Carmel Elementary School Counselor Named CCSD’s 2014 Counselor of the Year

Carmel Elementary School Counselor Elizabeth ‘Liz’ Ray, left, realizes that she has been named the Cherokee County School District 2014 Counselor of the Year during a surprise award presentation and reception at the school on Friday, March 7, 2014. ‘I think the world of her and all of the staff thinks the world of her,’ said Principal Dr. Keith Bryant, right.

Elizabeth “Liz” Ray is the counselor for more than just the students of Carmel Elementary School. She’s the counselor for the school’s entire community.

“I think the world of her, and all of the staff thinks the world of her,” Principal Dr. Keith Bryant said of Ms. Ray, who on Friday, March 7, 2014 was surprised with the news that she is the Cherokee County School District’s 2014 Counselor of the Year. “Even when I’m having a bad day, I can turn to her for wisdom.”

The surprise celebration for Ms. Ray included the presentation of the award by Cherokee County Deputy Superintendent of Schools Dr. Brian Hightower and of a bouquet of roses and brunch reception provided by the school. Ms. Ray’s husband, Chuck, and her mother-in-law, Molly Ray, joined Ms. Ray’s colleagues at the celebration.
“What a phenomenal career,” Dr. Hightower said, as he presented Ms. Ray with the award. “She cares deeply about every student and understands that if you don't focus on a child's self-esteem and help him feel better about himself, he'll never succeed.”

Ms. Ray qualified for the award by being nominated as the Counselor of the Year for the Woodstock Innovation Zone, which includes the high school and its feeder middle schools and elementary schools. A panel of veteran educators selected Ms. Ray as the Cherokee County Counselor of the Year from the six eligible Zone winners. She now will compete for the Georgia Counselor of the Year honor, which will be presented this summer. She will be recognized by the Superintendent and School Board at the School Board meeting on April 17, 2014.

She began her career as an educator in 1980 and has worked both as a counselor and a teacher. Ms. Ray holds a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education from Georgetown College and two Master of Education degrees, one in guidance counseling and the other in administration, both from the University of Louisville.

Ms. Ray joined CCSD in 2002 as a fifth-grade teacher at Carmel Elementary and transitioned to her current role as counselor in 2007. During her tenure at Carmel, she has served in many additional roles including as Carmel Ambassador Sponsor and Response to Intervention Chair, as well as on committees including Building Leadership Team, Positive Behavior, 504 and the School Council. The Positive Behavior Committee recently achieved prestigious National School of Character recognition for Carmel Elementary.

In addition to counseling individual students, parents and staff, she initiates small group counseling for areas of need, which this year have included topics such as: changing families, anger management, responsibility and organization, grief, social skills, friendship, anxiety and self-esteem. She also teaches classroom guidance lessons to kindergarteners through second-graders on subjects including safety, career choices, bullying and kindness.

An initiative that Ms. Ray said she’s especially proud of is the Student Welcome Bag Program, which she began six years ago. Her newest initiative is the Ladies Lunch Group, which hosts recommended girls from the fourth- and fifth-grade for lunch and lessons to help develop their social skills and friendships. Dr. Bryant said although these girls meet in a group setting only once a week, Ms. Ray checks on them throughout the week.
“By doing so,” he said, “she demonstrates to her students that she cares about them collectively and individually and knows their future is bright as long as they continue to strive to reach their full potential in all that they attempt.”

Colleagues and parents alike praise Ms. Ray for the support she’s shown them and for how she’s changed their hearts through her selfless approach to serving students.

“She has taken food, household items, bedding and coats to our students when they were needed. She mentions these trips to no one,” teacher Denise Karel said, noting she learned of these trips when Ms. Ray helped a student in her class. “It is truly a blessing to have Liz Ray at Carmel.”