

Nazarene Educator Honored by Local School District

By Beula Postlewait

A Dream Come True

“Being able to plan this building from conception to building construction has been the most interesting project of my teaching career,” says Cindy Alsip, from Greenville County, South Carolina, who had the privilege of seeing a professional dream come true.

Cindy is talking about a 54,000-square-foot building with room for 400 students. It is a new wing—at this point called Building B—for the J. L. Mann High School. It will house the NewTech@Mann program with an educational model that emphasizes project-based learning. Cindy Alsip is the director of NewTech@Mann. The space in this building is totally different from traditional lecture-style classrooms.

A High-Tech Workplace

Some people say it resembles a high-tech workplace rather than a school room.

- There are expandable classrooms and larger science labs to accommodate single and combined classes.
- There are three study rooms with media tables intended for student groups to collaborate by connecting their laptops through the media table.
- Three common areas allow students to leave the classroom to meet their groups and work. All classrooms are surrounded by glass to give students more movement and still be supervised.
- Teachers can bring smaller groups, up to 16 students, to workshop areas to give lessons when students need instruction.
- There are two “Think Tanks” where formal presentations can occur, often by community and business leaders.
- There is an adult learning space for in-house professional development for our staff or for outside groups who want to learn about “project-based learning” and how the building was purposely designed for it.
- Current technology has been installed, including projectors that allow students to interact on any surface. There are media tables that allow students to collaborate by connecting their laptops through the table. There is a portable broadcasting studio, a creation lab with 3-D printers, scanners, and other machines to support student projects. The monitors/televisions throughout the building allow us to broadcast and present not only in the wing, but we can also connect with the main building.

This wing also houses the Accelerate Program (an engineering program sponsored by the Governor's School), Special Education classes, some traditional academic classes, and the dual-credit classes taught by Greenville Tech.

Project-Based Learning

Because the building was purposely designed for project-based learning, the school has welcomed visitors from many parts of the country who are interested in seeing how the students interact with the facilities. The students are using the facilities the way Cindy and others who worked on this project had envisioned they would.

There are 259 ninth--twelfth graders who participate in the New Tech@Mann Program. The program accepts up to 150 freshmen each year. The program will have its first graduating class of seniors this spring.

For the past three years, the program used the hallway in the main building. Alsip says, "The past three years have been a success. I have seen test scores go up. So, we are supporting the program with a building built for it."

Few textbooks are used. All students receive laptops and most research involves digital sources. There is some individual work, but the students must learn to work within a team. Often teachers in two subjects will work with students in one classroom. Several subjects are combined: English with social studies, algebra with scientific research, and geometry with engineering.

"This works very well," says Alsip. "It helps kids make connections within two content areas. This helps students retain the content. For example, students study circle-related geometric principles while designing a tire. In the past, tire-manufacturer Michelin has sent engineers to New Tech classrooms to work with students on tire design. Later, the engineers have chosen the best student-designed tires and created them, with a 3-D printer, for the students to keep."

Every project ends with a formal presentation: a public speaking skill that may prove valuable for students later in their working lives. "They have to learn how to communicate not only what they learned but what they did--the problem they solved or the product they created," says Alsip.

A New Way to Learn

Alsip admitted that some parents were wary of the New Tech approach to learning. It was not the way previous generations learned. Alsip also admitted she was skeptical of the program until she visited a New Tech school in Dallas. "I saw the way the kids were interacting and functioning on their own: very autonomous, making decisions, thinking critically, problem solving, without someone showing them the way. They were on fire because they were finding solutions themselves."

Therefore, J.L. Mann High School opens the doors to NewTech@Mann every Tuesday for adults who want to learn more about the program. Many have responded, because people are curious about how it works.

Cindy's Many Roles

Cindy Alsip is the wife of Jon Alsip who is the School Resource Officer at Travelers Rest High School. Both of her children are married –Jon and Christina Alsip and Zachary and Beth (Alsip) Smith. Cindy has a 7-month-old granddaughter, Sophie. They live in Travelers Rest, SC. Cindy has a B.S. in Business Education from Olivet Nazarene University, a M.S. in Educational Administration from Furman University, and Ed. S. in Educational Administration and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration from University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC.

Cindy taught business education classes at J. L. Mann High School in Greenville, SC for 7 years. Then she became an assistant principal at the same school. She has been at J. L. Mann for 21 years.

“I started my college work as an accounting major. By my junior year, I knew accounting wasn’t for me! I switched to business education instead. Student teaching in college was a difficult experience for me. After graduation, my husband and I worked together in a boys’ home for three years. After being a stay-at-home mom for six years, my first teaching job was completing a long-term substitute position for a teacher who was on maternity leave. In my first week at that school, I fell in love with teaching and my students! When my long-term sub position was over, I looked for a permanent teaching position. I was contacted by the principal at J. L. Mann High School who hired me that afternoon. I have taught at Mann ever since that time. God had a plan for me, and it wasn’t accounting!”

Cindy said, “Through a friend at church, Midge Simpson, I learned about a Nazarene group that encourages teachers. She told me about Nazarene Educators Worldwide. I knew I needed help and encouragement, so I became a member of NEW. And, I served two 4-year-terms on NEW’s executive council. I learned so much by working with all the different types of educators who are members. That includes teachers in Christian schools, public schools, homeschools, preschools/early childhood learning centers, and college/universities. Because of my work on the NewTech@Mann project, I had to leave the council. However, I fully support NEW’s mission.”

“I have found that being a Christian affects my work ethic in every aspect. Like all public educators, I have the challenge of teaching students about Christ without proselytizing. I am very mindful of trying to be a living example of Christ in front of them each day. There are many students--and parents--whose only smile they see that day is mine. I work hard to begin every conversation with a silent prayer and a gentle smile. It leads to some amazing changes in the lives of students.”

Beula Postlewait is a retired employee of Children's Ministries at the Global Ministry Center. She currently is the Communications Representative for Nazarene Educators Worldwide. You may contact Beula at bpostlewait@kc.rr.com. You may obtain more information about Nazarene Educators Worldwide at www.naznew.net

[Attach photo of Cindy Alsip and a photo of the school building]