



# School News

## Important Dates Coming Soon

### Memorial Day Closure

Schools and offices will be closed on Monday, May 30, in observance of Memorial Day.

### Summer office hours

Charles County Public Schools has changed summer office hours for the Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building to 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., beginning Monday, June 27. The schedule will remain in effect until Monday, Aug. 15. Additional schools and centers will operate on the summer hour schedule. A complete listing will be available on the school system Web site next month.

### Graduations

Seniors from Charles County's six public high schools are preparing to turn their tassels and graduate. The following schools will hold graduation ceremonies on Monday, June 6: La Plata High School, 9 a.m.; Westlake High School, 2 p.m.; and Thomas Stone High School, 7 p.m. The following schools will hold graduation ceremonies on Tuesday, June 7: Maurice J. McDonough High School, 9 a.m.; Henry E. Lackey High School, 2 p.m.; and North Point High School, 7 p.m. North Point will host their ceremony in the school's convocation center; all other ceremonies will take place at the Showplace Arena in Upper Marlboro.

### Hats off to top MESA teams

Mathematics, Engineering and Science Achievement (MESA) teams from Dr. James Craik Elementary School and La Plata High School have earned top honors. The La Plata team earned first place in the Wind Energy Challenge at the state event on May 9 and advances to the national competition next month. The Craik team was selected as the overall state elementary school winner and placed in three of four featured events.

## Walent named Charles County Teacher of the Year

On a typical day in Stephanie Fara Harris-Walent's language arts classroom, students are learning about character archetypes by wearing colorful masterpieces on their faces. Their assignment - create a mask that portrays the behaviors of a character in a book and discuss the traits with their classmates. This is just one example of a lesson plan that infuses Walent's passion for reading with her passion for teaching. "I want to make a difference and language arts is my strength. I love to read and wanted to teach others how to love reading," Walent said.

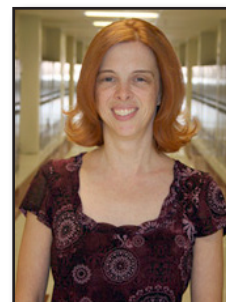
Walent, who began her teaching career with Charles County Public Schools at Somers in 2000, has high expectations for her students and strives to establish a positive learning relationship with them. She makes it a point to encourage her students to laugh as they learn.

Recently, a former student visited Walent to tell her that she was enrolling

in college to study teaching. The student told Walent it was because of the fun she had learning in her class, and her support and encouragement that inspired her to become a teacher. Walent's dedication to providing her students with the skills to become

successful in life is just one of the characteristics that earned her the title of the 2011 Charles County Public Schools Teacher of the Year.

Somers Principal Stephanie Wesolowski said Walent personifies what an outstanding teacher should be and has a natural ability to foster a love for reading and writing in students. "She instills in her students the



**Stephanie Fara  
Harris-Walent**

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## School system participates in spaceflight program

Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) is sending a student-designed experiment on the last flight of the Space Shuttle Atlantis (STS-135) scheduled to fly on June 28. The experiments are part of a national science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) program called the Student Spaceflight Experiments Program (SSEP).

In March, teachers and students in grades 5-12 were asked to develop potential experiments and proposals for submission to the program. Students in chemistry and biology classes were initially asked to participate, but the program was also opened to students in all content areas. The Maryland Space Grant Consortium is funding the school system's participation in this program, which will cover the costs of acquiring experiment space aboard the shuttle. Proposals were reviewed by a panel of educators, scientists and engineers, and three final proposals were selected for staff review to be for-

warded to the National Center for Earth and Space Science Education (NCESE), which is overseeing the program.

The review panel for NCESE will make the final determination on which experiment will fly. The three CCPS finalists - experiments from Henry E. Lackey High School, Milton M. Somers and Piccowaxen middle schools - will present their proposals at the Student Spaceflight Experiments Program Symposium scheduled for 6 - 7 p.m., June 1, at Maurice J. McDonough High School.

Another component is the design of a mission patch that will fly aboard the shuttle. The patch design competition was open to students in grades K-12, and all patches were on display at the Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building for public voting. The winner will be announced June 1.

The experiments will fly aboard NASA's STS-134 and STS-135 missions, which will

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## On the cover

Pictured on the cover are employees honored by the Board of Education May 10. Pictured, from left, are: Christine Krebeck, science teacher, Walter J. Mitchell Elementary School; Jaime Wright, physical education teacher, Indian Head Elementary School; and Shirley Foster, language arts teacher, Matthew Henson Middle School.

## Airing on NewsBreak 96

A new episode of NewsBreak 96, a monthly show produced by the communications department that highlights school system events, is now available. This episode features highlights from the May Board of Education meeting, a student fundraiser at Theodore G. Davis Middle School and the school system's participation in a space patch design contest.

The show airs on Comcast Channel 96 and Verizon FiOS Channel 12, and is available as a video on demand on the school system Web site at <http://www2.ccboe.com/publicinfo/channel96/vod/>.

## Calendar changes

Charles County Public Schools has made changes to June report card dates, and registration and start dates for the 2011 summer school program. These changes replace information announced in the 2010-11 Parent Handbook/Calendar. Report cards for middle and high school students will be mailed home on Thursday, June 23. Elementary school report cards will be issued to students on the last day of school, Monday, June 20.

Registration for the 2011 summer school program will occur at the Robert D. Stethem Educational Center on Wednesday, June 29, and Thursday, June 30. Times are 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., and no registrations will be accepted after 7 p.m. on June 30.

Classes begin for students on Wednesday, July 6, at Westlake High School in Waldorf. The last day of summer school classes is Thursday, Aug. 4. Graduation is 4 p.m. at Westlake on Aug. 4.

Visit the Charles County Public Schools Web site at [www.ccboe.com](http://www.ccboe.com) for updated calendar information throughout the school year.

## J.C. Parks receives \$100,000 outdoor education grant

Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation awarded a \$100,000 grant to J. C. Parks Elementary School on May 11 for Education in Nature, a project to create outdoor learning areas within restored natural habitats.

Parks will use the grant to transform the front of the school into an arboretum

with two outdoor classrooms tucked into a native landscape. Adjoining property, which is shared with Matthew Henson Middle School, will include an amphithe-



**J.C. Parks Elementary School science teacher Deanna Wheeler, right, accepts a check from Lowe's representatives, pictured from left, Mark Strentha, Cheri Martin and Matt Buchanan, on behalf of the school.**

ater and sitting areas overlooking a wetland habitat. A variety of learning opportunities are incorporated into the design of each accessible, sustainable and environmentally friendly space. The project has been a collaborative effort of the community, local organizations, county government, individuals and the school system.

A check was presented to Charles County Public Schools officials and staff members at Parks from the Lowe's store in La Plata on Wednesday, May 11.

## Walent

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confidence to be successful. She is without a doubt the teacher of a lifetime for many of her students," Wesolowski said.

Walent teaches seventh-grade language arts and has been the grade level team leader for the past seven years. She oversees the seventh-grade team and is the liaison between the team and school administrators. Walent holds monthly principals meetings and leads bi-weekly meetings with her colleagues. In addition to being a teacher, Walent says her favorite role is being a fan.

"Teaching is truly fulfilling. To have a child tell me that I am their role model, it is deeply humbling. That is why I do what I do," she said.

Walent is also humbled by her selection to represent the school system as the Teacher of the Year. Although she considers her award as a representative of Somers, she feels privileged to represent the school system. "When Mr. Richmond came to Somers to share the news with me that I was selected as the Charles County Teacher of the Year, I was overcome with a myriad of emotions. I am deeply honored by this recognition," she said.

Caitie O'Donnell is an eighth grader at Somers and had Walent for language

arts last school year. She said Walent has a special way of inspiring her students to work hard and better their learning skills while enjoying grammar, writing and even learning about Shakespeare. "If anyone deserves this award it would be Ms. Harris," O'Donnell wrote in a nomination letter.

Last school year, Walent was also nominated by a former student for recognition through the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth (CTY) Sarah D. Barder Fellowship program. The program recognizes outstanding teachers and Walent was one of 15 nationwide teachers selected as a fellow. For Walent, teaching is all about the connection she makes with students. "My kids and I are a team. Teaching is about seeing kids make a real world connection," Walent said.

Walent earned a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education from Salisbury State University and has taken graduate courses with a concentration in education at Drake University in California.

As Charles County's Teacher of the Year, Walent will compete for the Maryland Teacher of the Year award, which will be announced later this year.

## La Plata's Grote selected as Maryland Pupil Personnel Worker of the Year

Susan Grote, a pupil personnel worker at La Plata High School, was named the Maryland Pupil Personnel Worker of the Year for the 2010-11 school year by the Maryland Association of Pupil Personnel (MAPP). She was honored on Friday, May 20, at the MAPP spring conference in Ocean City. Grote has worked at La Plata High School as a pupil personnel worker (PPW) for the past 16 years and was nominated for her strong commitment to supporting children and their families, for creating and maintaining positive relationships with community businesses and organizations, and for her dedication to ensuring students succeed.

Grote said she is honored to receive the award and to be nominated for doing a job she truly enjoys. "I am humbled to receive the Pupil Personnel Worker of the Year award. I was once told that to be a good PPW you had to have the courage of a lion, the curiosity of a cat, the memory of an elephant, the wisdom of an owl and the heart of a servant. When you are a PPW, every day can bring different challenges – no two days are the same. We do such a wide variety of work it is hard to describe the job. I would like to acknowledge my fellow PPWs for all the work they do every day – this award should be for all of us," Grote said.

Grote is the first PPW in Charles County to receive the award in more than 23 years of the organization's history. As a member, Grote has participated in the MAPP's Glen R. Munch Scholarship program and assisted in the awarding of the scholarship to a former student. She also serves as the liaison between other county PPWs regarding

MAPP conferences and professional development opportunities.

She was nominated for the award by several Charles County Public Schools staff members, who said Grote is well deserving of the recognition. Mary B. Neal Elementary School Principal Carol Leveillee worked with Grote when she was principal at Matula and said Grote's support demonstrates her exemplary work ethic. "During my 10 years at Matula, Sue was my PPW. Her support to Matula and me speaks volumes to her character, work ethic and attitude towards student success," Leveillee wrote in a support letter.

Cindy Harrison, a PPW at Thomas Stone High School, said Grote is a dependable team player and is a wealth of knowledge and support. "Susan has been a driving force in helping the newer and inexperienced PPWs find their way. Even the more experienced PPWs find it comforting to have someone like Susan to have ideas and concerns to bounce off of," Harrison wrote in a support letter.

Grote is also the coordinator of the student support team and the 504 coordinator at La Plata. She has also served as a class sponsor and is chief of the Charles County Rescue Squad.

Before Grote became a PPW, she taught social studies at General Smallwood Middle School, where she began her career with the school system. She has a bachelor's degree from Frostburg State University, a master's degree from George Washington University and completed a human resource development doctoral program at the University of Maryland.



**Susan Grote**

## Charles County school system proposes change in handwriting program

The Board of Education is considering a change in the way children are taught to write. A committee, composed of instructional staff, is recommending "Handwriting Without Tears," a switch from D'Nealian, a handwriting technique with similarities to cursive writing.

When D'Nealian, which teaches children to write slanted letters that often end with small strokes upward or "monkey tails," was introduced, educators believed that using a slanted manuscript alphabet enhanced the transition to writing with cursive letters. Natalie Hart, early childhood specialist, said there is no evidence to substantiate this claim and teachers say children have to relearn many of the letters they can already write. Children often come to school knowing how to form some letters with vertical and horizontal lines and circles. Teachers must re-teach using the D'Nealian "monkey tails," adding another step in writing instruction and learning. Handwriting Without Tears would eliminate the extra steps and is more developmentally appropriate for younger children, Hart said. Prior to D'Nealian, Charles County Public Schools children were taught using the Zaner-Bloser Script method, which presented challenges to children when learning cursive writing, said Jackie Grabis-Bunker, director of program support.

If accepted, Handwriting Without Tears would be implemented beginning in the 2011-2012 school year. Training is planned for early

childhood educators, those teaching the three's, prekindergarten and kindergarten, in August.

In a presentation to the Board, Hart said nearly 10 to 30 percent of elementary school children struggle with handwriting. She also said children with poor handwriting skills also have difficulty in other academic areas.

It is logical, Hart said, to teach children to write letters similar to the letters they are learning to read. By age three, she said, children produce drawings that are composed of vertical lines, horizontal lines and circles. Handwriting Without Tears also includes a fine motor/multi-sensory component for prekindergarten.

Proposed handwriting materials and books are on display at the Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building in La Plata, Dr. Gustavus Brown Elementary School and J.C. Parks Elementary School. Community members are encouraged to review the books and materials and provide comment in writing by June 13 at either at the display site or in writing to the Board of Education P.O. Box 2770, La Plata, MD 20646; through email to [boardmail@ccboe.com](mailto:boardmail@ccboe.com); or in person at the Public Forum at 6 p.m., June 14, at the Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building.

The Board of Education is reviewing the recommendation and materials and will take action on the change at the June 14 meeting.

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# Board of Education announces June 14 agenda

The Board of Education's next monthly meeting is Tuesday, June 14, at the Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building on Radio Station Road in La Plata. The public portion of the meeting begins at 1 p.m. and recognition begins at 4:15 p.m. The meeting is televised live on Comcast Channel 96 and Verizon FiOS Channel 12, and is rebroadcast throughout the week. Program schedules for Channel 96 are available on the Charles County Public Schools Web site at [www2.ccboe.com/publicinfo/channel96/schedule.cfm](http://www2.ccboe.com/publicinfo/channel96/schedule.cfm).

## Executive session – 12 p.m.

## Call to order – 1 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance – Maurice J. McDonough  
High School's JROTC unit

Swearing-in of new Student Board member

## Contract signing

## Superintendent's update

## Reports of officers/boards/committees

- Correspondence/Board member updates
- Education Association of Charles County update
- Student Board Member update
- Graduation update
- CIP update

- Lifelong Learning Center
- New policy 5118 elementary and secondary: gang activity

## Unfinished business

## New business and future agenda items

- New business
- Future agenda items

## Recognition – 4:15 p.m.

- Ruth Ann Hall awards
- Outstanding vice principal award
- Outstanding support staff awards
- Resolution – Charles County Teacher of the Year – Stephanie Fara Harris-Walent, language arts teacher, Milton M. Somers Middle School

- Employees' retirement resolution

## Public Forum – 6 p.m.

## Action items

- Minutes
- Personnel
- Educational facilities master plan
- Handwriting
- FY 2012 budget
- FY 2011 intercategory budget change

## Adjournment



# Staff notes

## Job Openings

**Roof Mechanic** – Maintenance Shop, 12-month position. A minimum of three years of commercial roofing experience is preferred. Apply by May 31.

**Secretary for Instruction** – Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building, 12-month position. Apply by June 1.

**Secretary** – Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School, 11-month position. Apply by June 1.

**Financial Secretary** – Westlake High School, 11-month position. Apply by June 1.

**Secretary** – John Hanson Middle School, 11-month position. Apply by June 2.

**IEP Facilitators** – Openings at all schools, 11-month positions.

**Instructional Resource Teacher** – Opening at the middle school level, 11-month position. Master's degree and a minimum of five years teaching experience required.

## Extra pay positions

**Westlake High School** has the following opening:

- Head junior varsity boys' basketball coach

Contact Principal Chrystal Benson, 301-645-8857, for more information or to apply.

**Thomas Stone High School** has the following opening:

- Assistant girls' soccer coach

Contact Steve Lee, athletic director, at 301-843-0074 for more information or to apply.

## Unified Sports program

The Charles County Public Schools Unified Sports program is seeking tennis coaches at all six Charles County public high schools for the fall season. Contact Seth Rak, Unified Sports coordinator for CCPS, at [srak@ccboe.com](mailto:srak@ccboe.com) or 301-753-1745, to apply or for more information.

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dock with the International Space Station. The school system's participation in this program aligns with STEM-related curriculum, and encourages students in all grades to learn more about opportunities enriched with science and mathematics concepts.

The Student Space Flight Experiments Program (SSEP) is undertaken by the National Center for Earth and Space Science Education, a project of the 501(c) (3) Tides Center, in partnership with NanoRacks, LLC.

This on-orbit educational research opportunity is enabled through NanoRacks LLC, which is working in partnership with NASA under a Space Act Agreement as part of the utilization of the International Space Station as a National Laboratory.

For more information on the SSEP, visit their Web site at <http://ssep.nccesse.org>.