

File:
SAGAMORE DeKalb New Era
HILLS School 9/20/90



New Principal Says Hello

Dr. Leola Orr, center, gives a warm welcome to parents, teachers and students as she begins her duties as principal at Sagamore Hills Elementary School. Dr. Orr has more than 18 years of experience in elementary education and is committed to developing "well-rounded students," she says. She hugs first graders, J.J. Hare and Martin Fredrick, and is surrounded by parent Anne Murph, student Maria Baumstark and her mother Barbara Baumstark, and teacher Marsha Silas Jackson.

DeKalb principal advises parents who, in his mind, overindulge children . . .



CURTIS COMPTON / Sta

Owen Gilbert, 7, (left) Thomas Sheesley, 7, and Victoria Sheesley, 9, leave DeKalb County's Sagamore Hills Elementary, where principal Joe Reed urges children to be more self-reliant. "Kids don't learn if you do the work for them," he said.

Don't make life too easy

By **PATTI GHEZZI**
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Meredith Anderson had a surprise for her two kids the last time they dawdled too long at home and missed the school bus.

Instead of driving them to their DeKalb County elementary school, Anderson stopped within a half-mile and told them to walk.

"Meanie!" cried 7-year-old MacKenzie as her mother drove away.

Anderson's actions drew praise from Joe Reed, principal at Sagamore Hills Elementary, who sounded off in his recent newsletter, "The Principal's

Corner," urging parents to stop coddling their children.

Reed stopped short, however, of giving Anderson more than an honorable mention in his "Parent Hall of Fame." He disagreed with her decision to drive her son's alto saxophone to school instead of having him carry it.

Rule No. 6 on Reed's hall of fame criteria: "Don't do for your child what he or she can do for him or herself."

National experts say Reed is putting on paper what many principals, especially those in affluent neighborhoods, have been dealing with for

years: well-meaning but overzealous parents whose concern for their child's happiness hinders the child in school.

"All principals encourage parents to be supportive of their child's education, but there are times when parents step over the line," said Vincent Ferrandino, executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. "By trying to help, they actually do more harm than good."

Among the habits Reed and others hope to curb:

► Please see **CHILD**, B4

Schools urge kids to fend for selves

► CHILD, from B1

► Parents hovering over their children's homework, helping every time the child gets stumped or even doing the work for the child.

► Parents driving their children to school instead of putting them on the school bus or having them walk when the school is just a few blocks away.

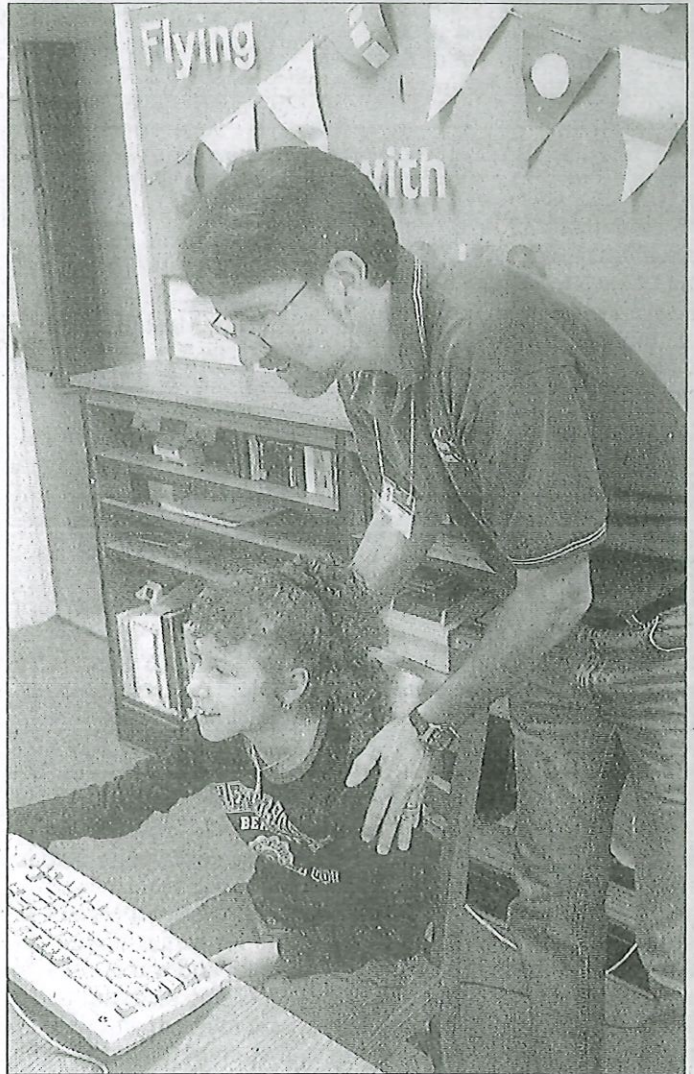
► Parents rushing to the school any time their child forgets homework, eye-glasses or athletic shoes.

► Parents walking their children all the way to the classroom every morning and picking them up at the classroom every afternoon.

The hyper-involved parent is not new to education, but principals say the problem of children being overly dependent on mom and dad has escalated in recent years. Today's parents are often better educated than previous generations, giving them more confidence to get involved in their children's education, which can be taken to an extreme, principals say.

"When you have a lot of well-educated parents, they want to help the teacher," Reed said. "They don't want to leave their kids at the door."

Teachers in poorer neighborhoods often struggle just to get parents to conferences because of conflicting work schedules, language barriers or apathy.



CURTIS COMPTON / Staff

Sagamore Hills Elementary School principal Joe Reed encourages Shelia Garibaldi as she works on an Accelerated Reader Program. Reed wants parents not to coddle their kids. "When you have a lot of well-educated parents, they want to help the teacher. They don't want to leave their kids at the door," he said.

organization for parent involvement in schools, said moms and dads who want to spend time in the classroom need mean-

Elementary, a diverse school nestled inside a wooded north DeKalb subdivision of ranch houses and sidewalks.

But while parent support at school is a plus, Anderson said she faces "parental peer pressure" to be a supermom who drives her kids to school every day and beams when her children receive armloads of academic awards at the end of the year. To try to teach her kids responsibility, she has pulled back on helping her children with homework and nags them to get going on their assignments.

"Once you get into that cycle, it's hard to break," she said, adding that it's most tempting to get involved when the bedtime hour nears.

Test score pressure

The emphasis on high test scores puts pressure on everyone from the school superintendent to the student, said Ferrandino, from the principal's association. Parents may think they need to help their children as much as possible so the school can reach its goals on standardized tests. "We're sort of in a spiral here," he said. "Accountability is important, but at times we get overzealous in how we're applying the pressure."

Bill Silvey, a veteran principal now at Stockbridge Elementary in Henry County, said the issue of parents helping too much with homework and projects is "a delicate one." Schools are loathe to discourage parents from getting involved in their children's education. He encourages parents to set aside a time and place for homework and to review their children's work.

Silvey hopes character education lessons in responsibility and honesty will help Stockbridge Elementary children resist the temptation to have their parents do homework for them.

Overly concerned parents can also make it hard for the school to discipline students, Silvey said.

"As parents our natural urge is to nurture our children and shield them from consequences," he said. "But it's important for children to suffer the logical consequences of their actions."

Right kind of help

Kevin Walker, president of the Project Appleseed, a national advocacy

group, said that in the classroom meaningful things to do that help all children not just their own. For example, parents could help the teacher prepare materials for an upcoming lesson.

The organization discourages parent participation in classroom instruction because an eager parent may take over.

"We hire professionals in the school district to educate our children," he said. "You have to know when to let go."

Walker admits it's not easy. A St. Louis father of four, Walker sat next to his daughter for her first day of kindergarten before realizing he needed to back off.

Reed, the Sagamore Hills principal, is a fan of controversial parenting pundit John Rosemond, who derides today's parents as guilt-driven servants too busy catering to their children to instill a sense of responsibility. But Reed culled most of his parenting beliefs through his adventures as a

Gwinnett County father of three kids now 25, 17 and 15.

When Reed's teenage son overslept and missed the school bus, Reed told him to call a taxi.

As his son works on a science project Reed thinks is doomed not to work, Reed says nothing. "It's his problem," he

said. "Kids don't learn if you do the work for them."

Some might see Reed's philosophy as extreme or even mean, but Reed said he wants his children — and his students — to take pride in their accomplishments knowing they got there themselves, not with their parents standing by to cushion every fall.

When a student wants to call his mother because he forgot his glasses, Reed's advice: "Squint."

Let 'em walk in the rain?

Bill Sheesley, a father of two Sagamore Hills students, said he likes Reed's nonsense rather than "warm and fuzzy" approach, even though Reed chided him recently for picking his children up from school on a drizzly afternoon.

Sheesley, who started letting his kids walk the quarter-mile distance home this year, said the weather report he heard predicted hail.

"Let kids walk in the rain," Reed said. "Children need stories to tell their children about how tough they had it when they were kids."