

Southwestern Middle School is such a special part of my life, first as a parent and then as a teacher. It's difficult to know where to begin. There have been many ups and downs along the way, but the feelings of belongingness and togetherness have always kept the feet moving forward. I began my association with Southwestern as a parent of one of the first-grade children (now 46 years old) who was mandated to transfer from George Marks Elementary School to Starke Elementary School. The doctrine of 'separate but equal' was struck down by the courts and Volusia County was ordered to integrate immediately. What a windfall that my child was placed in the classroom of Ms. Sally Poole, one of the finest ladies and best teachers I have ever known. She welcomed my child into her classroom and Dorothy Dandridge, media specialist, and Billye Staples, an excellent kindergarten teacher, welcomed me as a volunteer in the media center. For the next six to eight years (my second son, also), I was involved in an environment of community and family. The feelings of community and family followed my children and me, as they entered Southwestern Seventh Grade Center. My first son ruined Al Bouie's white shirt when my son split his head while running into a corner. Mr. Bouie picked him up and took him to the hospital. The main concern was always with the children and the parents were pulled into the "family." It has always amazed me that the feelings of community and family continued from elementary school into the middle school.

Years later, I began a new relationship with Southwestern Middle School as a teacher. Those same feelings of community and family were still there—awesome. To my pleasure and surprise, Billye Staples had graduated to middle school! How wonderful to see some of the same faces that were there when I was a parent—Mary Kay Smith, Don Tutt, Tony Tussing, Steve Stephenson. The years I taught with Mr. Presley as my principal were good years in which the standardized assessment performance of students at Southwestern steadily improved. The teachers at Southwestern are totally vested in the success of the children—they sincerely care about the children and they work very hard to make Southwestern an exemplary school. Under the leadership of Mamie Oatis, the school has expanded parent and community involvement. She knows every child and every parent at the school. I feel utterly blessed that my children were able to attend Southwestern and that I was privileged to have been a teacher at Southwestern.

Dr. Janet Raney