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# GWU Alumnus Leads the way as S.C. School System Bridges Homework Gap

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Office of University  
Communications

July 18, 2017

## *Dr. Mike Cory '15 Supports Initiative to Provide Internet Access After School*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Researchers estimate that seven out of 10 homework assignments require use of the Internet, which is not accessible to every student. Educators refer to this dilemma as the homework gap. Gardner-Webb University Alumnus Dr. Mike Cory, principal of Richard H. Gettys Middle School in Easley, S.C., led the way when leaders in his school district of Pickens County, S.C., started working to bridge the gap. His school was the first in the district to initiate a “Bring Your Own Device” (BYOD) project.

The project allowed students to use tablets, smart phones and other technology for class assignments. In Cory’s school, where 57 percent of the students are on free and reduced lunch, the initiative uncovered more needs, mainly students with no devices or no internet access at home. “It is what some might refer to as a civil rights issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” observed Cory, who received his Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership from GWU in 2015. “There are students in many areas who cannot do the work assigned, because they don’t have the access, whether from poverty or living in a rural area that may not have internet in the vicinity.”

As school officials looked for solutions, Cory collaborated with the district’s technology director, Dr. Barbara J. Nesbitt. Her department applied for a grant from AT&T, Samsung and Connected Nation to provide tablets and 4G broadband access for sixth and seventh graders. The tablets are equipped with filtering software to prevent students from accessing inappropriate websites. Pickens County was one of 150 school districts nationwide to receive the grant, worth more than \$5 million over three years.

Dr. Mike Cory, GWU Alumnus and principal at Richard H. Gettys Middle School in Easley, S.C., helps a student get started with her tablet. A grant from AT&T, Samsung and Connected Nation provided every sixth and seventh grader at his school and in the School District of Pickens County, S.C., a tablet and access to the Internet at home.

students using school-provided tablets

After using the devices and 4G access for seven months, more students completed homework assignments and checked out e-books from the library. Cory and Nesbitt shared their experience in a national webinar sponsored by the State Educational Technology

Directors Association. “Dr. Cory is a phenomenal partner with my team, and he and his teachers have done some outstanding work with the tablets at home with the 4G connectivity,” Nesbitt shared in the webinar.

Students also benefit from receiving more timely feedback from the teachers. “Students are writing essays on Google Docs and uploading to the teacher’s Google Drive,” Cory described. “The teacher is reading it and making an audio file of comments and suggestions to the kids.”

#### students using tablets in the classroom

Cory embraced the technology initiative, because his classes in the GWU School of Education emphasized the benefits of research, collaboration and innovation. “The professional guidance, teaching and relationships with my professors and colleagues was tremendous,” he observed. “Two years later I still have benefited from those relationships and they continue to be a great support to me today. These professors challenged me, encouraged me to be innovative and really helped me think about things from different perspectives. They are more than professors. They are friends, and I cannot say that about other universities I have attended.”

[Click here to listen to a WGWG.org interview](#) with Dr. Mike Cory to learn more about how the school district of Pickens County, S.C., is bridging the digital divide.

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