

School News



Notebook

Presidents Day

A two-hour early dismissal for students is Friday, February 17. Schools and offices are closed Monday, Feb. 20, for Presidents Day.

Science Center events

The [James E. Richmond Science Center](#) at St. Charles High School will show fulldome movies Feb. 18, 22 and 23. The shows include “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” which retraces the steps of people who were enslaved. The movie is suitable for viewers 9 and older. “Lincoln 150,” focuses on the life of Abraham Lincoln and is intended for audiences 10 and older. [Visit the Science Center online to learn more.](#)

Panel discussion Feb. 22

To celebrate Black History Month, the Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) Department of Community Engagement and Equity will hold [Voices of Power, Resistance and Change: A panel discussion](#) 5:30-7 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 22 at Thomas Stone High School. CCPS students will moderate the panel with Yolanda Wilson, Ed.D., president of the College of Southern Maryland, and Dyotha Sweat, president of the Charles County Branch of the NAACP, who will be guests. Stone is at 3785 Leonardtown Road in Waldorf.

Blueprint Town Hall CCPS staff will hold a virtual town hall on the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future on Feb. 21. The meeting will be from 5:30 to 7 p.m. A [link to the virtual meeting and more information](#) can be found at [www.ccboc.com](#).



Staff and students of North Point High School have a bit of fun with Daniel of St. Thomas Elementary School fifth graders before the start of the water safety program.

Into the deep end — Fifth graders learn water safety

With temperatures dipping, Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) fifth graders are taking the plunge. The [CCPS water safety program](#) is in its fourth decade teaching students the basics of water safety.

The program does not teach students to swim, instead it is designed to instill a respect for water and the inherent danger surrounding it. Students are taught to recognize the signs of a person in distress in the water and how to help or get help to assist them. They are also taught how to quell panic if they find themselves unexpectedly in a dangerous situation around water.

Fifth graders are at a good age to learn safety procedures, Amy Robinson, lead aquatics manager for CCPS, said. Not only are they at an age that they may find themselves trusted to explore more on their own, but they are also able to grasp the seriousness of a situation and the need to render aid or find help. They are also physically able to learn more safety procedures. “They have stamina and the physical strength,” Robinson said.

There are two phases to the water safety program. The first calls for students to view a water safety film from the American Red Cross and discuss it. They also go over general rules about how to stay safe around water and how to survive the unexpected. The instruction includes classroom and at home activities. Phase 2 is a

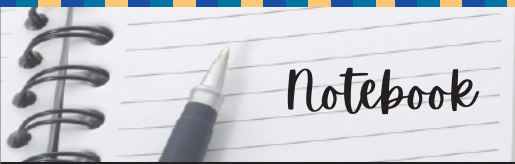
day spent at a high school pool learning skills from water safety instructors and recognizing the safest place to walk on the ice in Charles County is only at the Capital Clubhouse. The water safety program is held at the county’s indoor pools at Henry E. Lackey, North Point and St. Charles high schools.

Fifth grade students of Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer Elementary School visited North Point recently to learn more hands-on skills from Robinson who was assisted by Rebekah Colatriglio, North Point’s pool manager, staff from the Charles County Recreation and Parks Department, and North Point students with life-guarding experience.

Students practiced pulling swimmers in distress — this is where the North Point students come in, treading water until they are rescued. The younger students were asked to pull them to safety using objects nearby — a towel, a rope, a pole substituting for a branch. The more advanced swimmers among the fifth graders practiced how to help while they themselves are in the water. “It’s important to learn at least the basics of water safety,” William Gray, a North Point senior who is trained to be a lifeguard, said. “A lot of drownings and accidents can be prevented if you know basic water safety.”

The program, which is held in January and

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On the cover

Pictured on the front cover are CCPS staff members honored at the January Board of Education meeting including Ellen Escanilla, left, administrative instructional assistant, Walter J. Mitchell Elementary School; and Tania Saguid, ESOL teacher, Mattawoman Middle School.

Bus driver appreciation day

Wednesday, Feb. 22, is School Bus Driver and Attendant Appreciation Day. Make sure to thank a bus driver or attendant who makes the ride to and from school a smooth one.

Conference set for March 9

Mike Veny, a bestselling author who is a nationally known speaker on mental health, will be the keynote speaker at the March 9 CCPS Behavioral Health Conference. Held from 3 to 6 p.m., Thursday, March 9, at Thomas Stone High School, the event will have student-focused workshops and those geared toward parents and caregivers. To register for the conference, go to <http://bit.ly/3jGDGP3> to register and get updates. March 9 is a two-hour early dismissal day for students.



Polar Plunge

CCPS high school students and staff recently participated in a Polar Plunge to benefit Special Olympics Maryland. Click on the photo above to watch a feature about CCPS's participation in this year's Polar Plunge.



In front is school counselor Khadijah Hendrix of C. Paul Barnhart Elementary School. Standing from left are school counselors Erin Travers of Barnhart, Courtney Roberts of T.C. Martin Elementary School, Maria Ayers of Dr. Samuel A. Mudd Elementary School, Catherine Powell of Indian Head Elementary School, Felicita Custer of Dr. Gustavus Brown Elementary School and James Howard of Mudd and J.P. Ryon elementary schools.

Celebrating National School Counseling Week

Annually, in the month of February, school counselors are nationally celebrated during National School Counseling Week and this year, it is held the week of Feb. 6-10, 2023. The time is set to honor those who make a difference in students' lives by being a constant support in their overall educational journey.

Last week Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) school counselors had a chance to stop by the Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building for an afternoon of relaxation. They could enjoy a snack, play some games and mingle with one another during a mixer put on by the CCPS Department of Student Services.

"We wanted to give them a moment for self-care," Jackie Cheaves, CCPS supervising school counselor, said. "And to relax," Tricia Holcomb, CCPS secretary to the supervising counselor, chimed in. Counselors from any school could attend the mixer. "We wanted to give them an opportunity to have a short break, Cheaves continued. "To celebrate one another, collaborate and have some fun."

School counselors enjoyed the opportunity to connect with one another at the event. "I enjoyed meeting with counselors



Jacqueline Cheaves, left, CCPS supervising counselor, is pictured with John Hanson Middle School counselors Theano Alvanos and April Magee.

on all different grade levels," Denise Foster, school counselor at Benjamin Stoddert Middle School, said. "It gave me a reboot because there are things I have been struggling with as a school counselor and talking with the others let me know that we are in this together."

Those who attended the event played popular games like Kahoot, engaged in puzzles and checked in with one another after time apart. CCPS thanks all school counselors for the difference that they make in the lives of CCPS students.

State honors CCPS teachers for achievements in gifted and talented Ed

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland Advisory Council on Gifted and Talented Education will honor four Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) teachers — Jennifer Fenton, Amanda Jones, Joni Rooney and Amy Tascione-Hoffman — for their efforts and accomplishments in gifted education. The teachers will be honored during a virtual awards ceremony Feb. 28 with a Teacher Accomplishment in Gifted and Talented Education Award.

Fenton, Rooney and Tascione-Hoffman are learning resource teachers (LRT) who were nominated by staff of the CCPS Office of Gifted Education. Fenton works at Berry Elementary School; Rooney is the LRT at Dr. James Craik Elementary School; and Tascione-Hoffman works at Gale-Bailey Elementary School. LRTs are in elementary and middle schools and are knowledgeable on gifted education, differentiated instruction, cognitive, social and emotional characteristics and the needs of gifted learners. They also serve as a school's testing coordinator.

Jones, a sixth-grade language arts teacher at Mattawoman Middle School, was nominated by the school's LRT, Douglas Cunningham, for the honor.

The four CCPS teachers work directly with gifted and talented students while addressing the needs of gifted and talented students beyond required expectations. They also pursue ongoing professional learning opportunities and assist peers with gifted and talented education programs.

Fenton has been teaching for 14 years — all with CCPS. She taught fourth grade at Berry for a decade before becoming the school's LRT. "For me, the best part of working with our elementary students who receive gifted services is getting them to challenge their own

thinking," Fenton said.

She said students may enter a conversation with one idea or preconceived notion but can be challenged by a question or someone else's idea. The process can expand their minds. "Helping those students reconcile their thinking before and after a discussion, seeing their passion when defending their ideas and helping to open their minds to new ideas is what makes working with these students so much fun," Fenton said.

Rooney has been teaching for 26 years, all with CCPS. She began her career at C. Paul Barnhart Elementary School where she taught second, third, fourth and fifth grades, and was a Title I technology teacher for two years.

She is in her fifth year as a learning resource teacher, having spent three years at Indian Head Elementary School and the past two at Dr. James Craik Elementary School. "I enjoy creating opportunities for students to be challenged and seeing them work through those challenges — seeing light bulbs go off when connections are made," she said.

For the past 17 years, Tascione-Hoffman has taught with CCPS — first as a third and fourth grade teacher, then as an LRT. She has been an LRT for the past four years. Tascione-Hoffman likes seeing how students think through lessons. "I enjoy adding challenges to their daily instruction and helping them learn



Jennifer Fenton



Joni Rooney



Amy Tascione-Hoffman



Amanda Jones

to break down complex problems into manageable steps," she said. Tascione-Hoffman also likes seeing the growth students experience during their years in elementary school. "I also enjoy forming relationships with my students throughout multiple grade levels. It is a great way to see their personal and academic growth throughout elementary school," she said.

Jones has been teaching for eight years, starting her career as a sixth-grade language arts teacher in Jacksonville Beach in Florida. She has been teaching with CCPS since 2016. Jones appreciates that her students are up for trying new things. "The best part about working with gifted and talented students who are in middle school is the fact that they are so dynamic and always ready for a new challenge," she said. Jones allows her students to take ownership of their learning and the learning process. She also encourages them to share their thoughts, while respecting others who might not agree with them. "I include many student-led discussions, which gives students the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas with their peers," she said. "Moreover, it gives them a chance to hear diverse perspectives from their classmates."

To read more about the accomplishments of CCPS content specialists who will be honored, visit Page 4.

WATER

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May, was started by a CCPS physical education teacher more than 40 years ago and expanded by the aquatic's coordinator at the College of Southern Maryland (CSM). They saw a need to teach young children about water safety following the drowning deaths of two children in Western Charles County. Over the years, the program grew to be offered to all CCPS fifth graders.

"I think everyone should know this," Mia Joyce, a Jennifer fifth grader, said. "Everyone needs to know what they can do to help."

Kenneth Ruff, a fifth-grade teacher at Jennifer, has been on a few field trips and counts the water safety trip among the favorites. Not only does he get to participate in the pool, but he also knows his students and their peers are learning valuable lessons. "Spring weather is coming, and they're going to go outside, having fun with their friends. They may be around water, like a creek or a neighborhood pool," Ruff said. "They need to know water safety and how to stay safe and help others stay safe." [Learn more about the water safety program.](#)

Gifted, talented council recognizes CCPS content specialists

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CCPS provides nondiscriminatory equal access to school facilities in accordance with its Use of Facilities rules to designated youth groups (including, but not limited to, the Boy Scouts).

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland Advisory Council on Gifted and Talented Education will honor three Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) content specialists for supporting access and implementation of gifted and talented education. They are Sheila Hettel, middle school math content specialist, John Tompkins, middle school English/language arts content specialist, and Jack Tuttle, social studies content specialist.

Hettel graduated with a bachelors from Frostburg State University and has a masters from University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She started with CCPS as a math teacher at John Hanson Middle School before moving into the role of content specialist which she's held for three years. "It is important to engage gifted and talented learners in the learning process to provide challenges and opportunities for growth," Hettel said.

Tompkins comes from a family of educators. Other than a brief sixth-grade dream of making it to the NBA, "Becoming a teacher was all I wanted to be," he said. He earned his bachelors from Lycoming College in Williamsport, Pa., and a master's in reading from Towson University. He was a language arts teacher to sixth graders and taught social studies to eighth graders at Milton M. Somers Middle School at the start of his career with CCPS. He has been a content specialist for eight years. "Today's students become tomorrow's adults, and it is in the best interest of society to engage all learners," Tompkins said. Students' abilities

to process information, enjoy school and attend regularly is linked to higher levels of engagement and success, he said. "Having students who do well in school, attend regularly, and like it produces the next generation to improve society," Tompkins said.

After graduating from Fairmont State College in Fairmont, W.Va., with a bachelors in secondary social studies and physical education — he would go on to earn a master's in economics and economics education from Johns Hopkins University — Tuttle began his career teaching government, economics and world history in Preston County, W.Va. Moving to Maryland, Tuttle taught social studies at La Plata High School and coached junior varsity soccer. During his time at La Plata, Tuttle also taught various other courses. He became a CCPS social studies content specialist in 2008. "All students deserve an education that provides them opportunities to challenge themselves and to work diligently to both set and achieve their own learning goals," Tuttle said. "Parents, educators and the community have a responsibility to support all children as they attempt to reach their personal best."

The content specialists, who were nominated by staff of the CCPS Office of Gifted Education, will be honored during a virtual awards ceremony Feb. 28 with a Non-Classroom Based Educator Accomplishment in Gifted and Talented Education Award.

[Read more about teachers honored by the Maryland Advisory Council on Gifted and Talented Education. Students were also honored for accomplishments.](#)



Sheila Hettel



John Tompkins



Jack Tuttle

Personnel

Apply for positions online at www.cchoe.com/jobs/currentopenings.php. All teaching positions require a bachelor's degree and MSDE certification requirements.

Job openings

Building Services Assistant Manager — Mattawoman Middle School, 12-month position. One year of experience and a high school diploma required. Apply by Feb. 21.

Computer Analyst — Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building, 12-month position.

High school diploma and one to three years of technically progressive current work experience in information networks and user support required. Applicable industry certifications desired. Apply by Feb. 22.

Financial Secretary — Thomas Stone High School, 12-months. High school diploma required. Apply by Feb. 24.

Math Intervention Instructional Assistant — 10-month position. High school diploma

required with an associate's or bachelor's degree preferred. Apply by Feb. 27.

Instructional Assistant — All middle schools, 10-month position. High school diploma required and experience working with children required. Apply by April 30.

Special Education Instructional Assistant — All high schools, 10-month position. High school diploma required and experience working with children required. Apply by April 30.