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ALUMNI

Gardner-Webb Alumna Faces Teaching Elementary School with Covid-19 Protocols

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON AUGUST 14, 2020



Katie H. Barnes, '12, Accepts Challenges with Patience, Grace and Flexibility

As veteran and beginning teachers prepare for a new school year with Covid-19 guidelines, some necessities can't be bought. Educators, students and parents will need an abundance of "patience, grace, and flexibility," noted Gardner-Webb University 2012 alumna Katherine "Katie" Harte Barnes. She begins her eighth year of teaching elementary school this year and her sixth one at Pinnacle Classical Academy in Shelby, N.C.

Pinnacle is a tuition-free public charter school serving more than 1,000 kindergarten through 12th-grade students. She's excited to see her students in person again, and anxious to do her part to keep everyone healthy. "I am constantly reminding myself that no one, ever, has gone through this before in this setting, so none of us are expected to be perfect, know the right answers or know them right away," Barnes observed. "I'm also reminding myself that it's OK. The anxiety I feel toward the start of this school year is completely understandable, and I can give myself grace for having these feelings I've never felt before as a teacher. I will wear my mask proudly each and every day as I strive to make my students feel as loved and cherished as ever, even from a 6-foot distance."



Katie Barnes proudly displays her GWU diploma at her desk in the classroom.

Because of spacing requirements, Barnes' fourth-grade class will be divided into two rooms. "I will have 14 students in my regular classroom, and the other 14 will be in another classroom two doors down on the same hall," she explained. "I will teach one lesson to one group for 60 minutes while the other class is working on some independent assignments on the same subject, being covered by either a teacher's assistant or a middle school teacher during their planning time. Then, I will switch and teach the other class the same content while the coverage person swaps rooms with me and the first class works on the independent assignments. It will be a whirlwind, but it will happen and it will be great."

She also serves as the head coach for the school's middle and high school swim team and is one of the directors for the high school theater. High school athletics has been postponed until January, 2021, which is when theater usually begins.

In addition to these differences, Barnes is preparing for a joyful event. "My husband and I are expecting our first child in mid-September," she shared, "so amidst the ever-changing world of education that Covid-19 has us living in for the time being, I am thinking about who my interim will be, my plans for my maternity leave, and how my students will handle yet another change early in our year together."

“When the days get hard, remind yourself that this career takes a courageous person—and that courageous person is you.”

Katie Barnes, 2012 GWU Alumna

Teaching elementary students is something that Barnes had dreamed of doing from a young age. The professors at Gardner-Webb provided the foundation she needed to begin her career. "I loved the small class sizes at GWU, the engaging professors and enriching material," she reflected. "My professors were always willing to answer my questions and help guide my success. My education classes helped prepare me for the 'real world' with intense lesson planning projects, peer reviews, curriculum analysis, classroom observations at a variety of elementary, middle and high schools, a great deal of peer teaching assignments and of course, student teaching."

Despite all the challenges of returning to face-to-face teaching, Barnes is looking forward to seeing her students again. "In the classroom setting, I feed off of my students' personalities, their questions and conversations, their intrigue, etc.," she asserted. "All of this was stripped away during distance education, because there was no more real-time teaching that my students thrive off of so well."

If conditions change and schools have to return to remote learning, Barnes learned firsthand how to handle that last year. She used Google Hangout sessions for students and parents, along with other strategies she found helpful before. "The parents needed some encouragement and feedback on how to help their child be successful through distance education," she related. "I kept the learning objectives simple and doable for my students and their parents, making sure that the content I was assigning did not take hours per day to complete. I recorded video lessons to introduce new content, and my 'furlkids' made numerous appearances in those videos. I held class Google Hangout sessions several times a week, and the goal of these sessions was not to teach a lesson or to discuss content, but to simply be together, talk, and share what each other had been up to that day. We were used to being together eight hours a day, five days a week, and that outlet of socialization and emotional support was taken out of their learning realm."

In thinking about the uncertainty of the new school year, Barnes offered an inspirational message to her fellow educators. "No matter what grade you teach, how many subjects and students you teach, or how many years you have been teaching, you have to be all in for those students," she stated. "They need you to be there for them academically, spiritually and emotionally. Teaching is a hard job on a good day, and giving 100 percent of yourself can sometimes feel like an insurmountable challenge. When the days get hard, remind yourself that this career takes a courageous person—and that courageous person is you. Your students are looking for and expecting your best each and every day. Show up, stand tall, and make a difference!"

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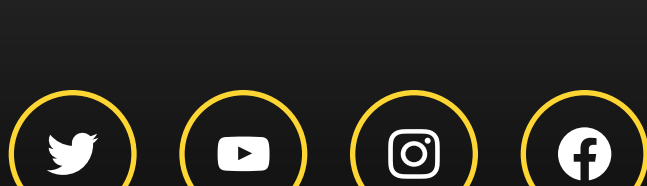
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