

# CRMS

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

**2023 - 24**  
Year In  
Review

# BOARD MEMBERS

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**Stephanie Sneed**  
District 4 (Chair)



**Gregory "Dee" Rankin**  
District 3 (Vice Chair)



**Liz Monterrey Duvall**  
At-Large



**Lenora Shipp**  
At-Large



**Monty Witherspoon**  
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**Melissa Easley**  
District 1



**Thelma Byers-Bailey**  
District 2



**Lisa Cline**  
District 5



**Summer Nunn**  
District 6

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# MESSAGE

## FROM THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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*Dear Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community,*

Education is the cornerstone of communities and the fabric of society. It is the great equalizer. It is the path to a better future for each and every one of our students.

Because of this steadfast belief, the CMS team works tirelessly each day to ensure that every student — including those with the least resources — has access to free, high-performing schools with dedicated, impassioned, and skilled teachers who guide and teach our students using effective and high-level instruction and curriculum. This level of education allows all students to soar to the greatest of heights.

CMS is ready to take flight with them.

The Board will continue to be committed to:

**EDUCATION:** We are laser focused on improving student outcomes.

**ENGAGEMENT:** We listen to our community who help inform how to ensure student success.

**ELEVATE:** We ensure that students and families understand the “Three Es” — enrolled, enlisted, or employed — so that students elevate their future.

It was with the help of the community, last fall, that the Board approved our visionary path forward for students. That path is captured in the CMS goals and guardrails. These goals are based on the community’s vision of what our students should know and be able to achieve.

With the goals and guardrails as our compass, Team CMS is on a trajectory of success. This Board advocated to have our latest budget fully funded so teachers and staff can be better paid; our learning environments improved and better technology for students.

Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill and her team have been committed to results-driven actions and insist on excellence from all those that directly or indirectly impact the growth and learning of our students. Therefore, they have seen improved outcomes for many students, but recognize and are planning for greater achievements. Team CMS has built strong relationships with businesses and community partners who understand that a future community is only as strong as today’s students. In this annual report, you will see how our strength is in our numbers and what we have achieved together.

We are forging into a new era at CMS. A transformational and innovative era that will build strong school leadership; support our educators; grow a teacher pipeline; and partner with communities.

We ALL collectively have an absolute obligation to do ALL things that will ensure that our students are academically successful so they are prepared to lead in the workforce, their communities and their families.

The Board recognizes that this is a new transformational era of excellence without exception.

*Stephanie Sneed*

Chair, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education

# MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

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*Dear Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools  
Families, Staff, Partners and Friends,*

The 2023–24 school year proved to be an amazing year in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. It was made more meaningful by your partnership, collaboration and support. Together, we celebrated our accolades and achievements with national awards for our teachers, state athletic championships and honors for school programs. We also celebrated your overwhelming support for our historic \$2.5 billion bond package, which will allow us to complete 30 capital projects over the next several years.

In my first full year as superintendent, my primary focus was to work with our Board of Education to build a strong foundation for the work ahead. The goals and guardrails set by our Board are where we begin. Our goals focus on literacy, math and post-secondary readiness. Our guardrails center on equity, safety, student well-being and engagement and staffing — all tenets we must not forsake as we work to achieve our goals.

I am pleased to share *A Year in Review* for the 2023–24 school year, which showcases our milestones focused on our work to ensure that every student in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools graduates enrolled, enlisted or employed, how we help students learn and grow at the highest levels, and our engagement with families and the community.

Throughout the 2023–24 school year, we aligned our work to pillars of excellence — academic, people, operational and engagement — as we worked to achieve our goals and guardrails.

We unveiled our district’s five-year Strategic Plan — a comprehensive roadmap for success in all areas of the district. Aligned to the goals and guardrails, the plan emphasizes improvement in student achievement through measurable outcomes and represents the next phase of initiatives to enhance the district’s organizational effectiveness.

We invited the Mecklenburg County community through town hall meetings and listening sessions to provide insight and share values and concerns related to our budget priorities, the bond referendum and the Strategic Plan.

Our community is eager to support Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, and for that we are grateful. That support was evident this year when we hosted our inaugural Partnership Summit, which strategically aligned our needs with the expertise of our more than 450 community partners.

We have high expectations for our students, and we are committed to improving student achievement levels. We know our success depends on a number of factors, including attracting the best and brightest educators to our district. Student achievement and Endless Possibilities are what drive us. We will continue this most important work knowing that 2023–24 is only the beginning.

With thanks and appreciation,

*Dr. Crystal L. Hill*

Superintendent

# ATA GLANCE

## *Our Mission*

To create an innovative, inclusive, student-centered environment that supports the development of independent learners.

## *Our Vision*

To lead the community in educational excellence, inspiring intellectual curiosity, creativity, and achievement so that all students reach their full potential.

## 2024–29 Goals



### Early Literacy

Percent of kindergarten through second grade students scoring at or above benchmark in early literacy as measured by DIBELS will increase from **67%** in June 2023 to **91%** by June 2029



### Grades 3–8 Literacy

Percent of students scoring college and career ready (CCR) on reading end of grade assessments in grades 3–8 will increase from **30.5%** in September 2023 to **50%** by June 2029



### Math I

Percent of students scoring college and career ready (CCR) on Math I assessments will increase from **27.4%** in September 2023 to **57%** by June 2029



### Postsecondary Readiness

Percent of rising 12th grade students on track to graduate from high school enrolled, enlisted or employed will increase by June 2029 (metric is currently in development)



## 2024–29 Guardrails



### **Equity over Equality: Equitable Distribution of Outcomes (Closing Gaps)**

While ensuring schools have the resources needed to meet student needs, the Superintendent shall not neglect strategies or resources for significantly reducing achievement gaps.



### **Safety**

The Superintendent shall not allow an unsafe environment in schools, at school-related events, or on transportation.



### **Attend to the Whole Child: Student Well-Being & Engagement**

The Superintendent shall not neglect social-emotional support; character development support; attendance support; or access to enrichment activities that successfully engage students.



### **Staffing: Teacher Recruitment, Retention & Engagement**

While ensuring all schools have teachers equipped to deliver high-quality instruction, the Superintendent shall neither neglect targeted nor comprehensive strategies for teacher recruitment, retention and engagement.

# ATA GLANCE

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Scan for more information  
about the Strategic Plan

## *Pillars of Excellence/Strategic Plan*

**Our strategic plan enables excellence without exception.**

Our vision and mission have driven our goals and guardrails, which collectively enable four pillars of excellence across our school system – academic excellence, people excellence, operational excellence and engagement excellence.



**Academic  
Excellence**



**People  
Excellence**

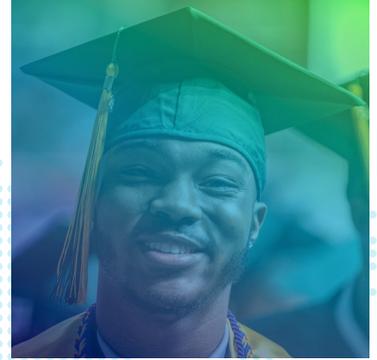


**Operational  
Excellence**



**Engagement  
Excellence**



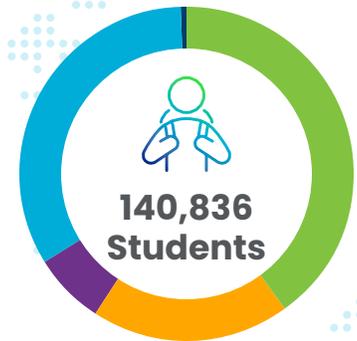
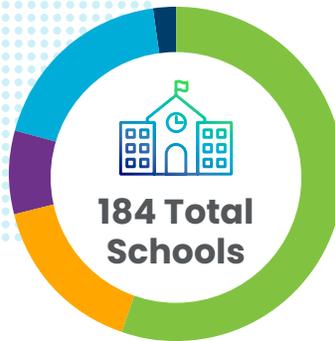
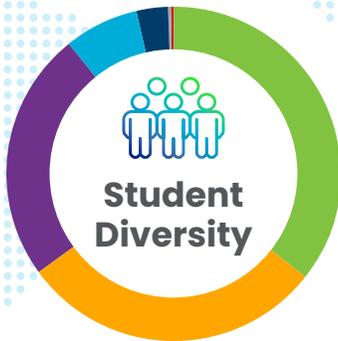


## More Than 140,000 Students

We proudly serve a richly diverse population of students and families. Our students come from **158 different countries** and speak **194 languages**. Our top ten languages spoken by students other than English are Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, French, Portuguese, Telugu, Arabic/Egyptian/Lebanese/Syrian, Hindi/Indian/Urdu, Tamil and Chinese.

2023 – 24 Grad Rate

# 84%



- 35.8% Black
- 29.2% Hispanic
- 24.4% White
- 7.1% Asian
- 3.2% Multicultural
- .2% American Indian
- .1% Pacific Islander

- 102 Elementary Schools
- 29 Middle Schools
- 15 K – 8 Schools
- 34 High Schools
- 4 Special Programs

- 56,430 Elementary Students
- 26,949 Middle Students
- 9,731 K – 8 Students
- 47,244 High Students
- 482 Special Program Students



We employ more than **19,000 teachers, support staff and administrators**, making CMS one of the largest employers in Mecklenburg County (48.02% of the workforce are teachers and 40.2% of them have advanced degrees).

# ATA GLANCE

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## CMS Makes Progress in Student Achievement

The N.C. Department of Public Instruction released data for the 2023–24 school year in September 2024.

- More CMS schools are **meeting or exceeding growth** than ever before in the district's history:
  - **83.4% of schools** (or 146 of 175 assessed) met or exceeded growth, a measurement that shows how they helped students to progress over the course of a year.
- The **graduation rate increased** to 84%, including significant increases in the graduation rates of Hispanic and Multilingual learners.
- **Increases in grade-level proficiency** in math, science and students at or above benchmark in K-2 early literacy.
- **Decrease in achievement gaps** between white, Black and Hispanic student groups in K-2 literacy.
- **For the first time**, more CMS schools (19) were removed than added (17) from the state's low-performing list.



Scan for more Student  
Achievement Results

“We are excited about and encouraged by the positive gains our district and schools have made. This progress is the result of diligent and intentional efforts from our school and district leaders, as well as our classroom teachers, school support staff and our entire community — proving that when we work together, we can achieve great results and improved outcomes for our students. We also know we will need to make even greater improvements in the future to reach the goals set for us by our Board of Education and our community in our five-year strategic plan.”

— Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill



## 2023 – 24 Operating Budget

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools 2023–24 operating budget was prepared with the urgent needs of our students in mind. The budget aligns the district’s resources with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education’s priorities outlined in the Goals and Guardrails. The Board approved the **\$2.1 billion budget** at its Dec. 4, 2023, meeting.

### Sources of Funding



**51%**  
State



**29%**  
County



**19%**  
Federal and  
Other Grants



**<1%**  
Other and  
Special Revenue

### Uses of Funding



**52%**  
Salaries



**24%**  
Benefits



**13%**  
Purchased  
Services



**6%**  
Supplies  
and  
Materials



**5%**  
Charter  
School  
Pass  
Through



**<1%**  
Furniture  
and  
Equipment

# ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

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## *Skylar Kupfer and Carter Legrand, East Mecklenburg High School*

*Two JROTC cadets are headed to  
the U.S. Air Force Academy.*

The U.S. Air Force Academy is one of the most competitive schools in the nation. Applicants must meet the highest academic, physical, character and medical standards to be eligible for a coveted spot. Two Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools seniors — Skylar Kupfer and Carter Legrand, both from East Mecklenburg High School — met those standards and have embarked on their dreams of becoming officers and pilots.

Kupfer and Legrand spent four years in East Mecklenburg's Air Force Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) before being accepted by the academy. They will earn their undergraduate degrees, each valued at more than \$416,000, at no cost in return for their military service. Their appointments are amazing milestones for them, as well as for their JROTC program.

"It's been a magical year — sort of a rare event — because it takes a high-caliber student to get to that

# We are enrolled



level," said retired Air Force Maj. D. Ray Cox Jr., senior aerospace science instructor and Air Force Academy alumnus. "It takes a lot of determination and a lot of patience, and not every student has that."

Kupfer first heard of JROTC in high school, which was held virtually her freshman year because of COVID-19. A friend told her the class was fun, and Kupfer quickly signed up. Within the first week, she knew she had found her career path.

"They spent a lot of time focusing on career and college readiness, and someone in my Zoom class said they wanted to go to the academy," Kupfer said. "I started researching it,

and from freshman year, I've been dead set on going to the Air Force Academy."

Kupfer combined challenging coursework with participation in almost every JROTC team and more than 100 community service hours, Cox said. As a senior, she was unit commander, leading 180 cadets and supervising a robust yearly school district schedule of service projects, competitions and a recruiting effort for four feeder middle schools. She served on the Academic Bowl championship team, the first-place Book Study team, several JROTC sports teams and won the Daedalian Award and Air Commando Association Award. She also earned



# and enlisted.

a prestigious J-100 Scholarship, one of 100 fully funded scholarships to attend any U.S. university that offers Air Force ROTC.

"Skylar is the utmost example of the core values of integrity first, service before self and excellence in all we do," Cox said.

Last summer, Kupfer and Legrand shared a coveted honor when they were selected for the Air Force's Flight Academy program. They were two of 220 cadets, from 850 JROTC units worldwide, who received the scholarship that allowed them to earn their private pilot's license at no cost.

For Legrand, the flight experience was a turning point. Since childhood, he had dreamed of attending the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. "But my aviation interests peaked after attending Flight Academy, and I switched," he said.

Cox said Legrand is one of the most respectful cadets in the JROTC program and "embraces the JROTC mission of building a higher character within yourself to serve in your community and nation." Legrand managed a challenging load of Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, maintaining a 3.98 weighted GPA,

while participating in multiple activities. In eighth grade, he created and taught a free chess club at Windsor Park Elementary School, which he continued throughout high school. This was in addition to his other activities: service and community projects, sports (baseball, indoor track, volleyball), Boy Scouts (Eagle Scout) and marching band (drum-line captain).

"The most rewarding programs I've been a part of were either in JROTC or Boy Scouts," Legrand said. "They both teach you the intangible things that you take with you through life, such as leadership, determination, grit. Those are things you don't always learn everywhere, but through JROTC and Boy Scouts, I've learned I can do more than I think I can."

Kupfer said she's excited about the future and sharing another adventure with her friend, Legrand, even though she expects they will be separated at the academy.

"A big point of it is to make sure you're outside your comfort zone," she said. "You don't know anybody, and you build really strong bonds. So we might not be exactly together, but it's nice to know that if I ever need something, Carter's there. He's always got my back, and I've always got his."

# ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

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## *Frida Guerrero Ochoa, Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology*

***Guerrero Ochoa will attend the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in the fall as a Levine Scholar.***

On June 12, Frida Guerrero Ochoa walked across the graduation stage as salutatorian for Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology's Class of 2024.

She was president of her school's Hispanic Heritage Club and served as an ambassador for Right Moves For Youth. Guerrero Ochoa, who has a 4.577 GPA, is also the recipient of a prestigious Levine Scholars scholarship valued at approximately \$115,000.

But her journey to academic success didn't come without its challenges.

Guerrero Ochoa's family immigrated to the United States from Honduras. Her father works construction, and



her mom worked at McDonald's for several years. Because of their status, Guerrero Ochoa's witnessed their limitations in what they could do, but also noticed the sacrifices they made to give her and her brother all that they could.

"I realized that I had the opportunity to do something, that I have so many doors that can be opened for me," she said. "Their limitations pushed me to want to strive to open doors for myself and take advantage of the opportunities that I had because I

know that at the end of the day, my parents came here for my brother and me, and I just want to make sure their sacrifices weren't in vain."

With the support of her teachers at Berryhill School and Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology, Guerrero Ochoa grew not only academically, but socially.

"CMS has helped me get involved in the community, really get to know myself and know that I am capable of taking on challenges that will prepare me for college and the professional world," she said. "I couldn't sit here and say that I'm here because I did it alone. It was all the people around me — my teachers, my brother who set an example for me when I was younger, and especially my parents."

Patrick Ames, Sports Marketing teacher at Phillip O. Berry, said Guerrero Ochoa is "all in no matter what." It wasn't just about the grade for Guerrero Ochoa. She put in the time and produced quality work.

# I am enrolled.

Ames wrote a letter of recommendation for Guerrero Ochoa when she applied for the Levine Scholars scholarship. While working on her essays, Ames reminded Guerrero Ochoa that only she could tell her story.

“She’s seen her family go through hard times, and that’s what motivates her,” said Ames. “What was really powerful was when she realized that her past, her struggle was what made her stronger. It didn’t hold her back.”

This fall, Guerrero Ochoa will attend the University of North Carolina at Charlotte as a Levine Scholar, the University’s most competitive academic scholarship. In addition to covering full-tuition, housing, meals and other costs, the scholarship also provides additional funding to support civic engagement opportunities and professional development.

She plans to major in marketing and minor in communications. She would also like to obtain her real estate license.

“The community that I’m surrounded by has helped me get to where I am today,” she said. “I cannot stress enough how much [my parents’] sacrifices have made an impact on me. At the end of the day, I just want to show them their sacrifices were worth it.”



# ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

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## *Joseph Cundy, Providence High School*

*Cundy is enlisting in the U.S. Air Force following graduation.*

Joseph Cundy was a sophomore when he signed up for Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) class at Providence High School. He thought the class looked interesting, not realizing the impact it would have on his life.

"I was in ROTC for three years and actually thought, 'This is pretty cool,'" said Cundy, now a graduating senior. "I was always brought up with a lot of discipline, so it wasn't a huge change for me, but it made me realize there are a lot of different ways to be a proper citizen and to be a proper human being. ROTC really helped me achieve that."

So much so that he is enlisting in the U.S. Air Force directly after graduation. A JROTC petty officer 1st class and Distinguished Cadet

Award winner, Cundy plans to climb the military ranks and eventually become a fighter pilot. He already has a recruiter and will turn 18 in October. Until then, he will prepare for testing and the rigors of basic training, which will send him to Texas later this year.

Cundy said he plans to learn the ropes as an air traffic control manager before going through officer training, earning a college degree and, ultimately, attending flight school. He initially will have a four-year commitment but would like to have his military career span at least 20 years.

"Joseph is an excellent cadet with a bright future," said Cmdr. Davin O'Hora of Providence Navy JROTC. "He is planning to enlist in the U.S. Air Force with a goal of using his military service to pay for college and return to the Air Force as an officer and pilot. We wish him luck and look forward to swapping aviation stories with him in the future."





# I am enlisted.

A Brooklyn, N.Y., native, Cundy was in seventh grade when his family moved to Charlotte, where he also attended Jay M. Robinson Middle School. At Providence, he found time for a variety of interests, in addition to JROTC. He participated in theater all four years, moving to the technical side (sets and sound) as a junior, ran track for two years, played on the esports team and, this year, was a member of Providence's inaugural men's volleyball team.

Cundy said he originally considered joining the U.S. Marine Corps but was inspired by an internship he had with Delta Airlines and eventually turned his attention skyward. He will be the first in his family to enter the military and said that while his parents aren't

keen on having their son on the front lines, they "always want the best for me — but it's all part of the job."

Cundy encourages incoming high school students to put aside any prejudices they have toward wearing a uniform or learning regulations, and seriously consider JROTC and the opportunities available with a military career.

"I know it's not for everyone, but at least try ROTC," he said. "It's a really fun class, and it gives you insight on what you can achieve without going to college. Commander pushes us not only to succeed, but to figure out what's best for us, because no one else can do that."

# ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

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## *Jamie Torres, Independence High School*

*Torres will work as an apprentice at Swinerton, a national construction company, post-graduation.*

From the time he was about 6 years old, Jaime Torres would go to work with his dad who works in construction. While he only did small jobs like picking up the trash

and handing workers their tools, he remembers watching and thinking how cool it was to see small parts come together to make something bigger – “like a puzzle.”

During his freshman year at Independence High School, he didn’t know much about the carpentry program until his friends started talking about it. When he began his sophomore year, he gave it a chance and hasn’t looked back since.

“This program has made me feel excited about new possibilities and opportunities I can have,” said Torres. “What I’ve learned here is going to help me in my career over the years because you learn about the basics, the fundamentals, everything you need to know that will give you a head start.”

From bird houses to sheds to stairs to toolboxes, Torres has made a little bit of everything. He’s also part of SkillsUSA, a workforce development organization for students, where he’s competed and placed in several competitions regionally and at the state level. Torres finds that he applies the skills and techniques he’s learned over the years to projects he works on at home.

“This room means a lot to me,” said Torres about his class. “I would stay after school to practice or stay after school to help out with something. I’ve learned a lot and I’ve made a lot of friends.”

During the second semester of his sophomore year, companies visited his class to talk with students about a variety of topics, from job opportunities to pay and benefits. That’s how he met representatives



# I am employed.

from Swinerton, a national construction company, where he'll be working as an apprentice post-graduation.

"It's a great opportunity," said Torres. "I'm able to walk into a job that will offer me growth and support, and teach me a lot more skills."

"It's impressive when you see a high schooler who is dependable and does everything he's supposed to do," said Keith Olson, Carpentry pathway lead at Independence High. "He's definitely well rounded."

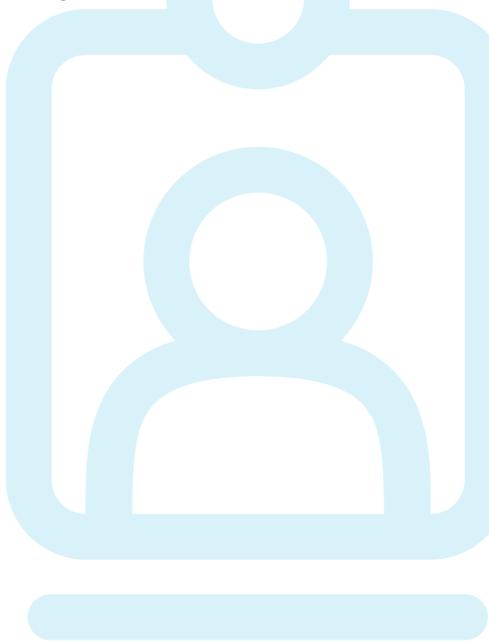
Olson helped establish the partnership between the school and Swinerton. Seeing students like Torres get hired straight out of school demonstrates to Olson the value of partnerships between schools and companies.

"We have a bunch of good opportunities for these kids," said Olson. "These relationships are working the way it's supposed to work, and I would love to see it spread throughout the district."

Torres said his family was excited to hear about the job offer and encouraged him to give it a try. And

while Torres' dad would've liked for his son to work with him, he's happy knowing that he will work in the trades.

"I want to thank my teachers at Independence because they've taught me a lot of skills, and not just things learned in the classroom," said Torres. "They showed me how to see things from different angles and overcome obstacles. I'm excited, and nervous, about the real world because I'm not sure what to expect. But I'm mainly excited to try new things."



# ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHTS

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## *Athletics Soar in CMS*

**North Mecklenburg High School** won the N.C. High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA) 4A Men's **Basketball Championship**, the Vikings' third state championship.

**Myers Park High School** earned its third NCHSAA 4A Women's Dual Team **Tennis Championship** in November with a 5-4 win against New Hanover High School.

**Ardrey Kell High School's** Knights Athletics Department received the **Safe Sports School** award from the National Athletic Trainers' Association, which champions safety and recognizes secondary schools that have met the recommended standards to improve safety in sports.

**Jack DiMenna** of Providence High School won the NCHSAA 4A Men's Individual **Tennis 2024 Championship**.

**Isaiah Evans**, a North Mecklenburg High School basketball player, became only the third CMS student to be named to the **McDonald's All-American Team**.

**Cameron Stinson** of Mallard Creek High School became the first wrestler in North Carolina history to win **200 matches** without a single loss. His win in the state finals capped his high school career with a record of 205 wins-0 losses; and his fourth state wrestling title. Stinson also received the NCHSAA's Willie Bradshaw Memorial Endowed Scholarship.

The **Mallard Creek High School 4x200 relay team** of Nassor Ashenafi, Travis McFadden, Justin Watts and Tyson Williams won **first place** in the NCHSAA 4A State Championship. Williams also won the 200-meter dash.

## *Schools Win Awards and Distinction*

**Jay M. Robinson Middle School** was named a 2023 **National Blue Ribbon School**. The school was one of eight selected from North Carolina and among 353 schools honored nationwide. The award recognizes overall academic performance or progress in closing achievement gaps.

**Thirteen schools** earned **Magnet Schools of America National Merit Awards**, which honor the top magnet schools in the nation.

### **Merit Schools of Excellence**

Blythe Elementary School, with one of the top 25 scores in the nation

South Mecklenburg High School

### **Merit Schools of Distinction**

Billingsville-Cotswold Elementary School

East Mecklenburg High School

Idlewild Elementary School

Irwin Academic Center

McClintock Middle School

Oaklawn Language Academy

Paw Creek Elementary School

Piedmont Middle School

Shamrock Gardens Elementary School

South Academy of International Languages

Tuckaseegee Elementary School



## Students Excel in Academia and Arts

**Christian Smart, Laqarius Ross** and **Kaliek Wade**, all from **Garinger High School**, earned college **esports scholarships** to Averett University, St. Andrews University and Carthage College, respectively, where they will continue to be competitive gamers while earning their college degrees. Garinger's esports teams won a number of top 10 competition titles, was state champ in app development the previous year, and the Call of Duty team was second in the state. **1**



**Isaiah Blevins of West Mecklenburg High School** earned a full-time **electrical apprenticeship 2** role at Gaylor Electric, an international industrial electrical contractor, following graduation. Blevins was enrolled in a dual-enrollment program with The ROC (Rebuilding Opportunities in Construction), where he earned college credits through Central Piedmont Community College and construction trades training, along with several prestigious national industry certifications. **2**



**Blake Bowman** of Coulwood STEM Academy won the worldwide Beable Spring PowerUp Contest. He competed with more than 100,000 students to earn the honor. **3**

**Dhruva Srivatsa of Davidson K-8 School** won the 2024 District **Spelling Bee** for the second consecutive year. This year's bee featured 12 intense rounds and an unprecedented spell-off to settle a three-way tie for second place.

Twelve students from Charlotte East Language Academy, Collinswood Language Academy and Oaklawn Language Academy competed in the **inaugural CMS Spanish Dual Language Immersion Magnet Spelling Bee** (Concurso de Deletreo). The district winner was **Vicente Alcayaga of Charlotte East**, who also won the school's English spelling bee. Luis Rico of Charlotte East was runner-up.

A **culinary team from Garinger High School** won second place and a silver medal in the 2024 **NC Jr. Chef Competition**. Team members created the "Le Ramsay" dish, which featured flavors from their Hispanic heritage in a twist on fajitas with orange rice and fresas con crema. They achieved their goal of creating a recipe to celebrate the diversity of their culture and school. The recipe featured North Carolina-grown beef, peppers and strawberries.

**Renee Rapp**, a 2018 graduate of **Northwest School of the Arts**, starred in the 2024 film "**Mean Girls**" as Regina George, a role she played in the Broadway musical. Rapp is also a singer-songwriter and contributed to the movie soundtrack.

# ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHTS

## Scholarships Earned by Our Students

**770 students** from the 2024 class were awarded scholarships valued at \$85.4 million. Scholarship winners included 17 National Merit Scholarship recipients, two Morehead-Cain scholars, three Parks Scholarship recipients, one Benjamin Duke and one Levine scholarship, 10 military scholarships, and two scholarships from the Magnet Schools of America.

### Benjamin Duke Scholarship

Rosie Smolowitz, Myers Park High School

### Morehead-Cain Scholarship

Benjamin Jones, Myers Park High School

Misha Logisa, Ardrey Kell High School

### Parks Scholarship

Adi Chheda, Ardrey Kell High School

Addison Roper, South Mecklenburg High School

Piper Stevenson, South Mecklenburg High School

### Levine Scholarship

Frida Guerrero Ochoa, Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology



*U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten visited Oaklawn Language Academy, Pineville and Matthews elementary schools as part of the Raise the Bar. Lead the World initiative to reinforce commitments to prepare students for the 21st-century global economy.*



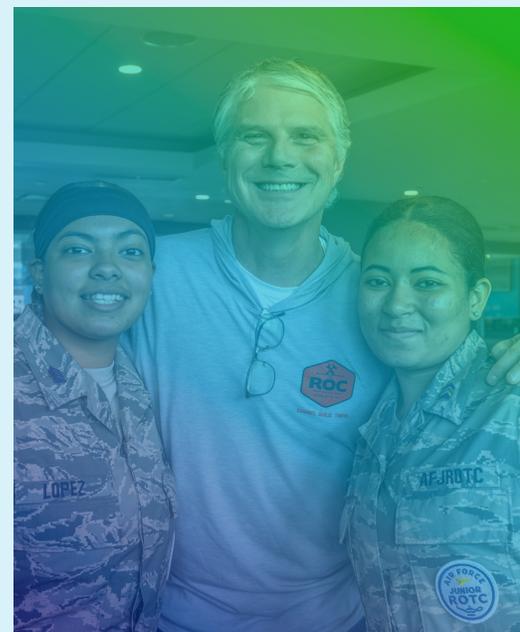
*CMS Arts Education established a new partnership with Charlotte City Partners and Charlotte is Creative to include the work of students and teachers in the 2024 Charlotte SHOUT! arts and music festival.*

## Inaugural Event Celebrates the Three E's

The inaugural “What’s Your E?” event at the Bank of America Stadium recognized more than **700 graduating seniors** from 34 high schools. The event aligned with the fourth district goal in the 2024–29 Strategic Plan, which tracks the paths to success for our graduates. The students who attended were already **enrolled, enlisted or employed**.

“Congratulations to each of you on selecting your ‘E’ and taking the first steps to map out a pathway to success after high school graduation. You may not realize that your decision to either enroll, enlist or choose employment is laying the foundation for your future. This decision will open new doors of opportunity for you and help you create the future you have imagined. You’re also inspiring younger students to follow in your footsteps.”

— Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill



# PEOPLE EXCELLENCE

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## *Meet Elizabeth Canute, Teacher of the Year*

*Veteran educator values rewards  
of nearly three decades of teaching.*

Elizabeth Canute has been a constant at Tuckaseegee Elementary School for the last 28 years. Her professional longevity, at the same school no less, never ceases to amaze those she has worked with along the way.

“They’ll say, ‘Tuckaseegee — you’re still there?’” Canute said. “And I’ll say, ‘Yep, I’m still there.’ It’s the most rewarding place I’ve ever worked. And invariably, wherever they are in life, their next words are, ‘That was such a special place to work. I never felt more like a family as a staff than I did at Tuckaseegee, but those were some of the hardest years I ever worked.’”

Canute, the 2023–24 Charlotte–Mecklenburg Schools Teacher of the Year, acknowledges the hard

work but values the relationships and rewards so much more. She is passionate about the students and families she serves and the school that’s been her second home.

“If you want to work with kids and you want to feel like you’re part of a family, this is the place to come,” Canute said. “However, you will work hard. It will not be easy, but things that are worth it never are.”

A native of Davenport, Iowa, Canute is a National Board Certified Teacher who followed her parents’ example. Both high school teachers, her mother later found success as a writer/editor, while her father, who played for the New York Yankees, was an award-winning baseball coach, including National Coach of the Year.

“I’ve just always wanted to be a teacher,” Canute said. “My dad could have gone other places, but he always chose to stay at the high school level where he felt he made an impact. Here, I can make an impact.”

Canute taught for 10 years in Jacksonville, Fla., and Atlanta before joining Tuckaseegee in 1995, an “itty-bitty little country school” on the west side of a much smaller Charlotte. Back then, all students attended the neighborhood schools, advancing from Tuckaseegee to the former Wilson Middle School — literally out their back door — and West Mecklenburg High School, a little farther down the road.

LaTresha Wilson grew up in that neighborhood and has just completed her first year as Tuckaseegee’s principal. She also taught at the school as a Multiage teacher alongside Canute and calls her “a rare gem.”

“Her dedication, energy and commitment to student achievement has been unwavering,” Wilson said. “She is a beacon of light for the staff, students and families, is always positive and works hard every day. Her passion and love for the students and her colleagues is genuine and unmatched. She is all in for

## 2023–24 TEACHER OF

Tuckaseegee and truly sees this school as her family and a place to call home.”

Tuckaseegee is now a partial magnet for Learning Immersion/ Talent Development, but the program has been embraced by the whole school. Canute said everyone there teaches like every student is gifted, or has the ability to be, and that many of their students move on to rigorous magnet programs, such as Piedmont Middle School and Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology.

Does Canute think her school is competitive? Absolutely, but she stresses that they need more parents sharing that good news. She said the pandemic took away relationships that were formed in schools and that bringing families back into the buildings — not calling in on Zoom — must be a priority.

“School is a family, and if your school building isn’t a family, we need to fix that first,” she said. “It’s always been

about those relationships — that is what we’ve got to go back to.” Canute knows personally how her relationships have paid off. She has former students who now approach her at school and say, “Remember me?” They’re settling back in the neighborhood and bringing their children to her at Tuckaseegee. Others have become educators and cite Canute as their inspiration to teach.

“I just finished my third year of teaching and can honestly say that my experiences in her classroom, even at such a young age, are some of the main reasons I chose to go into education,” said Kyra Johnson, who was in Canute’s Multiage program, kindergarten through second grade. “I admire so much about Mrs. Canute and her passion for teaching, love for her students and dedication to Tuckaseegee. She has been a blessing to so many students, families and colleagues throughout her career, and I am so thankful that I was lucky enough to be one of those fortunate students.”



# THE YEAR *Winner*



# PEOPLE EXCELLENCE

## *Keecha Finley, Teacher Assistant of the Year, University Meadows Elementary School*

### *Finley finds joy in watching students learn and grow.*

Establishing a good classroom environment is very important to Keecha Finley. Every morning, Finley plays a video of affirmations for her kindergarten students to recite.

"It's their classroom just as much as it is mine," said Finley, a teacher assistant at University Meadows Elementary School and the 2023–24 Teacher Assistant of the Year for Charlotte–Mecklenburg Schools. "I'm all about making sure the kids are comfortable and happy, and that they feel safe and secure and can trust us."

Growing up, Finley bounced between being a nurse or going into education. As the second oldest granddaughter, she did a lot of babysitting and considered herself a caretaker.



While at Harding University High School, she worked as a candy striper and participated in the school's Future Teachers of America, volunteering her time at Newell Elementary. Being with the students was what brought Finley the most joy.

"I love to see them grow and learn," she said. "I love those ah-ha moments."

Finley is in her 12th year at University Meadows and from year one to now, her style and methods of teaching have evolved to meet the needs of

her students. But one thing that has remained consistent is her desire to see her students flourish.

"She was always hands-on, wanting to learn and loved the students like they were her own," said Charmaine Moffatt, a pre-K teacher who worked with Finley for eight years. "She provides a safe space for them."

About a year after the pandemic, and while continuing to teach, Finley decided to go back to school to pursue her bachelor's degree. When Finley began her student teaching, she moved from pre-K into a kindergarten classroom where she was able to teach 15 students of her own. The class had several substitutes before her, so it was important for Finley to establish a routine and set expectations early on.

After a couple of months, their test scores increased, behaviors improved and students settled into their new routine.

"You have to get to know your kids and learn what makes them happy

or what triggers them,” said Finley. “Anything so that you get to know them and they can trust you, come to you and feel comfortable to grow.

“Student teaching has been the biggest eye-opener for me,” she added. “My biggest fear is that I’m not doing enough for them, or I’m not giving them enough opportunities to grow or learn. But then I see their data, and I see that they’re catching on and that they’re happy to be here. It makes me feel good and that I’m in the right spot and I’m doing right by my kids.”

In the 2024-25 school year, Finley will return to University Meadows in a new role – a kindergarten teacher. She recently graduated from the University of Phoenix with a degree in early childhood education.

“We’ve been talking about this for years, and now she has this opportunity,” said Moffatt. “(The pre-K team) is so excited for her and excited to see her continue to do great things and soar. It’s what she’s meant to do because she loves working with children, and we want to continue to see her thrive.”



2023-24 TEACHER ASSISTANT  
OF THE YEAR

Winner

# PEOPLE EXCELLENCE

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## *Dwight Thompson, Principal of the Year, Renaissance West STEAM Academy*

### *Thompson expands his reach as a principal.*

Dwight Thompson always had a passion for education. He knew education was the key to success in life and began his teaching career when he was 21 years old. After more than a decade in the profession, he wanted to make a bigger impact as a principal.

"I wanted to expand my impact to a community that was struggling academically," Thompson said. "I knew that I was doing important work and making a difference. That's always been my go-to."

Thompson is a native of Burlington, N.C., a small town near Greensboro. He spent 17 years as an elementary school teacher with Guilford County Schools before joining Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools at University Park Creative Arts School. He also held resident principal and assistant principal positions at other schools

before becoming principal at Tuckaseegee Elementary School in 2019. Two years later, he was named principal at Renaissance West STEAM Academy, the "designated school to eradicate barriers," he said.

"I had never had a teacher that looked like me; I have never had a teacher of color," Thompson said. "I thought that I needed to be more representative of that particular population for them to see themselves in that career. I think the teaching career for me just opened the door for everything and was an opportunity to have a part in someone's life."

Thompson now tries to give the same opportunity he received to other teachers and staff who, like him, want to impact the community. Monique Carr, a math and science teacher at Renaissance West STEAM Academy, has benefited from his guidance.

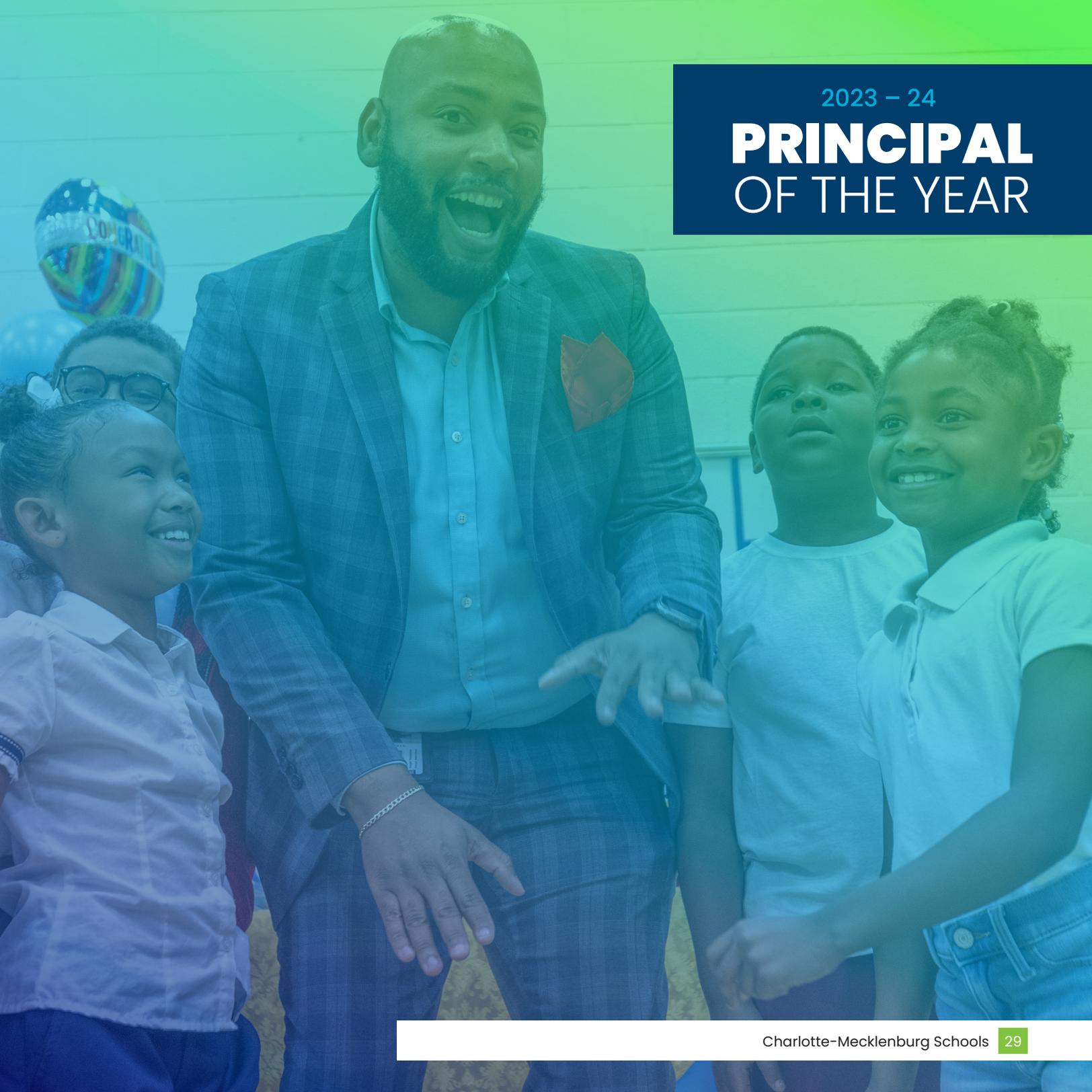
"When I think about Mr. Thompson, I think about a man with a vision," Carr said. "He gives us the steps we need to take to make sure that the vision is achieved. He provides us with resources as he follows us through



the school year. He creates leaders." Carr chose to follow Thompson from Tuckaseegee Elementary to Renaissance West. She said he treats staff like family, helps them work through difficult conversations when necessary, and never shows if he is having a bad day.

"I am extremely satisfied to work with him," she said. "He is a great leader."

Thompson was named Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Principal of the Year at a surprise ceremony in October and was later recognized as the Southwest Region Principal of the Year for North Carolina.



2023 – 24

# PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR

# PEOPLE HIGHLIGHTS

## Educators Excel

This school year, **70 CMS educators achieved National Board Certification** and **142 educators successfully renewed their certification**. The 2023–24 school year marks 25 years CMS has offered a support program for educators in pursuit of achieving or renewing certification. National Board Certification is the highest certification a teacher may obtain in addition to being the most respected one.

**Mariella Fernandes**, an English Learner teacher at J.M. Alexander Middle School, was selected for the **Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms Program** from the U.S. Department of State and the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board. Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms equips educators to bring an international perspective to their schools through targeted training, experience abroad and global collaboration. **1**

**Pooja Nair**, art teacher at J.T. Williams Secondary Montessori School, and **Justin Pierce**, Visual Arts specialist, were recognized by the **North Carolina Art Education Association**. Nair received the N.C.

Rookie Art Educator of the Year Award and Pierce received the Supervision/Administration Art Educator of the Year Award. **2**

**Brock Elgin** of Coulwood STEM Academy, **Krista Ricks** of Beverly Woods Elementary School and **Katharina Smith** of the South Academy of International Languages were named finalists for the **Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST)**. The PAEMST are the highest honors bestowed by the United States government specifically for K–12 science, technology, engineering and mathematics teaching. **3**

**Shelby Lattimore**, third grade teacher at Renaissance West STEAM Academy, gained national attention when her creative take on financial literacy went **viral on TikTok**. **4**

**Eric Hamilton**, science teacher at Lincoln Heights Montessori School, won the **Jo Duckett Wallace Distinguished Elementary School Service Award** from the North Carolina Science Teachers Association. This award is given to a person who exhibits leadership, contributes to improvement and excels in science education. **5**



**Kelli Glisan**, assistant principal at J.V. Washam Elementary School, was named the 2024 North Carolina **Outstanding Elementary Assistant Principal of the Year** by the North Carolina Principals and Assistant Principals' Association. This award recognizes the dedication and success of assistant principals working in pre-K–8 schools. **6**

**Elizabeth Barrick**, English Learner teacher at Crown Point Elementary School, competed on and won an episode of **Guy's Grocery Games** on the Food Network. **7**

**Aubrey Gilleran**, English teacher at South Mecklenburg High School, competed on an episode of **Jeopardy**. **8**



## Staff Members Receive Honors

**Doris Shivers**, director of Grant Innovation and Management, was elected as the 2024 **board vice president of the Grant Professionals Association (GPA)** during the annual Grant Summit held in Kansas City, Mo. GPA is an international membership association that serves over 4,500 members in the grants industry. **9**

**Chiquitha Lloyd**, executive director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, was awarded the **Change Agent of the Year** by the Metrolina Minority Contractors Association. This award is given for demonstrating leadership, excellence and strong commitment to the diverse business community. **10**

The **Communications Division** won a National School Public Relations Association **Publications and Digital Media Excellence Award for the 2022 – 23 Annual Report**, A Year in Review. The publication received an Award of Excellence, the highest award in the category. **11**

**Sarah Johnson**, school psychologist at Northeast Middle School, received the 2023 **Innovative Practitioner of the Year** award from the North Carolina School Psychology Association. The award recognizes a school psychologist who has been engaged in a high level of innovative practices that have provided significant benefits to a group of

teachers, schools or a school system, as well as the children within that school system. **12**

## Athletic Directors Recognized

The North Carolina Athletic Directors Association (NCADA) recognized:

- **Jason Fowler**, athletic director at East Mecklenburg High School, Director of Excellence Award.
- **Steve Robinson**, director of Athletics for CMS, named vice president and received the Leadership Award of Merit from the NCADA.
- **Chris Satterfield**, athletic director at David W. Butler High School, Citation of Merit.
- **Ericia Turner**, executive director of Athletics for CMS, named the Athletic Director of the Year by the NCADA and was also named the Dave Harris Athletic Director of the Year by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association.

**Kayla Price**, boys and girls' tennis coach/assistant athletic director at Rocky River High School, received the Region 6 Homer Thompson **"Eight Who Make A Difference"** Award by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association. **13**

**Ten athletic directors** achieved the **National Interscholastic Athletic Administration Association's Certification**.

# OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

## Community Support for Bonds Yields Better Student Outcomes

In 2017, the community voted and approved a bond referendum that launched 29 projects including 17 new schools and the upgrade, renovation, addition to and repurposing of existing schools. The final three projects on this extensive list, completed at the end of summer 2024, are Ballantyne Ridge High School, as well as Bruns Avenue and Knights View elementary schools.

- Ballantyne Ridge is a 100-classroom high school that relieves South Mecklenburg and Ardrey Kell high schools — the three largest student body schools in the district.
- Bruns Avenue’s new 45-classroom facility replaces the old 1969-built schoolhouse.
- Knights View is a 45-classroom elementary school that relieves Elon Park, Hawk Ridge and Ballantyne elementary schools.

Also included in the 2017 bond package were Grove Park Elementary School and Esperanza Global Academy. Both of these schools completed their inaugural 2023–24 year in CMS!

- Grove Park is a new 45-classroom elementary school that relieved overcrowding at Joseph W. Grier Academy and Hidden Valley and Newell elementary schools. These rooms were educational sanctuaries to 518 students in the 2023–24 school year.
- Esperanza Global Academy is also a new 45-classroom elementary school that relieved Windsor Park, Winterfield and Idlewild elementary schools. Esperanza provided a new educational home to 371 students, most of which were of Hispanic descent.

With these final projects complete, CMS has turned its focus to the allocation of the 2023 bond referendum’s \$2.5 billion package. The 2023 bond houses plans for 30 projects, including five brand-new schools. These projects will commence with a multiphase approach, the first phase outlining 12 projects.



**"I am grateful for the community support for the 2023 bond referendum, recognizing that the work that we're doing is going to completely transform educational environments for students and staff at 35 different sites across CMS. We're very grateful that our community supports public education and our students in this way."**

**— Dennis LaCaria, Executive Director, Facilities & Real Estate Planning**



Notable within these Phase I projects are the new Second Ward High School, the First Ward Middle School and the Marie G. Davis Montessori Secondary projects.

- Construction for the new Second Ward High School will be in uptown Charlotte on the old Metro School's site and is projected to open in August 2028. This full magnet school will absorb the medical magnet program from Hawthorne Academy of Health Sciences and focus on core classrooms and science laboratories pertaining to medical studies. Demolition and removal of the old Metro School building is scheduled for the fall of 2024. The First Ward

Middle School project is part of a concept to meet a community-specified need for an arts magnet program that allows for the progression from pre-K through high school. Currently, Northwest School of the Arts serves students in sixth through 12th grade while First Ward Creative Arts Academy and University Park Creative Arts School are both partial arts magnet schools. The intention of this project is to transfer the elementary art magnet program to a newly built University Park school. This will allow for the renovation of the First Ward site to accommodate the middle school arts program, providing

relief to the Northwest School of the Arts facility currently housing both middle and high school grade levels.

- Marie G. Davis School currently serves kindergarten through eighth grade students with a partial International Baccalaureate program on-site. With the current project concept, students from J.T. Williams Secondary Montessori School will relocate to Marie G. Davis. After this transition, students at pre-K through sixth grade Montessori schools will transfer to Marie G. Davis to continue their secondary education.

# OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

## 24 Safe: Safe Schools and Stronger Communities

In an era where the safety and well-being of students is paramount, the CMS Communications department launched the #24Safe campaign, a comprehensive initiative aimed at preventing violence in our schools and communities. Titled “24 Safe: Safe Schools and Stronger Communities,” this campaign represented the collective commitment to fostering a secure and nurturing environment for every student and staff member.



The primary goals of the #24Safe campaign were multifaceted:

1. **Raise Awareness:** To highlight the critical importance of violence prevention and gun safety in both schools and homes.
2. **Empower Stakeholders:** To provide students, educators, and parents with practical tips and strategies to counteract violence.
3. **Foster Respect and Empathy:** To cultivate a school culture rooted in respect, empathy and accountability.
4. **Offer Support:** To ensure accessible resources and support networks for those affected by violence.

To achieve these objectives, #24Safe was structured around several key components, each designed to engage and educate the community effectively. The CMS website served as the central hub for the campaign, hosting a wealth of resources, including infographics and interactive tools. That platform ensured that information was readily

accessible to all stakeholders. Resources and guides tailored specifically for parents were a key focus. These emphasized the crucial role parents play in supporting violence prevention efforts and fostering open communication with their children.

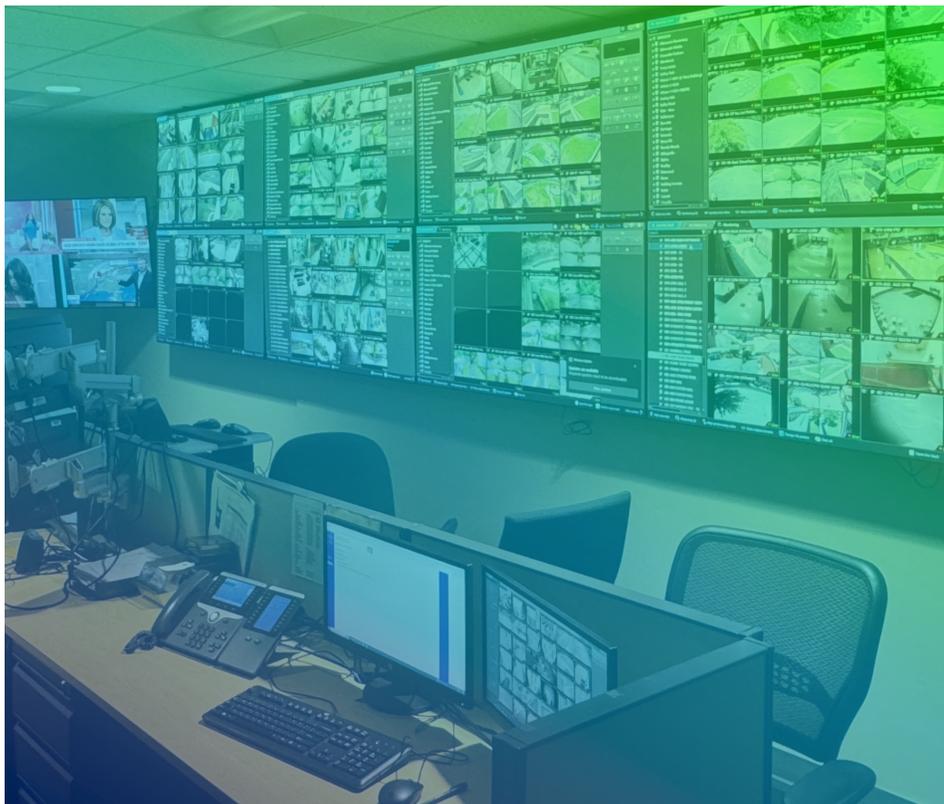
**“Every student deserves to learn and grow in a nurturing environment free from fear and violence.”**

**— Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill**

Our robust social media presence on platforms like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook amplified our message. Multiple series of short videos featuring students, educators and community leaders were produced. These videos discussed the importance of violence prevention and showcased real-life examples of effective strategies. By engaging with stakeholders online, we encouraged dialogue and spread awareness about violence prevention.

Since the launch of #24Safe, the campaign has made significant strides in raising awareness and engaging the community. Social media metrics reflect this success, with our posts reaching over a combined 800,000 views of individuals and generating substantial engagement.

“We remain dedicated to the mission of #24Safe, which is a cornerstone of our layered approach to safety,” said Superintendent Crystal Hill. “Coupled with proactive measures in place for mental health services, we will continue to work with our staff and community partners to ensure a safe learning environment for all students and staff – because every student deserves to learn and grow in a nurturing environment free from fear and violence.”



# OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

## CHARMS/Red Rover

In March, CMS launched the Charlotte Modernization System or **CHARMS**, a groundbreaking initiative designed to **modernize the workplace**. This multiphase project will streamline operations and enhance the workplace experience for all CMS staff, combining the district's finance, payroll, human resources, procurement, and inventory functions into a single, robust platform.



The first phase of the project was **Red Rover**, a web-based application designed for time entry, absence and substitute management. Red Rover provides all CMS staff a seamless and easy-to-use modern platform to manage their time off requests and attendance record. Red Rover is also a useful tool for staffing classrooms with substitute teachers.

## CMS Supplier Diversity Summit

In April, the CMS Supplier Diversity team hosted its Supplier Diversity Summit at Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont. This summit provided valuable insights and resources for Minority, Women and Small Business Enterprises seeking to engage with CMS beyond construction projects.

Attendees had the opportunity to meet representatives from different departments including Building Services, IT, Transportation, Procurement and more. The Supplier Diversity Summit underscores our commitment to fostering inclusivity, diversity and economic empowerment within the local business community.

## Clean School Bus Program

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is among several school districts across the country adding **electric buses** to its fleet. The district partnered with Highland Electric



Fleets to provide charging devices for the new buses.

The funding comes from Phase II of the North Carolina Volkswagen settlement, which is a \$68 million fund for projects to reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and improve air quality.

The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality awarded a total of 161 funded school bus replacements to the Phase II awardees. Forty-three of those buses across the state are electric and are expected to reduce NOx emissions by more than 126 tons over their lifetimes.

## CMS Cybersecurity Summit

In March, CMS hosted a Data Privacy Summit on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte to examine and discuss the ever-evolving landscape of **technology and its implications on privacy**. The Summit included representatives from various district departments and focused on three key areas related to district policies and procedures: artificial Intelligence (AI), approval process and academic alignment of digital resources, and updating staff and student policies to ensure the ethical and responsible use of technologies.

## Number of Buses/ Miles Traveled Daily

**839 buses** transported **100,000+** students to and from school, traveling **105,000 miles per day**.



## Number of Meals Served Daily



**38,000**  
Breakfasts



**76,000**  
Lunches



**4,200**  
After School Snacks



**2,000**  
Suppers

# ENGAGEMENT EXCELLENCE

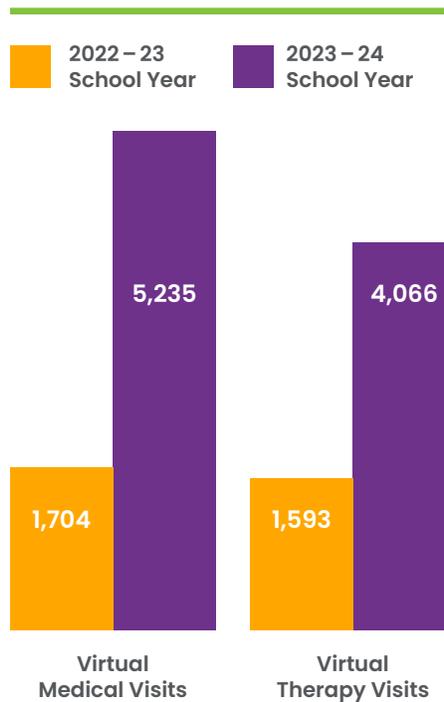
## *'Meaningful Medicine' Enhances Health and Attendance for Students*

In its second year, the Meaningful Medicine program grew substantially, providing health care services to more than 4,900 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools students and staff virtually, allowing them to receive care right on school premises. The program, which is provided through a partnership with Atrium Health, and funded by Bank of America, was designed to increase access to health care for students from underserved communities while reducing absences and time away from work for parents.

During the 2023–24 school year, telemedicine and teletherapy services expanded to 48 new schools, bringing the total number of schools participating in Meaningful Medicine to 86. Nearly two-thirds of those are Title I schools. More than 5,200 telemedicine virtual visits took place during the 2023–24 school year. That's up from just over 1,700 last school year. In addition, over 4,000 teletherapy virtual sessions were conducted with students at CMS

schools during the 2023–24 school year, up from 1,593 teletherapy sessions conducted virtually last school year.

More than 80% of patient visits were with students from historically underserved communities. Additionally, almost half of patient visits were with students at Title I schools.



“Our original plan was to implement virtual medical care in 50 schools and virtual therapy in 30 schools over a five-year period. Our program has far exceeded expectations. In two years, our program has provided well over 12,000 virtual visits at 86 sites, demonstrating a strong commitment to bringing healthcare access to CMS students and staff,” said Pooja Palmer, Portfolio Strategy and Special Projects manager at Atrium Health.

Meaningful Medicine utilizes cutting-edge technology that allows off-site clinicians to perform thorough medical examinations via a secure telemedicine platform. Advanced tools make it possible for doctors to do things like examine an eardrum or look inside a patient’s mouth virtually. The on-site convenience allows patients to be seen quickly and non-contagious students to return to class. It also minimizes disruptions to students’ educational time and parents’ work.

Parents are involved in all discussions about diagnosis, treatment plans, prescriptions and follow-up care. For students with no primary healthcare, the program serves as a bridge,



## Meaningful Medicine Partners



providing referral services to local clinics and follow-up care, when needed.

School nurse Cynthia Wiley, who serves at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School, one of the first Meaningful Medicine sites, is encouraged by the program's growth. "When parents experience this for the first time, when they trust you that first time and do what you say you're going to

do, they are more willing to accept that help in the future."

Going into year three of Meaningful Medicine, facilitators are focused on growing the program's adoption and ensuring its longevity.

"Over the next three years, the program will focus on increasing utilization to achieve program sustainability," said Palmer.

Meaningful Medicine exemplifies the power of technology, innovation and partnerships in improving the health and well-being of students. By integrating healthcare into the educational environment, Atrium Health, Bank of America and CMS are pioneering a model for a healthier community.

# ENGAGEMENT EXCELLENCE

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## Partnership Summit

***New process will align CMS and its partners to better serve students.***

The 2023–24 school year brought new leadership and change to Charlotte–Mecklenburg Schools. In the Office of Strategic Partnerships, that meant rethinking and restructuring the process for working with the district’s 466 partners — and more than 50,000 registered volunteers — to meet student needs.

With that work complete, the new partnership process was introduced to more than 200 partners at the CMS Partnership Summit at the Johnson C. Smith University Science Center on May 23. CMS partners include local businesses, nonprofits and community organizations that provide schools with vital goods and services — including tutoring, social-emotional learning and meals — that open opportunities for students and teachers, and clear the path to academic success.



CMS PARTNERSHIP  
SUMMIT



The summit’s featured speakers were Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill; Damon Willis, director of CMS Strategic Partnerships; and Dr. Valerie Kinloch, president of Johnson C. Smith University. There was also a panel discussion with Kieth Cockrell, Bank of America; Malcomb Coley, Ernst & Young; Amy Daniels, McPie; Principal Daniel Gray, Ridge Road Middle; and Emily Gaffney, Heart Math Tutoring, followed by breakout sessions based on the district’s four pillars of excellence: academic, people, operational and engagement.

“Heart Math Tutoring greatly appreciated the opportunity to get to know CMS leaders in person and to hear directly from Dr. Hill on CMS’ updated strategy, as we build understanding of how HMT’s work can best support CMS students,” said Gaffney, the organization’s CEO. “We enjoyed gathering with other CMS partners and hearing perspectives from partners and district staff alike that will inform our work this year.”



This was the first districtwide partnership summit that CMS has held in at least five years. Willis said it was important to share the new partnership process, lay out priorities by each district pillar and get partners' best thinking on how they could align with the work being focused on for the 2024–25 school year. There was limited space but unlimited enthusiasm, with every breakout session at full capacity. Findings from the sessions, gathered through the ThoughtExchange engagement platform, were compiled in an 86-page report and shared with attendees.

"We've done a great job of laying out a foundation and a structure," Willis said. "Now it's about building and doing the work."

That's something they all agree on, as feedback from key stakeholders was closely aligned with the team's

top priorities: finding ways to inform partners of the need and to connect them more efficiently with CMS. Willis and Ana Brown, engagement program manager, have already tapped the technical expertise of an executive in residence from the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council to create an essential tool — the partnership hub.

"With this tool, we can quickly identify not only what the school needs, but the current support services they are receiving from partners," Brown said. "It's very unique to each school, from the number of volunteers that they have, to the number of partners and what the partners are bringing to that school."

A school needs assessment is being tackled over the summer, with the goal of it becoming another dashboard in the hub. Willis said the dashboard could be accessed

externally, where all potential and existing partners could see the primary partnership needs at every CMS school.

The Partnership team is developing policy and regulation to ensure all partners have a Memorandum of Understanding, outlining roles and responsibilities, and to ensure the safety of students and staff through the volunteer clearance process. The team also plans to hold quarterly meetings to share information, such as testing data, that will allow partners to take action, and next year's summit is promised to be even bigger and more impactful.

"We are looking forward to this new process," Brown said. "We are excited at how this was so well received. It let us know they were waiting on this, and we delivered."

# ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The **CMS Foundation** invests in innovation to help CMS address big challenges and expand opportunities for our students and educators. As the nonprofit fundraising partner for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the foundation harnesses the power of philanthropy to seed innovative ideas and accelerate systemwide transformation. During the 2023–24 school year, the foundation focused its work in three big areas:

- **Strengthening the teacher pipeline:** The CMS Teaching Residency, a state-monitored educator preparation program operated by CMS, provides an alternative route to teaching licensure for qualified candidates who are ready to make a difference in the classroom.
- **Transforming the school experience:** Launched in 2023, the CMSF Innovation Center empowers schools to bring their big ideas to life. With dedicated coaching, community connections and funding, 12 schools worked to implement projects to transform the learning experience for their students during 2023–24.
- **Redefining engagement with our business community:** Through a unique partnership with the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (CELC), the foundation manages an innovative public-private partnership to leverage the talent, resources and commitment of Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s corporate community and higher-education partners to strengthen our public school district. The foundation facilitated financial and talent investments in CMS totaling more than \$3.5 million through this engagement in 2023–24.

## Engagement by the Numbers



**466**  
Partners



**50,628**  
Registered and  
Active Volunteers



**277,816**  
Volunteer Hours



**\$12M**  
Value from  
Volunteer Hours

The Career and Technical Education (CTE) team held **Careers on Wheels** at Hawthorne Academy of Health Sciences for fifth grade students from several elementary schools. The program introduced students to **20 district partners** representing different industries in the community.

Handle With Care is a program aimed at ensuring children who are exposed to crime, violence or abuse receive **appropriate interventions so they can succeed in school** to the best of their ability. CMS piloted the program in 2023–24 with 14 schools and one Charlotte–Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) division, and plans to grow with more schools and CMPD divisions through 2025.

CMS partnered with **Inner Explorer**, an audio-guided, mindfulness awareness program designed for pre-K–12 education. **More than 15,000 CMS students** had access to Inner Explorer. A recent randomized controlled trial by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte showed that students in classrooms using Inner Explorer achieved 3% to 4% higher math and reading grades and 4% to 6% higher math and reading MAP scores.

The Charlotte Hornets honored **Dr. Crystal Hill** as a Social Justice Forward Recipient and she received the Aspire Award from the Innovation Project, which honors first-year superintendents who demonstrate urgency, early success and promising leadership in navigating complex change.



**Atrium Health** and Charlotte–Mecklenburg Schools announced a partnership to enhance the school system’s **health sciences high school curriculum**, launching an early college program at Hawthorne Academy of Health Sciences that will help prepare students for well-paying careers in health care and address local education and health care talent needs. **Bloomberg Philanthropies** invested \$26.3 million to support curriculum development.

Several stakeholder groups participated in the **CMS Strategic Planning Think Tank** at Elbert Edwin Waddell High School in January.

Staff, students, parents and community partners had the opportunity to provide input and feedback about the district’s 2024–29 Strategic Plan.

**The Charlotte Hornets Book Bus** and its Hugo’s Super Readers presentation is a literacy program that inspires elementary students ages 5 through 11 to develop a love of reading. The Book Bus visited **47 CMS elementary schools**, allowing more than **18,000 students** to attend the high energy, interactive program that features Hugo the Hornet and the Book Bus crew. The program donated more than **3,500 books**, which are available in multiple languages and represent several nationalities.

**Jarian Kerekes and the Equitable Foundation** have made numerous contributions to support CMS teachers and students including serving as a sponsor for Teacher Talks, supporting the CMS Teacher Residency programs, sending counselors for professional development opportunities, supporting teacher appreciation events and funding a FAFSA coach for CMS students and families.

E2D, **Eliminate the Digital Divide**, provided **laptops** to more than 700 CMS graduates who are enrolled in four-year Historically Black Colleges and Universities. E2D has provided more than 45,000 laptops to students and families in need of digital access and established a workforce development program for students.

# cms

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

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