Since joining the College of Education (COE) at Georgia Southern University in 2014, Mete Akcaoglu, Ph.D., has been engaged in work with our K-12 school partners. His initial work was with colleagues Antonio Gutierrez de Blume, Ph.D., and Chuck Hodges, Ph.D., in an afterschool gaming club at the STEM Academy in Savannah, and he later continued this work at William James Middle and Nevils Elementary Schools in Bulloch County. Akcaoglu co-founded the Innovation Studio on the Statesboro Campus in 2015 as a makerspace for teachers, students, faculty, staff, youth, and local community members to foster a culture of innovation and prepare future leaders to learn, make, and play with cutting edge technologies, while seeking solutions to real world problems. Today he partners with COE’s Lucas Jensen, Ph.D., to offer technology-rich learning experiences in the Studio. Akcaoglu’s knowledge and skills have been instrumental in supporting teachers and students as they develop their skills with instructional technology. Prior to COVID requiring a shift to virtual learning, Akcaoglu was working with teachers at DeRenne Middle School to help science and social studies teachers develop relevant and meaningful technology-based instruction for their students. He expanded to offering this type of support, along with colleague Jackie Kim, Ed.D., to 30 educators and administrators in Chatham, Bulloch and Liberty Counties as they returned to virtual instruction this fall. Most recently he and COE’s Hodges and Selcuk Dogan, Ph.D., received a $300,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (Grant #2027948) in which they will be working with six teachers at Metter Middle, the Statesboro STEAM Academy, Screven Middle and DeRenne Middle Schools to develop a computer science curriculum based on digital game design.
Bulloch County Behavior Screener Development and Tier 2 Intervention Support

School Psychology faculty members Dawn Tysinger, Ph.D., and Jeff Tysinger, Ph.D., worked with Bulloch County Schools to develop a behavior screener and behavior incident report form that will help teachers and administrators focus on behavior intervention and not just discipline. The screener is being piloted at three elementary schools this fall: Langston Chapel, Julia P. Bryant and Mattie Lively. The Tysingers will provide professional development on how to use the screener and incident report form, as well as the use of the data that is generated from the screeners to develop Tier 2 behavior interventions. Additional professional development on designing and facilitating Tier 2 behavior interventions will also be provided.

Learning Pod Support for Community Volunteers

Through a collaboration with the United Way and the Savannah Economic Development Authority (SEDA), the College of Education developed materials to support community volunteers and other adults who are working with children in learning pods. A guide, titled “Tips and Techniques for Supporting Students in Learning Pods,” and a coordinating powerpoint with hyperlinks to additional resources is available, and Nedra Cossa, Ph.D., and Cynthia Massey, Ph.D., will also provide professional development on an as-needed basis as additional support. The learning pod support materials can also be found on our Partnership and Outreach website. Please feel free to share with your friends and colleagues who are supporting students in learning pods. COE collaborators in the project included: Elizabeth Williams, Ed.S., Nedra Cossa, Ph.D., Kitty Crawford, Ed.D., Stephanie Devine, Ph.D., Kathryn Haughney, Ph.D., Kania Greer, Ed.D., Heather Huling and Mary Thaler.

(Left to Right: Elizabeth Williams, Nedra Cossa, Kitty Crawford, Heather Huling, Cynthia Massey, Stephanie Devine, Kathryn Haughney, Kania Greer, and Mary Thaler)
Trauma-Informed Education Symposium

In collaboration with Lizann Roberts from the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition and under the direction of Regina Rahimi, Ed.D., Delores Liston, Ph.D., and Amee Adkins, Ph.D., from Georgia Southern and Vanessa Keener, Ed.D., from Savannah-Chatham County Public School System (SCCPSS) Dept. of Specialized Instruction, a symposium was hosted that brought together regional experts and community resources in trauma informed education. More than 100 teachers and counselors participated in the symposium in August. All sessions were recorded and are available to all educators and counselors in SCCPSS.

Faculty Share their Expertise on Parent University T.V.

David Owens, Ph.D., from the College of Education, and Maya Clark, Ph.D., from the Waters College of Health Professions shared their expertise with Michael O’Neal, Executive Director of Parent University. The interview with Owens focused on using dreams, dragons, and swords as metaphors to help adults work with children on setting goals and developing the skills necessary for overcoming obstacles. Clark offered communication strategies to engage children conversationally during increased virtual learning and social distancing. She also spoke about ways to read the nonverbal communication children give that may indicate stress and frustration during these pandemic times, as well as ways to assist children in expressing their needs verbally. Watch the segments on Vimeo.

Mentoring and Supporting New Teachers

Recognizing that the first year of teaching can be challenging, COE’s Taylor Norman, Ph.D., Alisa Leckie, Ph.D, and Courtney Toledo are mentoring and supporting new teachers at DeRenne Middle, Langston Chapel Middle and Langston Chapel Elementary Schools. Providing an extra set of hands in the classroom, the COE faculty are also assisting with additional ideas for lesson design and implementation. The faculty members are focusing on creating positive and productive classroom environments and allowing the new teachers to take the lead with identifying areas in need of support. Along with spending time in the classroom with teachers, the mentors are providing additional virtual support by sharing resources and ideas. The goal is to help new teachers begin with a solid foundation which will hopefully encourage them to remain in the profession.
Leadership teams at Langston Chapel Elementary (LCES) and Langston Chapel Middle (LCMS) Schools were awarded the National Youth-at-Risk Critical Resource Award to support faculty and students at their schools. LCES will be using its funds to support social-emotional learning and literacy development through a series of Saturday workshops for students with concurrent Parent Cafes for their parents. LCMS will be using its funds to support professional development for teachers in culturally relevant pedagogy and restorative discipline practices.

NASA Day on the Armstrong Campus

Kania Greer, Ed.D., and Mary Thaler from the College’s Institute of Interdisciplinary STEM Education (i2STEM®) coordinate the University’s STEMFest every fall that attracts hundreds of students, parents and community members. This year, however, they had to use their skills in very different ways in order to create an engaging, hands-on event for the community that adheres to social-distancing and sanitation guidelines. Their efforts were a huge success. Basing the event off of displays on loan from NASA, activities included: 1) aquaponics and food in space, 2) cooperation and communication skills in docking a space station, 3) the moon and tides, 4) packing for space, and 5) astronaut photo booth. Groups included several Boy Scout packs, school groups from Savannah-Chatham and Brunswick as well as families from Parent University. Faculty and staff volunteers included Travis Swanson, Ph.D., assistant professor of geology, Brigette Brinton, curator of the Sustainable Aquaponics Research Center (SARC), Elizabeth Rasnick, Ph.D., assistant professor of computer science, Kelly Kennedy, COE graduate advisor, and Eric Hogan, Ph.D., assistant professor of educational psychology. Student volunteers included COE pre-service student teachers and members of Beta Alpha Psi Accounting Honor Fraternity.
Paid Residency Partnership with Savannah-Chatham

SCCPSS and the COE are piloting a Paid Residency Program this year with the goals of developing a pipeline of exceptional teachers for the district and enhancing teacher retention. The program provides an opportunity for teacher candidates in the final year of their undergraduate teacher preparation program to be hired by SCCPSS as full-time teachers, called teacher residents. They earn a salary of $19,000 for the year and full benefits. Two teacher residents are working at Pulaski Elementary School and two at Hubert Middle School during this pilot year. They each fill a vacant teaching position. A classroom educator who has demonstrated exemplary performance in teaching and in mentoring other teachers has moved out of the classroom at each school and serves as a full-time mentor teacher to the two teacher residents. A COE faculty member serves as a university supervisor at each school also providing support to the teacher residents and mentor teachers. Guided by Heather Bilton, Ed.D., human resources director for SCCPSS, and Deborah Thomas, Ph.D., a COE associate dean, the program was developed in collaboration with numerous SCCPSS and COE faculty and administrators.

Upcoming Events

P-20 Collaborative | Thurs., October 15 at 4 p.m. | Zoom
On October 15 at 4:00 p.m., the P-20 Collaborative will share best practices for instruction during the pandemic, effective online pedagogies, and legal issues with online learning. Associate Professor of Instructional Technology Mete Akcaoglu, Ph.D., will be sharing his expertise as well. Please use the Zoom link below to join other stakeholders from across the region. Contact Regina Rahimi, Ed.D., at rrahimi@georgiasouthern.edu, for additional information.

Join us via Zoom at: https://georgiasouthern.zoom.us/j/98784827436?pwd=a2l6WktYSW10Qm82VGZkcEZ0cGtSUT09

Georgia Southern Partnership Council Meeting | Wed., November 18 at 4 p.m. | Zoom
On November 18, we will have our Fall GSU COE Partnership Council meeting. Along with all other Colleges of Education across the state, we are working on redesigning our teacher education programs to be more relevant to the demands and needs of today’s educators. Interested in being a part of this conversation? Please join us at 4:00 p.m. Contact Alisa Leckie, Ph.D, at aleckie@georgiasouthern.edu, for additional information.

Join us via Zoom at: https://georgiasouthern.zoom.us/j/84690345043?pwd=Y2t1ZlVja2p6bUtZbG52UkYveU1iQT09