

'SUMMER'S GONE, SUMMER'S GONE'

Students nudged into school year

By Tanya Jones
Sun Staff Writer

Mary B. Berry has watched children rush through the doors on the first day of school in Harford County for 50 years.

"Kids are always eager to get back on the first day," said Mrs. Berry, the media specialist at Hickory Elementary School. "They are glad when school closes, but they are glad when it opens."

Mrs. Berry, a 70-year-old Forest Hill resident, is embarking on her 50th year as an educator in Harford's public schools.

"I guess you would say she is the dean of our staff," Hickory Principal Michael J. Heiberger said. "When we want to go back and ask a question, 'What was it like then?' she is there to answer those questions," he said.

Yesterday, it was Mrs. Berry who was asking the questions as she quizzed fifth-graders during an orientation at the media center.

How do you check out books? Where are the fiction books? Who can find the unabridged dictionary?

"We're back in school now," she admonished the children when the pace of answers slowed. "Summer's gone. Summer's gone."

That refrain was probably uttered in schools from Havre de Grace to Norrisville yesterday as more than 37,000 students began the school year in Harford.

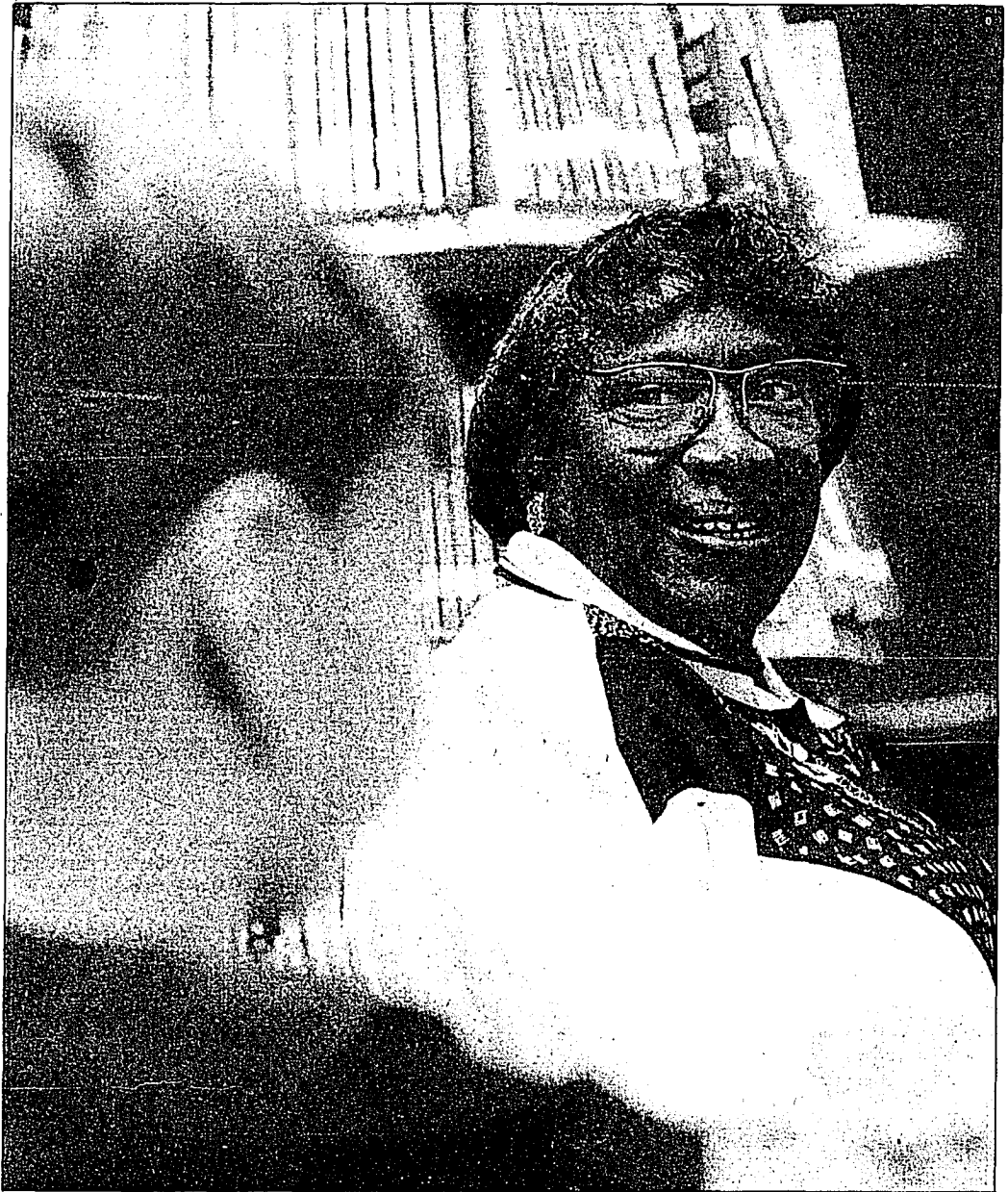
Mrs. Berry, who began as a high school English teacher in 1946, met a steady stream of classes in the media center yesterday, just as she has since the 1950s. The media center was known as the library for many of those years.

She became the librarian at the Central Consolidated School, then the county's newest school for black students, in the early 1950s after earning a master's degree in English and library services from Columbia University.

She stayed on at the school when Central Consolidated became Hickory Elementary School in 1965, after Harford was forced by court order to integrate its schools.

"We were ready for integration, because of the limited supplies and limited curriculum" for black schools under segregation, said Mrs. Berry, whose three adult children are Harford school graduates.

Although she and other black faculty were apprehensive, she said, integration went smoothly for Hickory. "I never felt that I was



ALGERINA PERNA/SUN STAFF PHOTO

Media specialist Mary Berry, a 50-year educator with Harford's public schools, acquaints students with resources of the media center at Hickory Elementary School.

mistreated, and I never had any problems," she said.

After half a century as an educator, Mrs. Berry has a simple goal for the coming school year.

"I want to give my best up until the end," she said. "The thing that is most important to me is that as long as I am here, I want to give what the job demands."

An exact enrollment count for the first day was not available, said Donald R. Morrison, spokesman for the county schools. Officials had

expected 37,239 students in the county's 49 schools.

No serious problems were reported, Mr. Morrison said.

There was the odd late bus and last-minute registrations, but principals reported smooth opening days.

"It is warm, and it is busy, but the children seem happy to be here," said Deerfield Elementary School Principal Rachael R. Reid. Deerfield is one of four Edgewood-area schools where rooms are be-

ing outfitted with weather-stripping and air filters as a precaution in case of a chemical emergency at the Edgewood area of the nearby Aberdeen Proving Ground.

Discarded chemical weapons at the Army base eventually will be removed, and there is a stockpile of potentially lethal mustard agent.

In the classrooms, where windows were sealed with screws and caulk, teachers opened doors to the outside for ventilation. The rooms are not air-conditioned.