

# Washington Center

## SCHOOL PROFILE

Washington Center, located in Greenville, South Carolina, is a separate school that serves students district-wide that have moderate and severe mental disabilities. Staffing committees, comprised of parents, administrators, classroom teachers, therapists, psychologists and other individuals knowledgeable in the educational needs of students, develop individualized educational programs and make recommendations for placement at Washington Center.

Washington Center moved into a new facility in June 2005. The school was designed by a team of parents, staff and a former Washington Center principal. Contract Construction built the facility under the guidelines of Institutional Resources. The facility is “highly designed” and each specialized group of staff members had input into the design of their area, thus making this facility unique and distinctive. Special consideration was given to such details as outside exits for each classroom and continuous sidewalks to encourage student mobility. The building is also adapted for the specialized programs designated in students’ Individualized Education Plans. In addition to the building itself, the campus has an external greenhouse and a playground designed for students with disabilities. Each classroom has an external exit to a concrete connecting path.



*Washington Center, Opened Fall, 2005*

Students in preschool through grade 12, ages 3 to 21, attend Washington Center and Washington Center at Hollis. The schools currently serve 142 students with 20 classroom teachers, 40 Para-educators and one full time homebound teacher. Support staff at Washington Center includes: a work adjustment specialist and a daily living instructor as well as art, music and adapted physical education teachers, three administrators, a media specialist, physical, occupational and speech therapists, office personnel, custodial and cafeteria staff, two registered nurses, three licensed practitioners and an orderly. Vision and hearing services are available on an itinerant basis for qualifying students. The physical facility housing Washington Center has 18 classrooms, a multisensory suite, a gymnasium/multi-purpose room, large cafeteria, a library, art and music classrooms, a Hortitherapy center and greenhouse, a daily living classroom and a speech therapy suite.

Washington Center at Hollis was established to provide an early intervention strategy for younger students (ages 3-7) with severe and profound disabilities. Planning for the annex began in 2007 with an expected opening date of January 2011. It will act as a feeder school for Washington Center, housing 50 students from preschool through grade 3. Washington Center at Hollis will have its own separate administration; the facility will include six classrooms and a multisensory suite. The support services offered will include occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech, a nursing staff and an orderly.

### **The Washington Center History**

In 1970, Greenville County Schools began serving mentally disabled students. A local organization which offers a sheltered workshop for mentally disabled adults occupied an area of our former campus in collaboration with the school district. At this same time, the school also operated one of the first special education classes in Greenville County. Subsequently, in 1971, a high school program for mildly mentally disabled students and a class for moderately mentally disabled students opened. During the 1972-73 school year, the school became known as Washington Center.

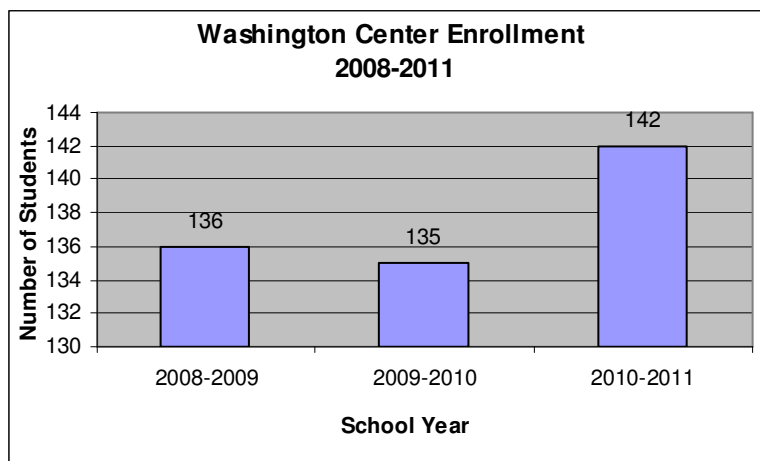
By 1976-77, there were seventeen classes for mentally disabled students located at Washington Center. That number gradually grew to 26 during the 1979-80 school year; and, in 1981-82, classes for students with severe mental disabilities were added. In recent years, the population of students at Washington Center has been substantially reduced as the district has endeavored to serve more students with moderate mental disabilities in self-contained classes in regular schools. However, recent enrollment figures indicate a steady increase in the number of students who qualify for placement.



*Washington Center students benefit from a team of staff and volunteers*

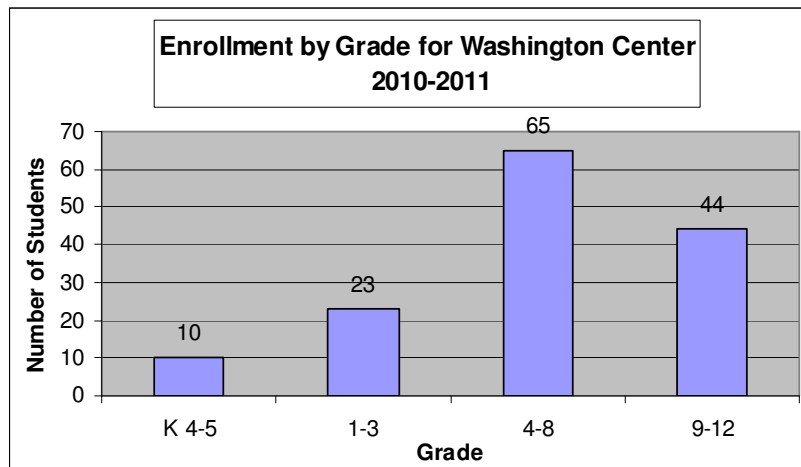
### **Washington Center Students**

Between 1998 and 2001, the Washington Center population declined as a result of district efforts to implement Least Restrictive Environment; however, increases in enrollment have occurred in subsequent years. Currently, students served at Washington Center are those with the most significant cognitive and physical disabilities. The following graph depicts the enrollment trend for Washington Center over the past three years. The 2010-11 school year evidenced the largest increase in student enrollment.

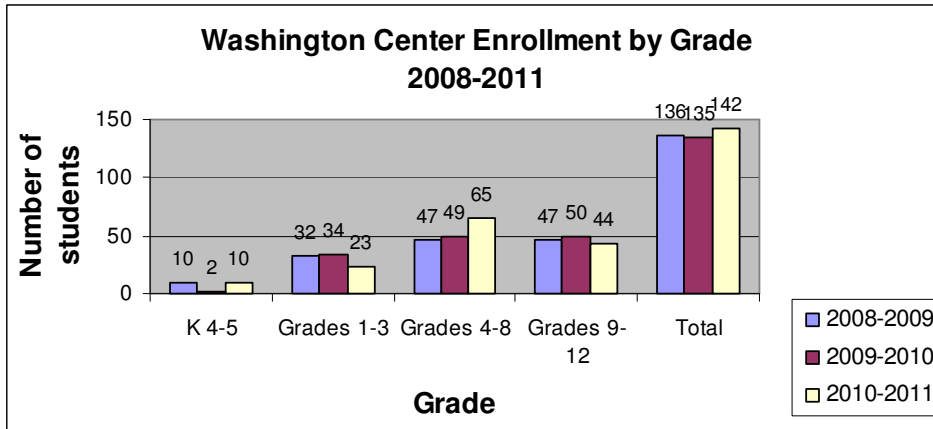




*Students experience a warm and nurturing environment at Washington Center*

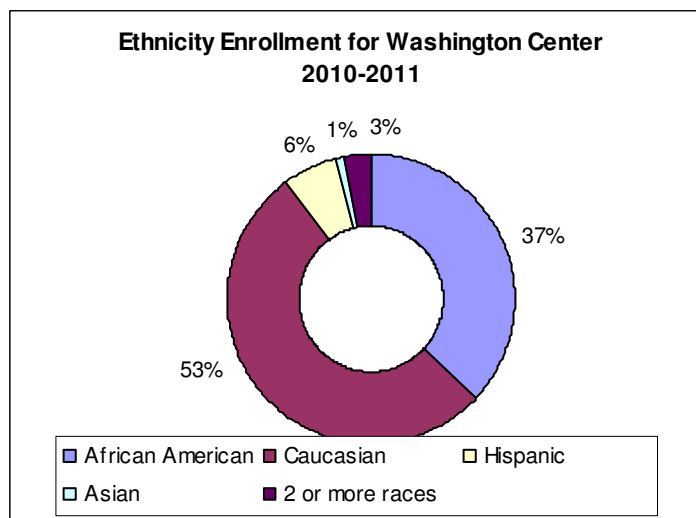


As grading is only for attendance purposes, students are primarily instructionally grouped by ability levels with age ranges considered. According to government regulations, students with disabilities are allowed to remain in public schools until age twenty-one. Due to this consideration, Washington Center’s enrollment traditionally shows more students in the upper end of grade categories. Past the tenth grade, students are classified as eleventh graders until age twenty-one; twelfth graders reach the year of “Certificate of Attendance” dismissal. The chart above depicts current enrollment according to grades.

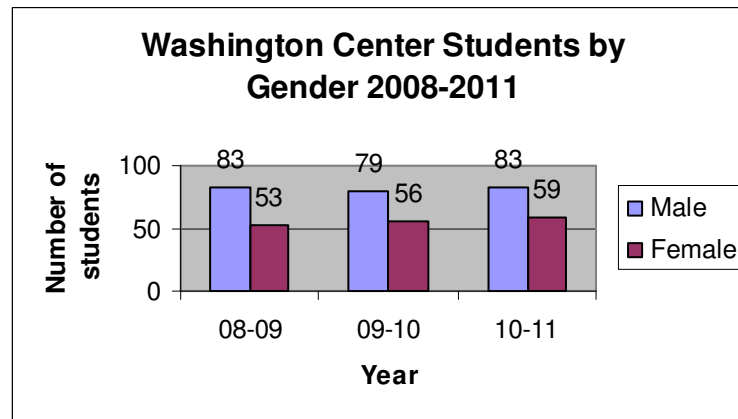


As anticipated, the information charted above indicates that enrollment for the high school aged students has remained the highest of grade categories for the past five years. Grades 4-8 and grades K 4-5 evidenced a marked increase during the 2010-11 school year. Recent trends show that elementary and middle school aged enrollments are increasing.

During 2010-11, Washington Center ethnicity is 6% Hispanic, 37% African American, 53% Caucasian, 1% Asian and 3% two or more races. This is reflected in the pie chart shown below. Students’ families generally report one home language with the exception of the eight students from Hispanic homes. Most Washington Center students are functionally non-verbal and communicate using augmentative devices or systems.

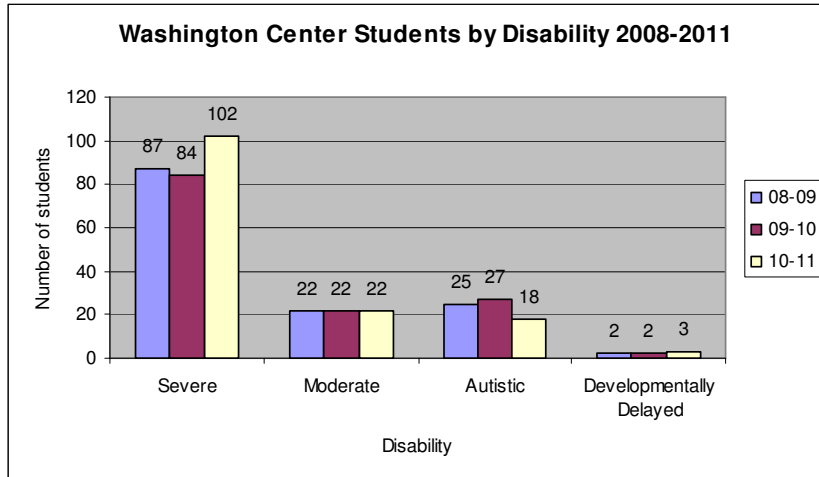


The data is generally reflective of overall district enrollment, with Caucasian students being in the majority. It is of interest that our Hispanic student enrollment has increased to six percent, mirroring the significant influx of Hispanic families settling in the Greenville area in recent years. In 2009, census figures indicate that 10% of the Greenville County population is Hispanic, paralleling the current enrollment of Hispanic Special Education students in the Greenville County School District.

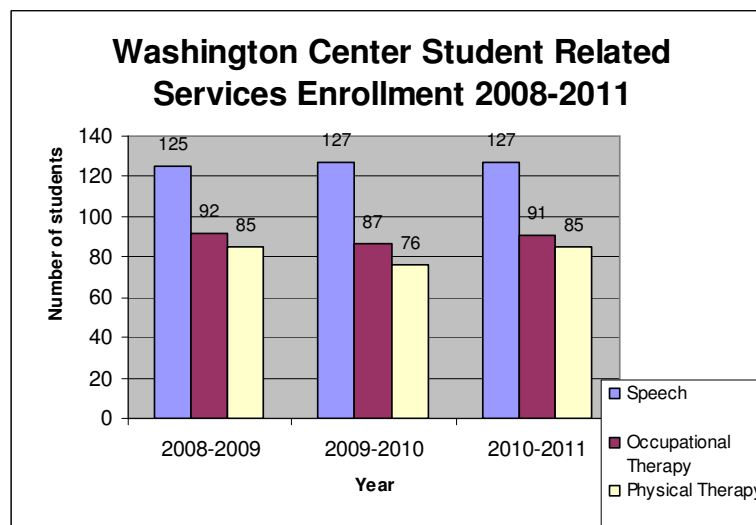


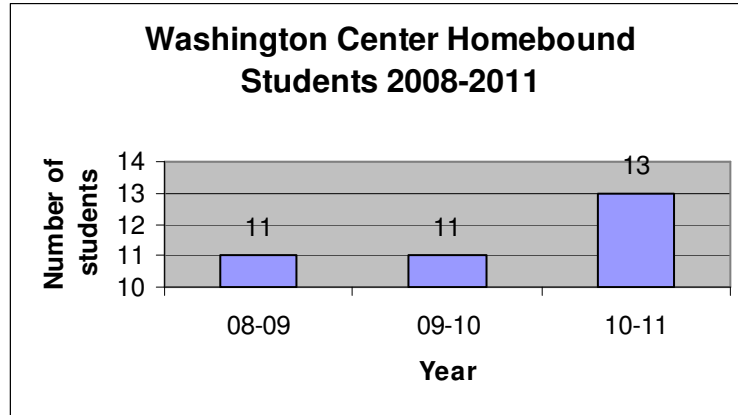
The graph above illustrates that Washington Center has consistently served fewer females than males. This finding is consistent with research that indicates males outnumber females in both categories of intellectual and developmental disabilities (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities 2008).

Disaggregation of student data by disability category, as shown on the following page, reflects slightly higher numbers in the severely disabled category and slightly lower numbers in the autistic category. Numbers are stable in the moderately disabled and developmentally delayed populations. Our severely disabled population continues to be Washington Center's primary group. According to a representative from The South Carolina Kids Count Demographics (2010), about 5% of children and youth have disabilities that, because of their severity, have lifelong consequences for community living, social life, and work.

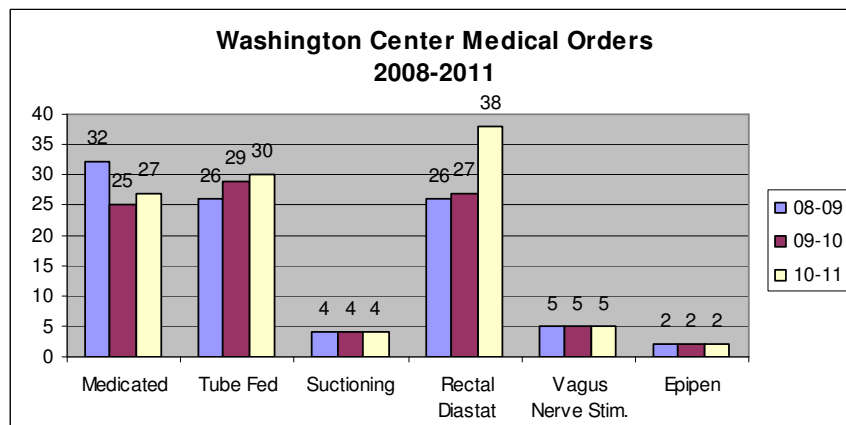


The following graph shows student enrollment disaggregated by related services required per student. It reflects the significant and continuing requirements of Washington Center students for Speech services, Occupational Therapy (OT), and Physical Therapy (PT). Numbers of students who qualify for Speech/Language Services have remained stable. Numbers qualifying for OT and PT have risen slightly. Therapy demands have grown with our special needs population.





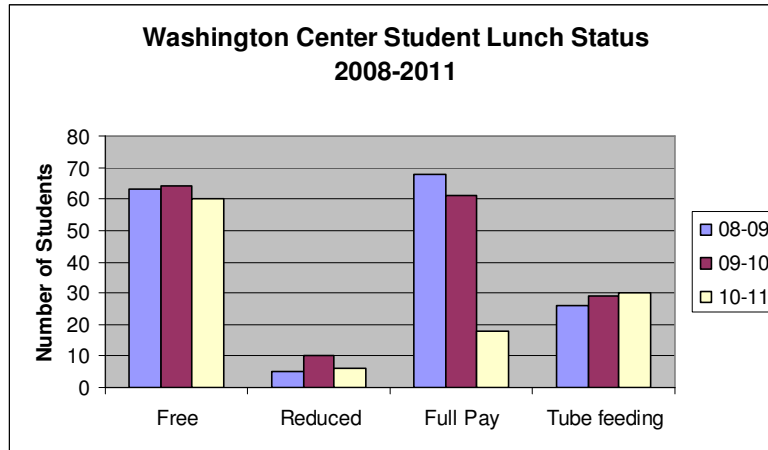
The above graph illustrates the number of students receiving homebound instruction during the past three years. Homebound students are generally medically fragile, and in all instances a doctor’s statement is required for initiation of services at home. From 2008 to the 2010-2011 academic year, the numbers have increased from 11 to 13.



Due to the extreme and complex health issues of Washington Center students, on-site nursing services are required. Two registered nurses and three licensed practical nurses coordinate classroom medical procedures and provide multiple services. During 2008-2011, the number of students receiving medical services has remained about the same in most areas even though the school experienced a slight enrollment increase during the 2010–2011 school year. This was due to the addition of two preschool classes at the Hollis location. Relatively new procedures such as Rectal Diastat and Vagus Nerve Stimulation are shown in the graph above, as well as other medical procedures required by students. It is important to note that there is one area of increase: the number of students prescribed Diastat rose from twenty-seven in 2009–2010 to thirty-eight in 2010-2011, indicating a 41% increase. We also have two students with medical orders for EpiPen usage due to extreme allergies.

The staff receives training in many medical procedures as described in the Professional Development section.

The following graph reflects current free, reduced, and full pay lunch status of students. Thirty tube feedings are conducted daily replacing cafeteria meals; therefore, the parents of these students do not apply for free and reduced meals. Of those who actually eat meals prepared in the cafeteria, 46% receive free or reduced lunches based on income.

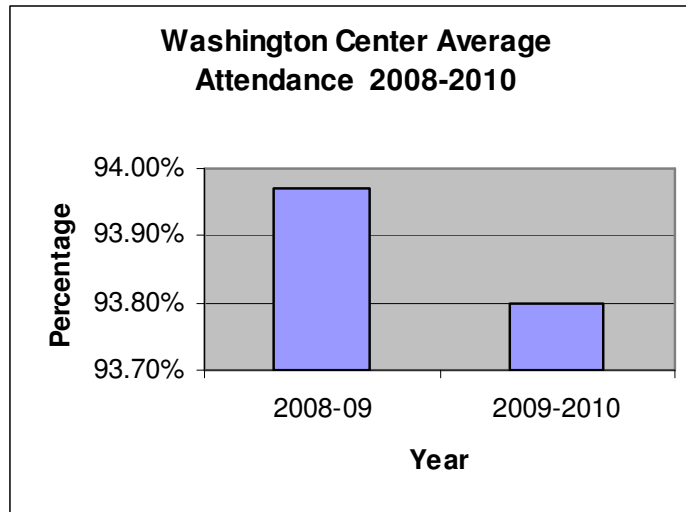


*Many Washington Center students require specified feeding procedures.*

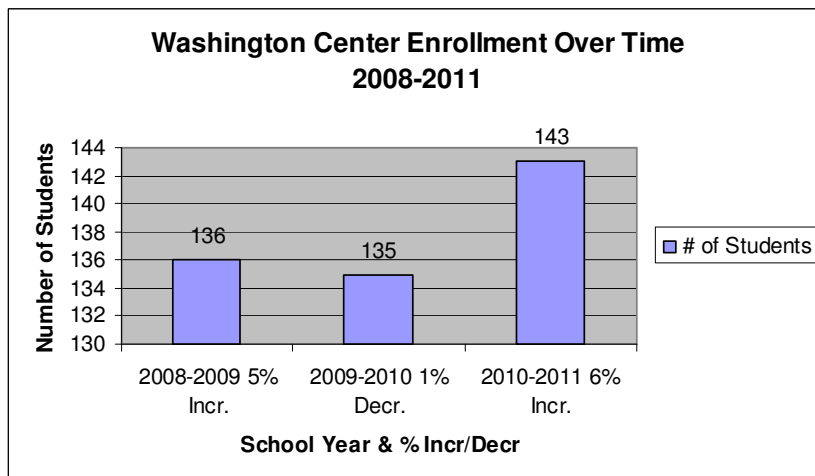
Annually, staff members attend a variety of professional development training sessions related to feeding, positioning, augmentative communication, technology, and other areas that are relevant to the population served.

## Attendance and Mobility

The medical fragility of Washington Center's population impacts the attendance rate. Some students may have a high number of absences due to severe health issues. In 2008-2009 the attendance rate was 94%, as shown in the following graph. During the 2009-2010 school year, the attendance rate remained relatively constant at 93.8%.



During the 2008-2009 school year, there were 136 students enrolled at Washington Center. Enrollment for 2009-2010 remained relatively constant with less than a one percent decrease. During 2010-2011, student enrollment grew to 142 students with the addition of two new preschool classes at the Washington Center at Hollis location. Since 2008, student enrollment has increased 5%. Enrollment growth for the most recent three years is shown on the following graph.



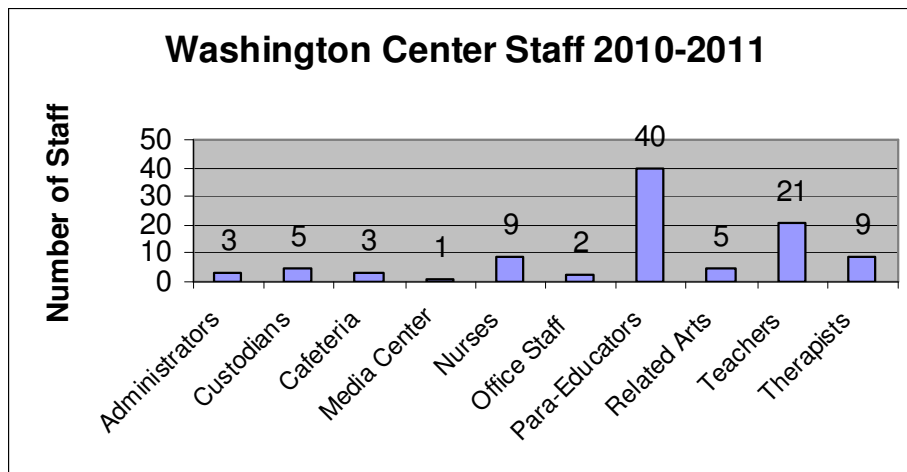
## The Washington Center Staff

Washington Center offers instruction in a nurturing environment. Since many of the students in this population require total assistance for self help, motor and academic skills, a high staff to student ratio is necessary (currently at approximately three adults to seven students). Students are grouped in classes by ability, age and disability considerations. More than half of the faculty members are veteran teachers, averaging over 25 years of experience (see table on following page.) Our faculty experiences relatively little turn-over in comparison to schools throughout the district. One new instructor and a new Program Facilitator joined the faculty during the 2010-2011 school year due to faculty retirees. Washington Center evidences a wealth of experienced certified staff, having eleven with 30 years of experience or more. Many instructors have spent most of their career at Washington Center.

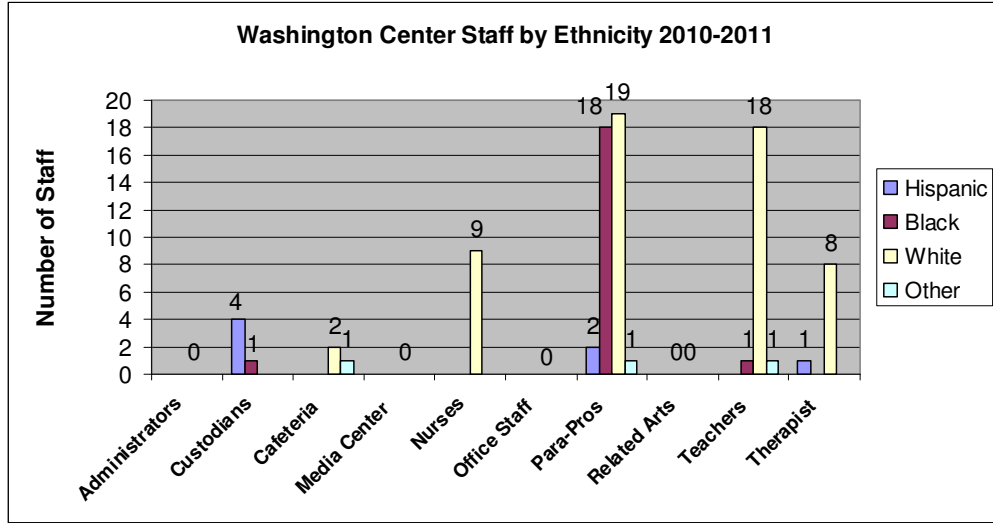


*Washington Center teachers conduct Professional Development training.*

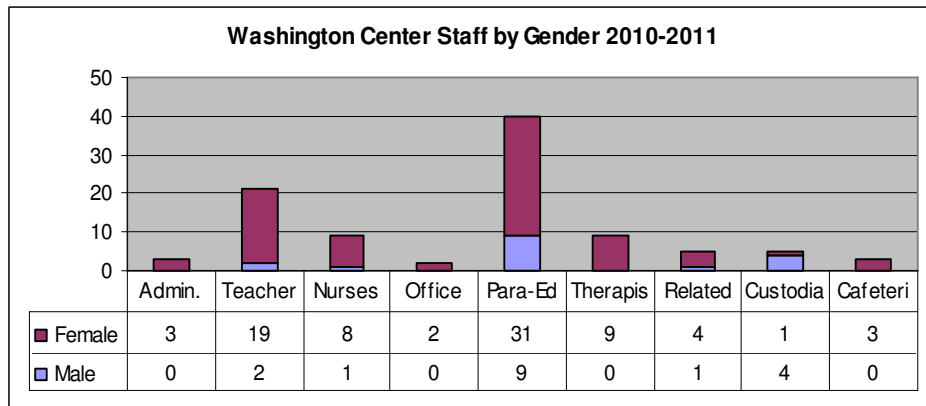
Two speech/ language pathologists, three occupational therapists, two physical therapists and a physical therapy assistant provide related services. Most of our therapists work part-time. Related Arts providers include Music, Art and Adapted Physical Education instructors in addition to a Media Specialist. Work Adjustment and Daily Living teachers provide specialized instruction related to prevocational skills for Washington Center’s high school age students and for moderately mentally disabled middle school students enrolled in regular schools. Itinerant services are provided by district vision and mobility/orientation teachers. Two registered nurses and three licensed practical nurses on campus are required for our medically fragile population. The nursing team supervises and administers tube feedings, suctioning, catherizations, breathing treatments and seizure interventions. An orderly helps with lifting non-ambulatory students and provides classroom assistance. Our cafeteria staff includes a manager and two dietitians who prepare meals that meet the specialized dietary needs of Washington Center Students.



The graph above represents the number of diverse job titles at Washington Center. The majority of the staff is para-educators and teachers. Other personnel in the school setting include: principal, program facilitator, administrative assistant, secretary, attendance clerk/receptionist, custodians, nursing staff, cafeteria staff, therapists and related arts teachers.

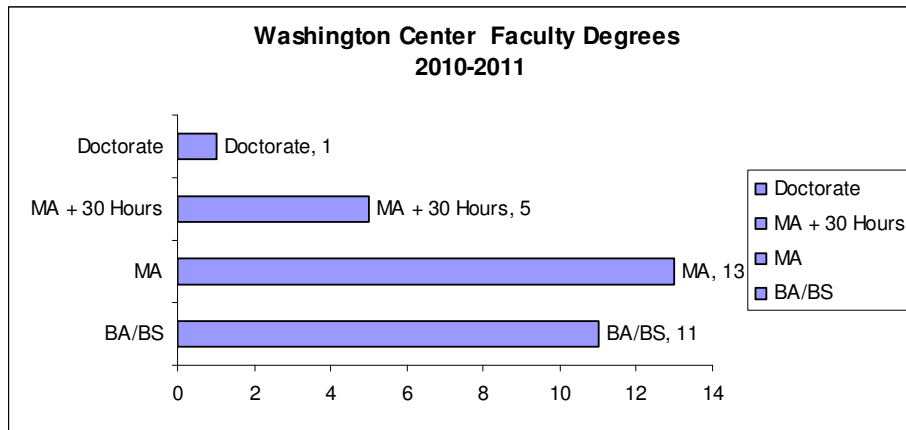


The graph above represents the ethnic makeup of the Washington Center staff. The majority of the staff is Caucasian. There are a growing number of Hispanic staff members; they are a valuable addition as they provide support for our Hispanic families.



The graph above represents the gender break down of the Washington Center staff. The staff is primarily female; however, the past few years have seen the number of male staff members grow. Male instructors and personnel are actively recruited to serve as good role models for our male students. They are also instrumental in assisting with lifting and behavior issues in the classroom.

The chart below illustrates the current educational levels for our faculty and certified staff.



Teachers are required to meet the State Department requirements for certification in Trainable Mentally Disabled. Staff members attend workshops related to special education issues and relevant curriculum such as: technology use, augmentative communication, sensory integration, behavior management, IEP development and Alternate Assessment training. Our principal has achieved her educational doctorate. A trained Emergency Team has been developed to assist in crisis situations. Recent extensive updates to school emergency/ safety plans are included in notebooks and electronic Safety Procedures Manuals are available to all staff. Many classroom para-educators and two teachers also serve as bus drivers, holding CDL licenses with regular training updates. Para-educators are receiving after-school training, as required by “No Child Left Behind” regulations, in preparation for the Praxis. Our Para-educators have or will achieve certified status by passing the Praxis general information test or by earning designated college credit. Achievement of Highly Qualified status for all staff is a goal for the school. Additionally, many Washington Center staff members are parents of special needs children.



## **Our Administration**

*Linda Hill (Program Facilitator), Dr. Wanda Brownlee (Principal),  
Linda Thigpen (Administrative Assistant) (left to right)*

Dr. Wanda Brownlee serves as principal of Washington Center. She began her career in Greenwood County as a special education teacher in 1988. While serving in this capacity, Dr. Brownlee became interested in working with at risk youth. For the next several years, she worked at the Department of Juvenile Justice with incarcerated females in grades 6 – 12 and in McCormick with middle school students. Next, Dr. Brownlee accepted a position in Laurens County as an assistant principal where she served for 6 years. During this time, she gained valuable administrative experience while working at an elementary, middle and high school where she supervised the special education department. Dr. Brownlee came to Washington Center as principal in 2007, when Mrs. Ann Poole retired. Dr. Brownlee is an active community leader. She has served on the Board of Directors for the Laurens County YMCA. Under Dr. Brownlee’s leadership, the faculty and staff continue to adopt best practices that enhance the educational program and quality of services for students with severe and multiple disabilities.

Linda Hill is the Program Facilitator for Washington Center. Her main duty is supervision of due process compliance. Ms. Hill has thirty years of professional experience in special education, with twenty two years as a classroom teacher and eight as a special education coordinator for Greenville County Schools. Ms. Hill was first introduced to the world of individuals with disabilities as a teenager, where she worked for eight summers at Camp Spearhead; she is also a longstanding supporter of Special Olympics. She was twice chosen as Teacher of the Year, has served in a leadership capacity on numerous committees, and is currently serving a three year appointment to the South Carolina IDEA Advisory Council. Ms. Hill remains a steadfast advocate for students with disabilities and their families.

An Administrative Assistant was added to Washington Center's administrative staff in 2000. Linda Thigpen moved from the classroom to fill this position. She is a former Washington Center teacher with more than 30 years of district special education experience, teaching students with a variety of handicapping conditions. Mrs. Thigpen assists the principal with multiple administrative duties, fulfills due process obligations, and provides instructional support to the school staff. She also serves as an ADEPT and PAS-T evaluator and mentor for Washington Center and district teachers. In her role as the Alternate Assessment District Test Coordinator, Mrs. Thigpen provides workshops and support to participating Greenville County teachers while coordinating the district's alternate assessment testing process. She is a member of the State Alternate Assessment Advisory Committee and participates in multiple committees for the State Department of Education. For the 2005 school year, Mrs. Thigpen was awarded the Greenville County TIAA-CREF Administrative Assistant.

The current administrative team brings a wealth of educational experience to the program. Each member has experience in a variety of areas and as a team is able to provide guidance and leadership to the Washington Center staff.

### **Safety, Cleanliness, and Adequacy of School Facilities**

Washington Center and the District are committed to providing a safe and clean learning environment. The five members of the custodial staff are dedicated to providing a safe and clean environment for the special needs population. Care is given to provide non-toxic materials and out of reach hazards for the students who may not be aware of dangers.

At Washington Center, student safety is a priority. There is an extensively researched, updated emergency preparedness/safety plan. Regular fire and emergency drills are held. Preparations for various potential emergencies are coordinated with regional agencies. Washington Center personnel work with all of the City of Greenville emergency agencies to ensure that in case of an emergency, our severely disabled students will be evacuated or sheltered in place in a timely manner. Response time for EMS has been shortened. A protocol is in place for addressing EMS required incidents. Staff members and bus drivers are trained in Diastat, VNS and EpiPen procedures. Buses are equipped with two-way radios and videotaping for emergencies. There is a medical team consisting of ten staff members who are certified in CPR and First Aid. First responder drills are held on a regular basis. Designated staff members receive instruction in administering emergency medical procedures, such as tube feeding, as needed for students. Emergency call buttons in every restroom, classroom phones, and locked secondary entrances are further safety measures.

Universal precautions procedures are used for handling all body fluids with gloves furnished. Training is provided for handling contaminants. Wex-cide 128 is utilized to

prevent contamination on campus. Hand sanitizer is provided at different locations throughout the school campus.

Specific safety concerns regarding buildings and grounds are remedied by on-site custodians or utility workers assigned to site duties. If on-site personnel cannot handle the problem, it is handled by the school district's maintenance department. The five member custodial staff performs basic cleaning operations in each classroom and the cafeteria every day.

Other aspects of the school/district safety program include:

- District safety committee
- Bus evacuation drills
- District Safety Training completed on line by all staff
- Fire safety inspections
- Campus supervision

### **Classroom Discipline/Learning Climate**

Washington Center provides a disciplined, yet stimulating, learning climate for students that is enhanced by involved parents. Parents are encouraged to participate in school committees and councils, to practice skills designated on the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and to encourage and honor the successes of their children. Student discipline is the responsibility of all Washington Center staff members. As our student population expands, behavior issues have also increased. If a student has been identified with a severe behavior disorder, a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is conducted. Based on those findings, a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is developed and integrated into the student's IEP. The BIP serves as a blueprint for supporting students whenever behavior issues arise. Currently, 32 students require a BIP as part of their instructional plan. Staff members are trained and certified in Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) techniques. There is also a Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) Response Team. This seven member team has received additional training and certification on physical interventions. This team is called only after regular classroom interventions have been attempted. This team conducts review/practice sessions on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of each month. As noted in subsequent sessions, training and behavioral management strategies are recent focus areas.

A major Washington Center goal is to provide a positive climate for learning in order to assure student achievement, enhance self-esteem, and develop positive social behavior. To reach this goal, the program offers opportunities for student participation and recognition.

Students are encouraged to exhibit and expected to maintain appropriate behavior at all times because disruptions interfere with learning. Student handbooks and other information

regarding school and classroom rules are distributed and discussed on a regular basis. Classroom rules that can be understood by our population are posted. Most rules are formatted in the picture/symbol form. If students violate school/district rules, including BIP guidelines, by becoming aggressive, district suspension policy is followed.

Progress on Individualized Education Plans is reviewed on a regular basis, with interim and quarterly instructional team updates. If a student is not making progress due to inappropriate objectives, a staffing committee is reconvened to amend the IEP. Students in Grades 3 through 8 and age 15 are assessed on the South Carolina Alternate Assessment. Classroom activities are aligned with the State Academic Standards and IEP functional curriculum.



*SC State Standards are incorporated into classroom activities*

### **Counseling and Other Student Support Services**

Students at Washington Center receive a high level of support from an outstanding staff. The administration, nursing services and classroom teachers work closely with Greenville County agencies to facilitate the provision of services for disabled students and their families. Washington Center personnel work collaboratively with numerous agencies including: Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN), Department of Social Services (DSS), Family Connections, Pre-School Program, Center for Developmental Services, Shriners, Children's Program at Greenville Hospital, DEHEC, Commission for the Blind, Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of the Governor.

### **After-School Programs**

Washington Center as a school does not provide after-school programs. However, the Greenville County Disabilities and Special Needs program provides a summer

camp. Many students' families receive respite, nursing and/or personal care services through public agencies.