

*The Washington County Consortium*

# NEWSLETTER

Brought to you by Sarah Woog, Executive Director of the Washington County Consortium (WCC)

February 1, 2019

## Is it really February already?!

**I hope you've enjoyed the new year thus far and are feeling energized by the increasing daylight. I've been working with some fantastic folks from the Maine DOE who shared at Harvest of Ideas last year and are eager to reconnect (or connect for the first time) with you.**

Please consider the following professional development opportunities and use the included links to view additional details and to register:

Chronic Absenteeism: Strategies to Engage Parents and Students with Sue Liebermann, CountMEIn

February 27, 8:30-12:30 Reynolds Center at UMM

Please register at: <https://www.maine.gov/doe/calendar>

Questions are the New Answers: Inquiry in the Social Studies Classroom with Joe Schmidt, MDOE

February 27, 12:30-3:30 Torrey 232 at UMM

Please register at: <https://goo.gl/forms/0nc1mqZXdngVsTJo2>

Planning with the End in Mind with Lavinia Rogers, MDOE

February 27, 12:30-3:30 Reynolds Center, Room 14 at UMM

Please register at: <https://goo.gl/forms/SXxz71D2LR5kAb5m2>

Phenomenal Shifts in Science- Storylines with Shari Templeton, MDOE

February 27, 12:30-3:30 Torrey 223 at UMM

Please register at: <https://goo.gl/forms/RQsuc4FU3NXBqhBl2>



## Meet Bertha Caler, Retired Teacher, Volunteer Extraordinaire, and Downeast Gem.

Bertha graciously welcomed me into her home in Cherryfield so I could learn about her work at D.W. Merritt School in Addison. Thank you, Bertha, for your time, and for all you do to enrich children's lives.

In the January Washington County Consortium Newsletter, I encouraged Washington County educators to reach out if they knew someone who should be profiled for future newsletters. I soon received an email from Suzanne Plaisted, a teacher at D.W. Merritt School, who recommended I reach out to Bertha Caler. Bertha, she shared, "is a retired teacher who has not only been subbing for years but established a free library at D.W. Merritt School in Addison." Bertha seemed like a great person to profile. She is doing replicable work that truly enhances the lives of many students.

Bertha's work is replicable, but she is not. She has the energy of my seven-year old, the passion of a crusader, and the generosity of the heart we see in every great educator. As soon as I was seated in her living room, Bertha pulled out her overflowing 3-inch binder where she logs every book donation with donors' names. When students take out a book, that's logged too, but they are not required to return it. They are welcome, encouraged, to keep books. Bertha explained, "We've had over 2500 donations. Hundreds haven't come back and that's the goal."

Here's how the free library works: Bertha collects book donations. She started collecting from public libraries and local donors and now, thanks to her Facebook page, she regularly gets books shipped to her from all over the country, from Minnesota all the way down to Florida, and from throughout New England. Last year, she received a package every day and would even get calls from the Post Office asking her to come pick up the overflow.

Bertha logs the donations, takes a picture, gives a shout-out on Facebook, and stores the books by grade level in her garage. She brings rotations of books from the garage into D.W. Merritt School to give them away. She has two book carts she carts around the school, one for the littles and one for the big kids. "I'll take the books down and get surrounded," Bertha shared. From there, little hands grab books and consume them with a happy fury. Some books are returned, some get a new home.

Bertha runs the free library "because I don't see kids reading anymore... We need to get the world opened up to them and this is the way to do it." Not only does the free library open the world to kids through reading, but it also opens lines of communication between D.W. Merritt students and the world outside of Washington County. Every donor receives a hand-made (not just hand-written, but hand-made with illustrations) thank-you note from students at D.W. Merritt. The free library teaches students how to express appreciation, how to write thank-you notes, and even how to address envelopes.

The free library's impact is constantly expanding. Last year, the Stephen and Tabitha King foundation donated \$5000 to buy books and supplies for the free library. D.W. Merritt has re-instituted school-wide sustained silent reading because of a growing enthusiasm for books at the school. Bertha believes the free library "can happen at any school. You just have to have someone willing to put in the time." If you're interested in setting one up at your school, find Bertha on Facebook and reach out to her. Or just reach out to her, because she's worth getting to know.