

Gardner Newman assistant principal returns after remarkable recovery from stroke

July 30, 2025 By Tommy Murphy

One morning in April could have been the worst day of De'sa Fuller's life, but thanks to fast action from her colleagues at Gardner Newman Middle School and caregivers at Wellstar, she is back, healthy and ready to help her students. Fuller is the sixth-grade assistant principal at Gardner Newman. On April 15, De 'sa suffered a massive stroke during morning admission. Fortunately, her fellow educators noticed that she had fallen and immediately went into action, saving her from potentially devastating stroke debilitations. Fuller's friend and her former sixth-grade teacher, Karen Fowler, was the first to notice De'sa had fallen. Fowler taught Fuller years ago at Long Cane Middle School and they later became colleagues.

"Her first year as a teacher, I always called her Day-Day. [When she fell], I called her Miss Fuller, and she didn't respond to me, so I said, 'Day-Day, Day-Day,' and she opened her eyes, she smiled, and I knew then something had happened," Fowler said. "She smiled, and I knew when only half of her face smiled, we were in trouble." Fowler and Coach Heath Taylor immediately went into action, helping Fuller to a rolling chair and into a classroom to prevent students from being alarmed. Taylor said he utilized his Centegix badge to alert administrators who were able to call 911 and get help for Fuller. De'sa said her morning had been going relatively well prior to the stroke. She had stopped by Smoothie King earlier and was just having a regular morning on sixth-grade hall.

"Thank God that I wasn't behind the wheel. I had just got to work. I went to put my stuff down, and I was talking to Ms. Fowler. When I put my stuff down, as soon as I walked out, all of a sudden, my vision got blurry," Fuller said. Fowler said the first thing she remembered was Coach Taylor asking if she was okay. She responded, yes, but then quickly realized she was not okay, and began asking for her mom. "At that moment, I just wanted my mom. I just knew something was wrong. I just couldn't say what it was," Fuller said.

While the school nurse checked Fuller's vitals, Taylor began trying to contact De'sa's mother, Tracie Bonner, and EMTs with the fire department arrived to help. Fuller was then taken to the emergency room where nurses recognized that she had suffered a severe stroke. "When she came to the hospital, I saw her and said, 'Oh, my god, this is really a bad stroke.' She's so young and just [having] devastating symptoms," said Ginger Truitt, stroke program coordinator at Wellstar West Georgia Medical Center. Truitt said that they immediately took Fuller in for scans and worked to see if she was a candidate for stroke medication, explaining medication they use for strokes is also

a blood thinner, so they have to make sure patients can take it. “I immediately got on the phone trying to identify if she was on any medications that would prevent her from getting the blood-thinning medication,” Truitt said, noting time was also important because the medication only helps with strokes if it is taken quickly. Truitt knew Fuller’s stroke was bad because she couldn’t move her right leg or right arm. She could speak, but her words were very slurred. “For somebody so young, at 34 years old, to experience these types of symptoms, this is not good,” Truitt said.

Fortunately, De’sa was able to make a miraculous recovery thanks to her colleagues, doctors, nurses and her mom, who was her caregiver after the stroke. Fuller said her mom, Tracie, was her angel during recovery. “It was all her. She was my nurse for everything that I needed, even down to taking a shower if I needed it. She was my angel in disguise,” Fuller said. Now, Fuller is back and ready for school to start on Friday. She says she’s not 100 percent and still needs to get endurance back up, but she does not have any apparent disabilities from the stroke. Doctors aren’t sure why she had the stroke at such a young age, but she has made a remarkable recovery. She’s happy to be back with her students, and they’re happy to have her back, too. “While I was out, I received messages from my students, and they really missed me,” Fuller said. The school put up hearts around Fuller’s office door with little messages from students telling her how much they missed her and hoped she was doing better and praying for her. “It was nice to see that my students were praying for me. That really meant a lot to me,” Fuller said, adding the whole community had reached out to check on her.

“[That day] I had over 300 text messages on my phone. The whole community was praying for me, from the [school] board, from the central office, down to teachers at different schools were sending their prayers,” Fuller said. Truitt said that when you see someone experiencing a stroke, call 911 and get them directly to the hospital because time matters. “Know what their medications are. Know when their last known well time was. Give us a clock time of when they were last their normal self and emergency contact information,” Truitt said. You can spot a stroke by remembering to BE FAST: 4 B – Balance: Sudden dizziness or loss of coordination. 4 E – Eyes: Blurred or double vision, or loss of vision in one or both eyes. 4 F – Face: One side of the face may droop or feel numb. 4 A – Arms: Weakness or numbness in one arm or leg. 4 S – Speech: Slurred speech or difficulty understanding others. 4 T – Time: Call 911 immediately—every second counts.

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