

gs *New Vision To Old Foundations*

By Ronald Horton

As competition in public education has stepped up the tempo of life in the schools, where technology and modern media continue to bombard young minds with data and stimuli, competing for their time and money, the pace for Fred Bartholomew has definitely not slowed or diminished. His faith in himself, like his faith in others, has sustained him since the halcyon days of the 1960s when he entered the field of education; and today, thinkers and planners in the rapidly-changing arena are discovering and restating ideas in which he has been a firm, early believer all along!

Mr. Bartholomew's successes have been the direct result of long- and short-range goals for his career, as well as careful and deliberate preparation. Moreover, he credits his home training and family devotion to the work ethic for his sense of purpose and stamina in making the overall climb a rewarding and fulfilling one. Mr. "B", as most of his staff and students have called him over the years, waded into the struggle for quality and relevance in public education during the time of great change known as the Civil Rights Movement in society. He admits that he knows only too well the difficulties of both Blacks and Whites who have been resolute in their attempts to gain equality of opportunity and performance for all races; and he has always taken private pride and pleasure in his search for fairness and for positive achievements in human relations. In these endeavors, as in most of his professional life, he has tried to do more than merely follow the dictates of prescribed laws. He has pursued a course of fairness coupled with firmness throughout many a troubled time.

At Princeton Union School, Mr. B (for those struggling with Bartholomew) is a K-12 administrator with a pace fast enough to require a body beeper and a golf cart to shuttle him back and forth from one campus location, meeting, evaluation, game or special project to another. Nevertheless, with an enrollment of more than one thousand, this principal does not believe that bigger is always better in the education business. Fred has observed over the years that in many of the large, comprehensive high schools, the staff does not get to know all of the students by name, much less have the information to know which visitors to the school belong there and which ones spell trouble. In his current role at Princeton School, Mr. B can generally recognize each young person, call his name, and tell him something important about his academic career or his family.

In spite of the total task to be done, Mr. Bartholomew is adamant in his belief that the principal sets the tone, defines the school, and gives it direction. His faculty handbook makes these points clear! Whether he is in conference one-on-one, before a staff gathering, or addressing the student body, he seldom raises his voice, preferring instead to wait for others to listen before he speaks. Perhaps this is true in part because of his Southern upbringing. He was born in a community near Warrenton, North Carolina, called Warren Plains, and the hint of Virginia gentleman is no accident. Everyone on campus recognizes it when he greets each one with "Ha' aw ya?"

Leading a good school in which young folks learn and take the spotlight is also not an accident. Mr. B insists that a primary goal for him personally over the years has been to defend the integrity of the school from detractors—political or otherwise. He wants his learning environment clean, competitive, and current, with an eye toward the future. If you want to see him blanch with indignation and suppressed rage, just attack the reputation or potential of his school. Therefore, he devotes much time and energy to strong public relations and "selling" programs, projects, and planned changes to the local, county, and state following. He admits that it is not always easy, for this is a time of staggering bureaucracy, with everybody wanting to be satisfied customers or to receive special consideration.

If Mr. Bartholomew wished to slow down and refuse some forms of professional or social participation, he likely could not. He is heavily involved with humanity and has learned through constantly working with and serving others that the only meaningful life is one of interaction with and improvement of others. As a school leader and a Baptist, as well as a member of the Princeton Lion's Club, he is a frequent guest speaker, eulogist at funerals, supporter of community functions, and a general cheerleader for all that goes on at school.

Whenever the local staff and student body see Mr. B coming down the hall in his best athletic gait, wearing his bright red N.C. State blazer, they know that his favorite college team has won again and that the boss is in a good mood. Furthermore, they know they can further brighten his day if they mention his granddaughters, Anna Mikel and Traci Bridgers. While Mr. B's three children were students at PHS, he says he often worried about their adjustment and the pressures upon them from other students. However, his youngest daughter Nancy used to chide him by asking, "How're we doing today, Fred?" Thus, Papa's fears were put to rest.

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In front of the PHS gymnasium, Mr. B confers with cheerleader Amy Parrish, an honor student and active school supporter in all facets of campus life.

Mr. Bartholomew is often touted for his ability to put together a strong and effective staff. He practices psychology on them, teases them, and motivates them to meet the needs of every pupil while enriching themselves and continuing their own educations. Although he is essentially conservative and moderate in nearly everything, he does not like for his administrative peers to outdo him in any way. His competitive spirit, honed undoubtedly on the ballfields years ago, proves to be contagious. He also advocates constant preparation and adaptability among his faculty and staff. "Nothing is static. Education is like life. It is in a constant state of flux," he insists.

Teachers at PHS describe Mr. B as skilled in motivation, in human relations, and in arbitration. Through diplomacy he often defuses problems before they can escalate into embarrassing confrontations. He weighs situations carefully and practices creative discipline. Even the student body regards him as firm, but fair. His style is that of a warrior against negativism!

An avid golfer, Mr. Bartholomew runs for exercise and tries to watch his weight. In student-faculty basketball games, he is one of the first adults to hit the floor. Everyone on the local school campus will tell you that Mr. B *can* quit smoking cigarettes and get serious again about this health. They have seen him give them up so many times! His family enjoys trips to their Topsail Island beachhouse, where Fred suns, golfs, spends time with his offspring, and finally catches up with his reading. *Future Edge* by Joel Barker is a recent title inside the profession and just for the fun of it, Mr. B says he laughed all the way through Lewis Grizzard's *Chili Dogs Always Bark at Night*.

An innovator, Principal Bartholomew won the fight to experiment with a highly positive strategy to address problems in academics, attendance, discipline, and the performance of homework. He dubbed it Project STEP (Scheduled Techniques for Educational Performance). A reward system, it allows students who qualify through improved effort and grades to miss their sixth and seventh period classes every Friday afternoon, while other students remain at school for tutoring, one-on-one practices, help with missed work, and enrichment opportunities. During the 1992-93 school year, he added a fifth area of participation called independent study, designed for those students who only need additional work in a single subject area and who may have a genuine struggle to find time to do their homework. Last year attendance (although already high) improved 38% over the previous year, the number of students attaining honor roll rose by 6.9%, overall improvement of grade point averages for all students was at 2.841, total percentage of students failing one or more subjects decreased by 15.7%, and in-school or out-of-school disciplinary cases plunged to an overall decrease of 104 from 167 to 63 compared to the 1990-91 academic year. "If for no other reason discipline makes this a successful program," he states.

In order to promote and reward scholarship, Princeton High School has created its own Academic Banquet, modeled after sports banquets, in the spring of each year. One of the first of its kind, this honors banquet offers an applique letter to those who make honor roll three out of four grading periods and a lamp of knowledge applique for the same performance during ensuing years. Locally, numbers are up and commencement marshals will likely include an unprecedented list.

When pressed for his opinions on the greatest influences affecting public education, Mr. Bartholomew gave the same response he recently offered on WUNC's "Personalities in Education" forum: integration, consolidation, and the breakdown of the family unit. "Schools are too large," he observed. "Anything above 700-750 can not be managed effectively," he added. "Perhaps a return to the old concept of neighborhood schools is not such a bad idea." He continued to say that more money needs to be spent on smaller schools to update facilities and to hire more teachers in specialized fields.

Remembering how segregation used to be during his own youth, Mr. B remarked that now every child has more nearly the same or an equal opportunity to be educated. "Integration was a good thing; schooling is much fairer for all children now," he admitted.

"With both parents working outside the home and not having anybody to check on young children and teenagers after school, anything can and often does happen to children today," Mr. B continued. "Around here, some 40% of our homes are single-parent homes. Too many kids come to school unfed and unprepared for academic classes as well as strenuous playtime activities."

Still singled out among remaining union schools in the state, Princeton High attracts not only the watchful eyes of other educators around the county and state, but it also has been the focus of attention for its curriculum, innovations, and progressive spirit by WTVD, Channel 11, and Raleigh's Channel 5 television stations. "Good Morning, Heart of Carolina" has been broadcast twice from the Princeton campus, and WRAL has visited to collect footage on the progress of Project STEP.

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Princeton Pride extends deeply into the community, as well! The school continues to be the heart and focus of hundreds of local citizens, who give it their money, their time, their accolades, their defense, and their devotion. Not infrequently, parents of current students and former students credit the positive growth of their children to the learning environment and personal attention stressed by Mr. Bartholomew. "Parental support and appreciation for what we are trying to do definitely make it possible for us to fulfill our mission," he finished.

Bartholomew knows that both his style and his abilities have been molded and influenced by outside forces and mentors. He credits all four of the superintendents under whom he has served for their contributions to his educational philosophies and performance. "From J.R. Peeler I learned that there is no substitute for quality. Staff and building construction should always be first-rate. In the Johnston County schools, Evander S. Simpson was able to bring about the smoothest transition in integration in the state of North Carolina. I would have to say that he was a very far-sighted, very savvy educator. He was a genuine visionary who knew his way around the citizens, the Board of Education, the administrators, the County Commissioners, and even the students with whom he worked. When he wanted something he never stopped until he got it," Mr. B explained.

"From Dr. James Ellerbe I learned a very different management style," Fred continued. "He liked for local principals to run their own schools for the most part. I remember him as a capable organizer and a detail man. Our present superintendent, Dr. G. Thomas Houlihan, is likely years ahead of his time! He is clearly an innovator, a motivator, a debater, a facilitator, a super salesman, a bold risk taker, and has no rival at gaining the cooperation of the business world, the taxpayer, the institutions of higher learning, and the political figures who can do good things for public education in Johnston County and the state."

During his tenure, he says he has seen the founding of the North Carolina Principals/Assistant Principals Association. He adds that his professional organization is now called the Tarheel Association of Principals and Assistant Principals of which he the past president and he is proud of the accomplishments of the Association.

These days, Fred insists his greatest pride, however, comes from more local circumstances, mostly having to do with his staff and students. He remembers with special joy having the opportunity to present diplomas to his own three children as they graduated from Princeton High School. He relishes the thought of their taking on satisfying roles in society, as well as learning that ever increasing numbers of his former students are also earning university degrees, are finding fulfilling jobs, and are staying out of harm's way. He admits that he is particularly gladdened by the numbers of graduates who are becoming teachers, lawyers, pharmacists, etc. On the scene at Princeton High School, the faculty almost always contains eight to ten local alumni, who are carrying on the cherished traditions and emulating their former teachers who tried to light a flame within them in earlier times.

Mr. Bartholomew has had several opportunities to advance within the profession, but he has routinely declined to leave the spot at the head of a good school. "Advancement," he further explained, "would be important but would separate him from his chances to see young people mature, to assist new teachers entering the business, and to savor his friendships with co-workers with whom he has literally grown up with, especially at the *Princeton Union School*. I have been around Ricky Boyette, Debra Lane, Thelma Wall, Janet Wells, Janet Boyette, Tucker Twisdale, Matthew Sanders and Edith Creech for such a long time. I have counted on them and others for so much help in making a good school. I know only too well that I want to continue to associate with those who are not only sharp, but the best folks in the world!" he reminisced. "One other cohort, Gerald Poplin, has always been a mainstay. I'm a career Principal."

Beyond the inner circles of public education, Mr. Bartholomew ventured to urge less assignment of blame to the schools for whatever areas of criticism exist today and the acceptance of a greater role in children's training and instruction by parents, communities, and those in positions of authority and influence who can have a meaningful impact on the total process and the total product.

Among the most important aspects of his private and professional life, Mr. B ranks his family at the top of the list. He is married to the former Deanna Ballou (Dee) from Morehead City, NC. The couple have two daughters, Betsy Bridgers (a teacher at Benson Elementary) and Nancy (an employee with the NC Film Commission in Raleigh), as well as a son Ricky (a student and part-time employee in Goldsboro). The Bartholomews have a permanent residence in Princeton. Needless to say, spending quality time with them, as well as with his granddaughters, makes many a long work day brighter!

"I'm where I want to be," volunteered Mr. Bartholomew. "I wouldn't trade places with anyone else I know."

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Friday afternoon early departure has become popular among high school students because of Project STEP. Mr. B congratulates those who qualify as they go home for the "longer" weekend.



Proudly displaying shirts which read 100 Book Club readers mug for with Principal Bartholomew and Principal Wood

Proud Bartholomew shirt Mikel, his first volleyball game On She was only six months already had aaron