

Students Welcomed Back to School in Caring and Fun Ways

By Kim Underwood

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools

AUGUST 28, 2017 – When Antonia Lomax and her children Christopher and Najirah arrived at Ashley Academy this morning for the first day of school, more than 100 men were on hand to greet them as they walked up.

“I think it’s great,” Lomax said. “It’s encouraging for the kids. It makes them feel good and feel special.”



The children had no idea that’s how their first day of school would start. Christopher, who is in the third grade, said that it made him a little nervous at first, and then he decided he liked it.

Najirah, who is in the first grade, liked it from the start. She was already excited about school, and this made her even more excited.



This the second year that, with the help and support of others, Lamonte Williams of the Triad Mentoring Coalition, organized the first-day welcome at Ashley.

Although it was billed as a 100-Man Tunnel, well more than 100 men and women from churches, universities, the police department, and community organizations were on hand to greet students and parents.

The presence of such leaders in the community show that people in the community care, Williams said.

“We felt like it was imperative to give these kids a super energy boost on the first day of school.”

Chester David – the chair of the Hunger2Health program at Ardmore Baptist church, which provides weekend meals to 125 students through the BackPack program – said he felt good about the sense of connection that such an event brings to students and their families, to the teachers and other staff members at Ashley, and to the people in the wider community.

“This is the right thing to do,” said David.
“It gives me hope for the whole year.”

Many of the men present will be back during the school year to support students in various ways, he said.



Principal Scarlet Linville said that, while establishing supportive relationships with people throughout the wider community, the welcome said to the students and their families, “We’re in this together,” and shows them, “These are the people who are advocating for you and supporting you.”

The greeters included seven men from St. Paul United Methodist Church, where Camille Roddy serves as the community outreach coordinator.

Seeing so many men there can make a deep, positive impression on students, Roddy said. “This is an image that the community is supportive of young children.”

The greeters also included men from Wake Forest University School of Divinity, the Minister’s Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity, and members of Clark S. Brown chapter of the Prince Hall Masons as well as about 25 students from Winston-Salem State University (WSSU).



“I believe the students seeing us on the first day will make them want to come to school every day,” said WSSU student Tavonte Gray.

“It makes them feel at home and welcomed and cared about,” said Kambre Stephens, the WSSU college liaison who organized the group from Winston-Salem State.

As David mentioned, for many of the men there this morning, this will be the first of many days they will spend at the school. Roscoe Pouncey, a retired captain with the Winston-Salem Police Department, does things to support the school during the school year such as bring in school supplies for students.

Devin Rankin, a member of the Beta Iota chapter of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity at WSSU, has served as a mentor to boys in fourth grade, and he will be doing that again this year.

He was glad to be there this morning.

“They need that encouragement to spark that fire of learning,” Rankin said.



Quanteria Best and her daughter, Aniyah, who is in the first grade, were among the parents and students being greeted this morning.

“I thought it was nice,” said Best. “It’s really encouraging to do something like this on the first day of school.”

Aniyah already knows what she wants to be when she grows up – a dress designer. She makes sketches and, sometimes, she dresses dolls with fabric she has picked out.

This morning, Ashley Academy for Cultural and Global Studies was just one of many Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools that kicked off the new school year for students in special ways.

At North Hills Elementary School, men belonging to the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity were there, along with community volunteers members of staff members' families.



“It was great!” said Principal Tiffany Krafft.

At Moore Elementary, Principal Adam Dovico and others organized a “block party” in the back parking lot where buses drop off students.

Batman and Iron Man were there, along a fairy princess.

“This is a cool school,” said parent Sean Gordon as he and his wife, Christina, waited for their third-grade daughter Brianna to have her picture taken with Batman and Iron Man. He wishes that the first day of school was like this when he was in elementary school.

“It makes it more relaxed,” Gordon said. “It brings the fun back into learning. It brings the fun to education.”

Brianna’s twin sister Niarie was off on some other adventure but returned in time for a family photo.



When Traci Jermyn is not being a fairy princess, she’s the speech pathologist at Moore. She had created her costume out of one bride’s maid dress, one Halloween wig, one donated crown, and a set of wings loaned by the daughter of a colleague.

In some respects, Jermyn wouldn't mind being a fairy princess every day.

"I wish I could work magic every day," she said.

After thinking about it for a moment, she said that, in a way, she does work magic with students every day. That's the great thing about being an educator.

"I just don't always see it," Jermyn said.



When he's not being Batman, Paul Hicks teaches physical education and health at Moore. Iron Man Bryan Timmons is married to Ruth Ann Timmons, the reading specialist at Moore.

Ruth Ann Timmons is looking forward to the year.

"This is my 17th year," she said. "It keeps getting better. It's wonderful to see all the kids."

One of the block party activities was jumping rope, and third-grader Shyla Simms demonstrated that she is quite skilled.

Sisters Angelina and Ariya Yin are excited about the new school year. "I get to learn new things," said Angelina, who is in the fifth grade. At the moment, she's not sure whether she will grow up to be an artist or an FBI agent.

Ariya has no idea what she wants to be when she grows up. But she does know she's looking forward to first grade.

"I get to learn new things and harder stuff," she said.



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