



Melissa Fowler hands out compliments to students Cole Cochran, Dearra Donald, Jeremiah Looney and Lanisha Cooper.

## Children show state superintendent what good behavior is all about

*Dr. Nancy Grasmick visits Jenifer Elementary*

At Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer, a bucket of compliments rests on each teacher's arm. It's part of the school routine. Teachers carry the buckets and liberally hand out colored-paper compliments to children in their class who are modeling good behavior.

Students also collect "I Care" coupons when teachers catch them following the rules well or doing something particularly kind. When a child collects enough "I Care" coupons, he can exchange them for a chance to become the Patriot of the Week, a coveted honor that draws attention to the student's positive behavior. That's only the start of the positive rewards for good behavior at Jenifer Elementary. There is also the Golden Trash Can that is presented weekly by the building service staff to the cleanest classroom and Checker Buddies who provide support for children needing extra attention.

Good behavior is expected and celebrated at Jenifer Elementary School where they have an active Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. PBIS is a voluntary state program that helps schools create better school climates, spend less time on discipline and more time on teaching and learning. There are 20 Charles County schools participating in the program, and a number of them, like Jenifer, have been named by the Maryland State Department of Education as PBIS exemplary schools.

PBIS is working at Jenifer and in Charles County Public Schools. State Superintendent of Schools Nancy Grasmick stopped by Jenifer last week to find out how the staff has achieved such a high level of success with PBIS. By the time Grasmick left the building, she praised Principal Susan Fowler and staff saying PBIS at Jenifer is what the state envisioned



Dr. Nancy Grasmick talks with students Michael Duke, and Tiffany Horne during her visit to Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer.

when it first piloted the program.

PBIS has made a difference at Jenifer. Fowler shares that in 1999 there were 435 office referrals for discipline. "All we were doing was discipline. That is really disruptive," Fowler told Grasmick. "We had to do something."

That something was PBIS. Staff was trained and then worked on a school-wide program that established consistency in routine, structure, expectations and rules. "The same rules apply to everyone, and the rules are actively taught," Fowler said.

Jenifer's success, said Fowler, is the consistency of expectations throughout the school. "We have routine and structure. Everyone knows what to do." Fowler pointed to the students' morning ritual where they

automatically line up by class outside and recite the school motto and say the pledge. "It is only seven days into the school year and we have 200 new students, and everyone already knows what to do," Fowler said during Grasmick's visit.

The PBIS changes were successful. The proof is in the data, which is used to monitor how well things are working. Referrals dropped by several hundred students the first year, and were down to 121 last school year. Suspensions declined from 76 in 1999 to 25 in 2005.

Fowler also makes a connection between PBIS and the students' academic success on the Maryland State Assessments (MSA). "PBIS has led to our student success on MSA scores, which have also increased each year as discipline issues decreased."

PBIS, says Fowler, "Is all about the attitude, beliefs and actions of adults. When you get the big people acting a certain way, the little people follow along."