

A TEACHER'S COMMITMENT

Some of the particularly effective programs instigated by SSHS funding include:

Project Alert, a preventative program focusing on drug and alcohol abuse. The need for a program like this is high in New Hanover County. "In our Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 30 percent of eighth graders report drug use, and 11 percent of sixth graders do," says Clements. The survey, implemented in 2005 by Clements' evaluation team, surveyed 1000 New Hanover County kids in middle school and high school, and found high rates of drug use and alcohol use. More than half of all graduating seniors surveyed had smoked marijuana; while 46 percent had drunk five or more alcoholic drinks in a row in the past month.

Second Step, a social skills development program in place in some county preschools and all elementary schools in New Hanover County. "We've seen positive changes in four year olds through the individual observations in the preschool setting," says Brewster.

Families in Schools Together (FAST), a program serving small groups of high-risk families. Participants meet once a week for three hours to focus on parenting skills, and cook a meal or work on a family project together. "It has had a tremendous impact," says Clements. Brewster agrees that this program has made significant progress in increasing positive parenting skills among the participants.

As a special education teacher in her native Iran, Dr. Mahnaz Moallem strived to become a better teacher. This dedication to teaching drove her to further her education in Iran and later at Florida State University and it is what drives her research in instructional methods and technology as a professor of instructional technology at the Watson School of Education. "I am deeply committed to human development, and fortunately my work has allowed me to pursue this passion," says Moallem.

Moallem's research focuses on how people learn and how to incorporate non-traditional methods of learning into a Web-based approach to teaching. Her research also has a strong international focus. Her research interests include instructional design models and principles, development of Web-based instructional materials, design and development of online collaborative learning environments, and how new and emerging technology can improve learning and instruction.

She is currently involved in two research projects and has also recently applied for a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) with a group of computer science faculty and officials from three local school systems. The group plans to begin a three-year program to encourage students in New Hanover, Pender and Brunswick counties to study science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) by offering expanded information technology programs to students and teachers in grades 7 through 12. The goal of the program is to teach students and teachers how to exploit the Squeak Media Authoring Tool—a free open source computer-programming tool—as a modeling environment to infuse IT skills into core STEM curriculum.

One of her other research projects grew out of her own experience in teaching online courses. "I confronted issues when I started teaching online courses. Students had different styles of learning and it was difficult to keep non-traditional students in online courses. Non-traditional students found that although online courses are convenient, it didn't match their learning styles," says Moallem. She has since spent the last two to three years developing instructional strategies that address the needs of non-traditional learning and is studying how online learning differs from traditional classroom-style learning.

In December 2005, she visited the Philippines and Taiwan and presented her study on different learning styles in an online environment, and found that educators in both places were very interested. In June, she met online with researchers from both places to begin a study comparing online learning styles of students from the Philippines, Taiwan and the United States.

She is also working to partner Wilmington science teachers with science teachers in New Zealand. She's initiated a pilot program for students to collaborate with one another online, and for the participating science teachers to compare teaching methods and set up similar goals.



Dr. Mahnaz Moallem, left, conducting a workshop for teachers and faculty in the Philippines.

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