

Featured: GIVING EXAMPLES: Clarke Central High School special education department teacher Brad Williford aids a student in math department teacher Malory Thomas' geometry class in Room 106 on Jan. 30. Williford has worked at CCHS since the 2020-21 school year and has tried to make an impact during his time at the school. "I just try to be positive with students and help them try to find that success," Williford said. "No one is unimportant and no day is unimportant. Every kid matters, every class matters." Photo by Aza Khan



HELPING HAND

CCHS special education department teacher and 2023-24 Teacher of the Year Brad Williford brings a smile and a positive attitude to everything he does.

STORY BY ISABELLA WESTRICH
News Editor

LAYOUT BY MAYA CLEMENT
Managing Editor

Although Clarke Central High School special education department teacher and 2023-24 Teacher of the Year Brad Williford doesn't specialize in any specific school subject, he still has a specialty: helping students.

Williford started teaching in 2000 at Monroe Area High School in Walton County, Georgia, where he ultimately became an assistant principal. However, he moved to a special education teacher position at Clarke Middle School in the 2016-17 school year to take a more hands-on approach to education.

"I wanted to be where I felt like things were happening, and that's why I wanted to become a special education teacher," Williford said. "In a way, I feel like my career has gone full circle to where I'm back in the classroom. I love it in the classroom. It's very enjoyable helping students, I feel like it's a very worthwhile endeavor."

"I just try to be friendly when things just go awry sometimes. I just try to take it in stride because I know there's gonna be another class period and I gotta be ready for that."

-- BRAD WILLIFORD,
CCHS special education department teacher

After CMS, Williford moved to CCHS during the 2020-21 school year. In his time at CCHS, he's co-taught a variety of classes, from Algebra I Support to Multicultural Literature, but no matter what he's teaching, he always brings a smile and a positive attitude.

"I just try to be friendly when things just go awry sometimes. I just try to take it in stride because I know there's gonna be another class period and I gotta be ready for that," Williford said.

As a co-teacher, Williford is placed in classes to offer extra support, whether it's working one-on-one with students or helping them keep track of deadlines, so that the general education teacher he's paired with can deliver content more effectively.

"I try to remove some hurdles or find a way (to) get kids engaged or get things done. Sometimes there might be other layers of challenges



Above and below: HELPING HAND: Clarke Central High School special education department teacher Brad Williford works with two students in Geometry in Room 134 on Nov. 28, 2023. CCHS math department teacher Nicole George co-taught Algebra I Support with Williford during the 2022-23 school year, and was impressed by the way he built relationships with students. "He works really, really hard, he cares about these kids so much and he builds such great relationships with them. He's incredibly sarcastic, but they love it," George said. "He's built really strong relationships with a lot of these students, and even if they don't really know him they're like, 'Oh, look at this goofy guy coming in.' With his personality, with the way he is, he's just so silly and sweet that all the kids just adore him." Photo by Aza Khan





or issues or there might be something going on, and I meet the student where they're at, and that's fine, too. 'Okay, this is where you're at, how can we get you to the end?' Williford said. "It's just whatever it takes and it's different for every kid and every class. Every situation is just trying to find something that works."

CCHS math department teacher Nicole George co-taught Algebra I Support with Williford during the 2022-23 school year and was impressed by his dedication to his students.

"Even though math is not his strong subject, he jumped right in there with me and he was just trying to make sense of everything, and trying to make sure he could figure out a way to explain it to all the kids," George said. "(He was) making sure the kids are always taken care of, (having) their questions

answered. He tended to have kids all around him, and he's just helping them all with their DeltaMath, and things like that."

CCHS sophomore Ny Patman was in George and Williford's Algebra I Support class during her freshman year and appreciated Williford's friendliness.

"Every time you see (Williford) in the hall he always has a smile on his face. No matter who you are, he will smile at you and wave at you," Patman said. "Every time he came into class, he would do a little cringey joke, but it was funny. He still comes to my classes and checks up on me. He tries to help me as best as he can with my tests and things."

Williford's supportive role and connections with student has offered many the help they needed to achieve milestones. Since he worked at CMS as well as CCHS, he's built continuous relationships that lasted beyond one institution.



"(I was) able to have a relationship with students to know the challenges that they've dealt with. To see them blossom into a newer version of themselves, they're now the manifestation of who they said they wanted to be," Williford said. "Now, we're having those real conversations about college and life after high school, whereas back in sixth grade it was just like, 'Hey, how do we get through this class period? How do we make it one day at a time, one week at a time?'"

CCHS Associate Principal Dr. Summer Smith believes that Williford has brought his helping hand to other aspects of the school, as well.

"He has always been super friendly, super helpful. I think that's the best way to describe Mr. Williford, he is willing to do anything that anybody needs," Smith said. "He can figure things out. He can get on the computer and look up some data and figure some stuff out and make a spreadsheet that makes everything easier. He is always an unsung, quiet person who just kind of makes everything work."

"Every time you see (Williford) in the hall, he always has a smile on his face. No matter who you are, he will smile at you and wave at you."

-- NY PATMAN,
CCHS sophomore

Because of his positive impact on CCHS, Williford was named the 2023-24 Teacher of the Year, a Clarke County School District honor awarded to one teacher from each school every school year. However, to Williford, the real prize is being able to make a positive difference in the CCHS community, which he hopes to continue doing.

"I've really enjoyed my time working here at CCHS. I love the students here, I love the school," Williford said. "We have a lot of amazing things happening here at (CCHS), so I'm just happy to be part of it. My whole focus is to be a supportive cog in the big machine of (CCHS)."



Above: WATCH AND LEARN: Clarke Central High School special education department teacher Brad Williford demonstrates a problem on the whiteboard in Room 106 for CCHS math department teacher Mallory Thomas' Geometry class on Jan. 30. Williford has co-taught with twelve different teachers during his time at CCHS, and enjoys observing their various classes. "I love seeing all the different teaching styles, how teachers decorate their classrooms, how they approach students, how they deal with the different concepts related to their content, all those different things. They're all great teachers, but they're all different as far as their own personality," Williford said. "What I do is I come in there and I just try to jump in there with them." Photos by Aza Khan

Left top: MAKING MEMORIES: Clarke Central High School special education department teacher Brad Williford works with a student in CCHS math department teacher Miles Thomas' Geometry class in Room 134 on Nov. 28, 2023. CCHS sophomore Ny Patman was in Algebra I Support during the 2022-23 school year, a class that Williford co-taught with CCHS math department teacher Nicole George, and has many positive memories of Williford as a teacher. "I was playing this game and (Williford) popped up behind me and he said, 'You're good at playing games but you're not good at doing math. I think you might want to put the phone down,'" Patman said. "I felt so embarrassed, but then I was laughing at the same time. And he said 'I'm just joking with you. But seriously, you should put more effort into your math instead of putting more effort into your games.' It was funny, and I felt like he was actually trying to help me instead of trying to insult me." Photos by Aza Khan

Above: SPREADSHEET WIZARD: Clarke Central High School special education department teacher Brad Williford makes a spreadsheet on Jan. 31 in Room 106. Throughout his time at Clarke Central High School, Williford has used his problem solving skills to help make the school run smoothly. "He is willing to do anything that anybody needs," Associate Principal Dr. Summer Smith said. "He can figure things out, like he can get on the computer and look up some data and figure some stuff out and make a spreadsheet that makes everything easier. So, he just is always an unsung, quiet person who just makes everything work." Photo by Aza Khan