

# Georgia School Raises Morale and Builds Togetherness

**H**igh-stakes testing, a charter renewal, and accountability for student performance can all have a negative impact on student and staff morale. Statesboro STEAM Academy Director Corliss Reese understands how stress can affect academic achievement, and he decided to do something about it! Corliss put a plan in place that created a supportive leadership team and positive school climate. Motivating teachers and students and building morale became and continue to be priorities at Statesboro STEAM Academy.

Statesboro STEAM Academy begins

each day with a daily Morning Mingle. Morning Mingle is a time for them to come together as a school community and start the day off with a little fun, fellowship, and dancing. Research has shown that music and dancing help to improve mood and increase happiness while decreasing stress and anxiety. Knowing that some students come to school each day with a little additional baggage, this activity creates a time and space to find a release from those issues. During this time students can talk to one another about what is bothering them or even meet with a teacher to discuss a way to shake off a possibly negative ride to school or the cobwebs of a restless

night's sleep. The DJs are the principals and on some of the mornings they take requests, do giveaways, and even allow students to call in from their cell phones for prizes. It is a great way to kick off the day with laughter and fun. Everyone even participates in some of the popular line dances like the Wobble and Cupid Shuffle.

“Morning Mingle for Statesboro STEAM Academy is a wonderful way for us to build community and comradery, and it is our time to come together and support each other toward a positive start to the school day,” says Mr. Reese.



“Morning Mingle is socially interactive, builds confidence and trust, and creates a cohesive, successful school community.”

The staff shares this infectious mingle wherever they go! I saw this firsthand while attending the 2017 Georgia Charter Schools Conference in Atlanta this past March. The Statesboro STEAM Academy was the highlight at the After Dark Party, and the General Session, when they got up and led several line dances. Educators got an opportunity to see what the Statesboro crew does each morning, and many joined in! Although I initially felt somewhat awkward, I too was drawn to this nonthreatening, harmonious group and joined the dance. It was amazing to see and participate in this positive social connection of ages and cultures spending time together. It's about the community and everyone enjoying each other's company.

As Corliss Reese and Student Services Director Benji Lewis shared, the focus on morale, group interaction, and supportive relationships has proven to be successful for students and staff. Statesboro STEAM is doing great things. It just had its charter renewed for another five years and it continues to build and retain students and staff each school year!

Morning Mingle is socially interactive, builds confidence and trust, and creates a cohesive, successful school community. These elements are crucial to student and staff performance. Statesboro STEAM exemplifies the positive attitude AAE looks for and I am proud to have the entire staff as AAE members! ■



**Dana Williams** is an AAE regional membership director in Georgia.

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