, Solomon, while studying at the library.

"We were friends before we got married," said Mrs. Woodard. "That friendship is what you need to take you through those rough periods."

Mrs. Woodard acknowledges several role models, including her predecessor Irvin Burnett, who retired.

"He was here for 32 years," Mrs. Woodard



Mrs. Woodard has been years.

said. "He allowed me to do restrictions. He had a lot of me."

Changes brought about include a private office with ways open, a cabinet full of students and teachers and her daughter. Her husband "I go fishing with him as in

"I'm in the classrooms day," she said. "It's an honor to model a lesson flow that relationship with the

Educators seeking to benefit from Mrs. Woodard "Go with your heart," she's afraid of change."