

## NEA president praises Polk schools' 4-day week

By Jeremy Stewart [JStewart@PolkStandardJournal.com](mailto:JStewart@PolkStandardJournal.com)

Apr 19, 2022



National Education Association President Becky Pringle listens to teachers talk about Polk School District's four-day school week during her visit to Cedartown Middle School on Tuesday, April 19, 2022.

Jeremy Stewart

Looking for ways educators and schools can attack the problem of closing the learning gap created by the onset of virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, Becky Pringle says she found it in Polk County.

Pringle, the president of the National Education Association, visited Cedartown Middle School on Tuesday as part of her national “Joy, Justice and Excellence” tour. She was accompanied by Lisa Morgan, the president of the Georgia Association of Educators, while speaking to faculty and visiting students in classrooms.

Touted as the nation’s largest labor union, the NEA has several affiliate organizations with over 3 million members.

Pringle's visit, organized by CMS math teacher Dorothy Welch, included a session with a group of faculty. She asked them about their successes, their challenges and their thoughts about teaching in 2022.

The natural flow of the conversation eventually led to Polk School District's implementation of a four-day school week for students.

The shift in instructional time not only allowed teachers Mondays to prepare lesson plans for both in-person and virtual learning during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, it also provided time for teachers to attend training sessions without cutting into class time and allow students who were behind in studies to attend remediation through the establishment of Monday school.

When time came to set the district's calendar for the next two school years, the four-day week received unanimous praise from teachers and the school board approved.

As teachers explained the program and how it has improved not just their professional well-being but the well-being of their students, Pringle's eyes lit up.

She said she's often asked about specific strategies to help in meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of students. Now, she has a blueprint.

"This is a tangible solution. And what I love about it is everyone came together. Like one of our teachers said, we're not here to babysit the kids. We are here to teach them. And if this works better for them so that the educators are ready and prepared to teach them, it works for everyone," Pringle said, adding she plans to pass it along to U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona.

"I've never heard of that. But you can believe I'm going back and I'm telling Secretary Cardona about it. I'm going to talk about Monday school," Pringle said. "I'm spreading that story."



NEA President Becky Pringle (right) talks with Cedartown Middle School robotics instructor Wes Astin during her visit Tuesday, April 19, 2022.

Jeremy Stewart

The NEA did a nationwide survey of teachers in which 55% of them said they were planning to leave teaching earlier than they had anticipated. The reasons for that, Pringle said, included the same reasons the teachers at CMS brought up when discussing the effects of the four-day school week; mental health and time to do their jobs adequately.

"Every school that I went to, they talked about the need for time. This is the first school that I've visited where they did something about it. They created that time, and it was quite amazing to see how the educators are using their time to come together and plan collaboratively," Pringle said.

Pringle also visited an art class and agriculture science class at the school before getting a tour of the media center's student resource center.

The common consensus from the faculty who spoke to Pringle was the change that has occurred at the school over the last three years not just from the arrival of the four-day school week and Monday school, but the feeling of togetherness and emotional support they have received at every level of administration.

Pringle said that trickles down to better learning for students and the future of the country.

When I became president of the NEA, I spoke about my vision to anybody who would listen to unite not just our members but this entire nation to reclaim public education as a common good, as the foundation of our democracy, and then transform it into something that it actually was never designed to be — a racially and socially just and equitable system

that prepares every student, every student, every single student to succeed,” Pringle told the group of teachers.

“That can't happen unless every adult in the system understands that they have a shared responsibility. That's what I'm seeing in this community, and it is filling my heart.”

---

Jeremy Stewart