

# Evidence of Success:

# 10

***AMAZING THINGS WE'VE DONE IN***

# 2021



Cherokee County  
School District

## 1. Preparing Every Student for Future Success

*The Cherokee County School District prepares every student for future success ... in college, career and civic life.*

# Evidence of Success:

### GRADUATION RATE

- **CCSD's graduation rate has hit a new high, with 90.82%** of the Class of 2021 earning a diploma within four years of entering high school!
- The four-year graduation rate both exceeded the State average of 83.7% and increased from the CCSD Class of 2020's 90.3% rate.
- The CCSD Class of 2021 rate is the **second highest among Metro Atlanta counties**.
- **CCSD has grown its graduation rate more than 15 percentage points since 2012.**
- The CHOICE Program continues to assist Special Education and English Learners in overcoming challenges in order to graduate on time, with 91% of Special Education and 95% of English Learners participants graduating on time.

### COLLEGE READINESS

- According to State data collected from Georgia public colleges and universities, when CCSD students move on to college, they are more prepared than their classmates, as **97% attending University System of Georgia colleges don't need a single remedial class**. This is an increase from 95% reported last year. Similarly, 88% attending technical colleges don't need a single remedial class.

- All CCSD high schools, for the 11th consecutive year, have earned top honors for outstanding **Advanced Placement (AP) programs and performance that continues to exceed National and State averages!**
  - ◇ Overall, CCSD students who took the exam earned passing scores of 3 or higher on 73% of the 5,028 tests administered last school year, as compared to 58% for Georgia and 59% nationwide.
  - ◇ Assuming each exam equals one college course for which students and their parents avoid tuition costs, **these CCSD students earned \$4.4 Million in Georgia in-state college tuition through passing AP courses!**
- CCSD's Class of 2021 **increased average SAT scores by 25 points and outscored the State and Nation! CCSD's Total Mean Score ranks in the Top 10% of all 180 school districts in Georgia.**
  - ◇ The CCSD Class of 2021 earned an average total score of 1125 on the curriculum-based college entrance and placement exam, which **exceeds the National public school average by 87 points and the State by 48 points**. The gap between CCSD and U.S. averages widened by 17 points.
  - ◇ The CCSD Class of 2021 average Reading & Writing score is 569 – **up 10 points from last year** and 23 over Georgia and 45 over U.S., and the Math is 556 – **up 15 points from last year** and 25 over Georgia and 42 over the U.S.
  - ◇ Five CCSD Class of 2021 seniors were named **National Merit Scholarship Finalists**, with two earning National Merit Scholarships and three earning National Merit Special Scholarships! Seven CCSD Class of 2022 seniors have been named National Merit Scholarship Semi-Finalists and are expected to advance to be named Finalists!
- CCSD's Class of 2021 **increased average ACT scores and exceeded National and State scores! CCSD's average composite score ranks in the Top 10% of all 180 school districts in Georgia.**
  - ◇ The Class scored an outstanding 23.2 average, increasing from 22.6 in 2020, and topping Georgia's



22.6 and the Nation's 20.3 averages on the competitive college entrance and placement examination.

- CCSD ranks **third highest among Metro counties for HOPE Scholarship eligibility** – 62% for the Class of 2021! Georgia's overall eligibility rate is 50%.

## CAREER READINESS

- The graduation rate for CCSD students who complete a Career Pathway was **99%** for the Class of 2020.
- CCSD offers **35 Career Pathway** programs for high school students to pursue as electives to explore possible careers, engage in hands-on experiences, refine career soft skills and earn industry certifications and licenses to graduate workplace ready.
- **The newest Career Pathway, launched for the 2021-22 school year, is cyber security**, which also is the first course offering for the Cherokee College and Career Academy (C3) campus open to all CCSD high school students.
- CCSD, in partnership with Be Pro Be Proud Georgia, the Cherokee Office of Economic Development and Chattahoochee Technical College, in May celebrated **the First Annual Skilled Professions Signing Day**, with 19 high school seniors representing all of CCSD's high schools recognized for their commitment to pursue advanced technical training or careers in the skilled trades.



- **CCSD students continue to consistently excel through Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) competitions**, which are sponsored at all CCSD high schools. CTSOs offer real-world career skills, competition and leadership experiences to compliment classroom studies. Three CCSD high school seniors in November earned Certificates of Excellence from the Georgia CTSO for their achievements.





## 2. Ensuring Every Student Has Opportunities for Success

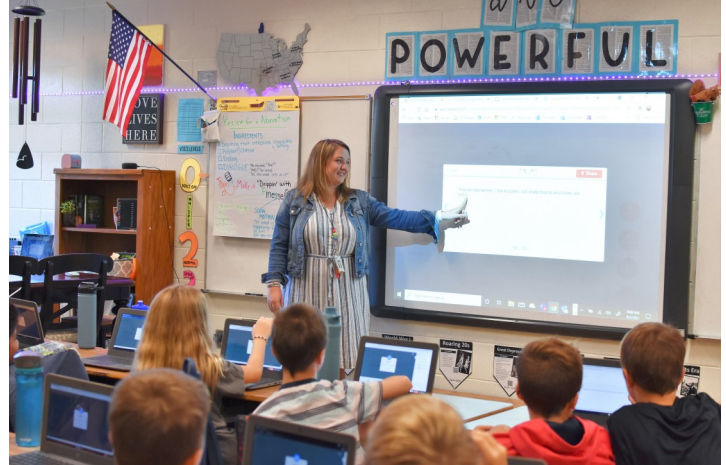
*The Cherokee County School District ensures every student has opportunities for success in the classroom, and through extra-curriculars, with a focus on college, career and life skills.*

# Evidence of Success:

### ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE FOR ALL STUDENTS

**CCSD students exceeded State averages on the 2021 Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade and End-of-Course tests for the sixth consecutive year -- even in the midst of a global pandemic!**

- For third-grade, the percentage of CCSD students achieving the highest two levels of scores -- Proficient to Distinguished -- was 54.4% for Math (as compared to 38.4% for Georgia) and 45.9% for English Language Arts (36.1% Georgia).
- For fifth-grade, the percentage of CCSD students achieving Proficient to Distinguished scores was: 51.5% for Math (34.7% Georgia), 47.1% for English Language Arts (39.4% Georgia) and 45.9% for Science (38.5% Georgia).
- For eighth-grade, the percentage of CCSD students achieving Proficient to Distinguished scores was: 50% for English Language Arts (41.4% Georgia), 42.6% for Math (31.8% Georgia), 42.7% for Science (34.6% Georgia) and 43.3% for Social Studies (34.7% Georgia).
- For high school credit courses, the percentage of CCSD students achieving Proficient to Distinguished scores was: 41.1% for American Literature and Composition (29.8% for Georgia), 38% for Algebra I (30.2% Georgia), 54.6% for Biology (40.7% Georgia), 43.7% for U.S. History (29.6% Georgia).
- CCSD is in its fifth year of the Balanced Literacy initiative, a science of reading program that incorporates all best research-based practices for teaching reading (phonics, sight words, guided reading, read aloud). **Since its adoption, the percentage of third-graders reading on grade level has increased to 70%, based on the 2021 Georgia Milestones.**
- CCSD has earned an **overall accountability performance better than 90% of Georgia school districts**, according to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement's most recent reporting.
- CCSD's new Microsoft Power BI data visualization portal implemented this school year provides assessment metrics and school information to all Principals, assistant principals, counselors, and se-



lect District leaders. Administrators gain a bird's-eye view of how students are performing overall and can take a deep dive into data for students who are struggling or excelling in order to focus School Improvement Plans and improve instructional strategies.

- CCSD is continuing the districtwide initiative to create blueprints for all high school credit courses in order to allow for faster recovery than course credit recovery, through the systemic use of unit credit recovery opportunities.
- STEM learning has expanded throughout CCSD, beginning with the nationally recognized Cherokee Academies initiative and continuing with the **new partnership with Discovery Education** that is enhancing STEM learning in all elementary and middle schools. At the high school level, STEM learning has been enhanced through expanded AP (Advanced Placement) offerings, as further detailed below, and partnerships for advanced program offerings such as with Georgia Tech.

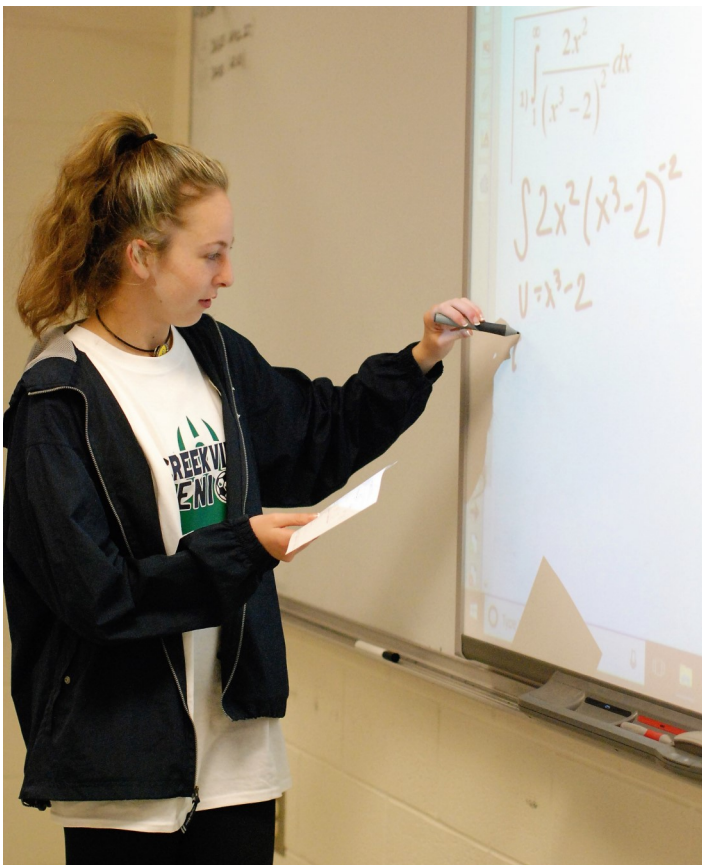
### ADVANCED ACADEMICS

- All of CCSD's high schools were named **Georgia 2021 AP (Advanced Placement) Honor Schools** for exceptional student performance and participation on AP exams, which offer students more challenging coursework and the opportunity to earn college credit. Every CCSD high school offers a wide selection of AP courses. All CCSD high schools



earned recognition as AP STEM and AP STEM Achievement Schools; three – Creekview HS, Etowah HS and River Ridge HS – also were named AP Humanities and AP Humanities Achievement Schools; two schools – Creekview High and Woodstock High – additionally earned AP School of Distinction Honors.

- CCSD this year celebrated its **first class of AP (Advanced Placement) Capstone program graduates!** Sixteen Class of 2021 Etowah High School seniors who participated in the recently adopted AP Capstone program earned the AP Capstone Diploma, and one student earned the AP Seminar and Research Certificate. AP Capstone is a two-year project-based learning program designed to help students develop critical thinking, research, collaboration, and presentation skills that are critical to academic success. The elite program, which is offered in fewer than 100 high schools, was developed by The College Board in partnership with colleges and universities. Last school year, only 11,900 students nationwide earned the AP Capstone Diploma, and 7,700 earned the AP Seminar and Research Certificate. Sequoyah High School students will be eligible to earn the AP Capstone Diploma beginning this school year, and River Ridge High School students will be eligible to earn this recognition beginning in the 2022-23 school year.



## CONTINUOUS EXPANSION

- **CCSD this school year launched i-Grad Virtual Academy**, a permanent online school choice for Grades 9-12, that may be expanded to more students and additional grade levels in the future. Students complete classwork online at home, but come to the ACTIVE Academies campus for specific tests and can attend optional in-person instructional sessions as offered. Classes are offered in all core academic subjects, with AP options for more advanced students, as well a variety of Career Pathways electives.
- **CCSD this school year also launched Cherokee College and Career Academy (C3 Academy)** at the ACTIVE Academies campus, with its initial Career Pathway course offerings in cybersecurity, which is part of Georgia's Information Technology Career Pathway. Enrollment at C3 Academy is open to students from all CCSD high schools, with plans to expand to offer other unique career programs.
- For the second school year, CCSD has offered a Digital Learning option for K-12 students who would prefer their children learn at home due to COVID-19. **The Digital Learning program was significantly improved for this school year**, with elementary school teachers centralized at one campus for greater collaboration, and middle and high school students served through Canvas resources and lessons created by CCSD teachers.
- **A new agri-science lab on the Creekview High School campus** is allowing students to learn new skills and explore possible career paths. In addition to classrooms, the facility includes an ag mechanics machinery workspace, five welding bays an outdoor holding pens for livestock. The facility cost \$1.84 Million, paid for by Education SPLOST funds and \$283,394 in State funding.
- **Oak Grove Elementary School was renamed a STEAM Academy** beginning with this school year and is blending STEM into its Fine Arts instruction. It is CCSD's first STEAM Academy and is pursuing state STEAM certification this year; CCSD has two State-certified STEM schools, Clark Creek ES STEM Academy and Woodstock HS.

## OUTSTANDING SPECIAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Two CCSD schools this school year earned top state honors for excellence in education. **Indian Knoll Elementary School and Macedonia Elementary School both won the prestigious School Bell Award** from the Georgia Association of Elementary School Prin-

cipals. The Association presents the School Bell Award to no more than 10 schools in Georgia each year in recognition of outstanding curriculum and organizational leadership initiatives.

- A CCSD elementary school was named a **2021 Georgia Title I Distinguished School**. Clark Creek Elementary School STEM Academy achieved the prestigious recognition, awarded only to the top 5% of Title I schools in the State, based on its students' academic success and progress.
- **Among the many recent academic accolades for CCSD students:** seven CCSD Class of 2021 seniors were named U.S. Presidential Scholars Program candidates; 11 Class of 2021 seniors were named Georgia Scholars from the Georgia Department of Education; 14 students were selected for the 2021 Governor's Honors Program; seven middle and high school students placed at the Georgia Science and Engineering Fair; 16 elementary school students placed at the 2021 Georgia College K-5 State Science Fair; Freedom Middle School won the 2021 State Tome Society Reading Bowl; five students placed first in Regionals and one placed at the State's Young Georgia Authors Writing Competition.
- **Among the many recent career, arts and athletic achievements by CCSD students:** 14 CCSD students were named to 2021 All-State Band and one was named to All-State Orchestra; 16 students placed at the 2021 State Career and Technical Student Organization Competition; Georgia State Raider Championship State Champions; and CCSD athletic teams and/or individual athletes earned the following honors: Baseball Region 5 7A and 7 6A Champions; Competition Cheer 6A State Champions; Cross Country Individual 6A State Runner Up, Individual Region 5-7A and 7-6A Champions; Fast Pitch Softball Region 5-7A and 7-6A Champions; Girls Basketball Region 5 7A and 7 6A Champions; Girls Golf 6A State Champions; Girls Tennis Region 5 7A Champions; Literary 7A State Champions, Individual 6A State Champions, Individual Region 5 7A and 7 6A Champions; One Act Play Region 7-6A Champions; Swimming Individual State 6A Champions; Wrestling 6A State Runner Up, Region 7 6A Champions, Track & Field Individual Region 5 7A and 7 6A Champions; Volleyball 6A State Runner Up and Region 7-6A Champions.



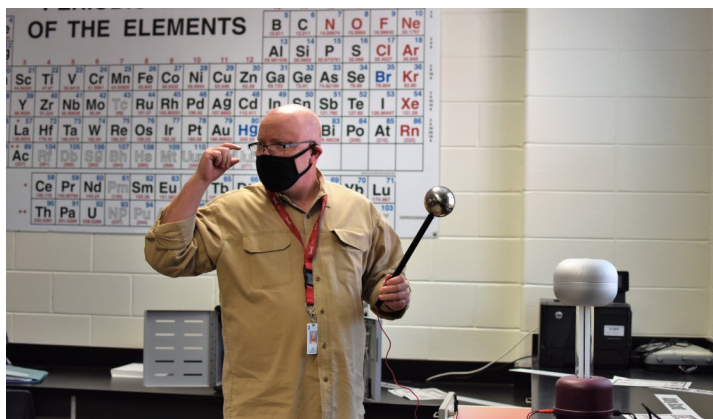


### 3. Recruiting and Retaining the Best Employees for Student Success

*The Cherokee County School District invests in recruiting and retaining highly qualified employees to provide the best instruction and support for student success.*

# Evidence of Success:

- CCSD annually achieves a **90% teacher retention rate**, which is among the highest in the State.
  - This school year, as it has for the previous three school years, **CCSD started the school year with a 99% teacher fill rate**.
  - **CCSD's current teacher workforce maintains 15 average years of experience, and 72% of all teachers hold advanced degrees in education** (master's, specialist and/or doctorate).
  - CCSD used federal CARES Act pandemic funding to **hire 125 teachers above and beyond enrollment growth needs for this school year to allow for lower class sizes and more individualized support**. The budget also funded the hiring of two additional school nurses to support larger campuses and act as permanent substitutes for any CCSD school.
  - The Annual Budget approved in June funded longevity and cost-of-living **salary increases for all teachers and eligible support staff**, which followed the payment in April of an expanded version, as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools and endorsed by the School Board, of the Governor's bonus for teachers to also include all CCSD full-time and part-time staff and substitute staff.
  - CCSD in September **increased hourly rates for School Nutrition full-time workers, part-time workers and substitutes as well as After School Program workers and ExP extended learning program workers** as a result of a market rate study.
  - The School Board in November approved **one-time retention bonuses for CCSD employees** to be paid using \$5.5 Million in federal CARES Act pandemic relief funds.
  - CCSD continuously improves its recruitment practices, with new developments including a digital job fair and refining the on-boarding process. As a result, **hiring supervisors report high satisfaction in the new practices**, with New Hire Performance ratings of 4.46 out of 5 stars.
  - The introduction of the digital job fair, while established due to the pandemic's impact on holding large events, proved serendipitous as it expanded
- CCSD's recruitment opportunities with travel no longer a barrier for applicants. **Participation in CCSD's job fairs increased by 19% for this school year's hiring.**
- CCSD educators consistently earn high marks in professional evaluations, with **100% of administrators receiving top-tier summative scores and 99.8% of teachers earning scores in the top two levels** of the State evaluation system.
  - **To ensure substitute teacher availability throughout the pandemic and beyond, CCSD implemented a strategic plan** this year that included increasing pay, offering more training sessions, and a temporary emergency plan to use central office staff for both teacher substitutes and School Nutrition substitutes. These measures guided CCSD through the Delta variant's pressure on staffing, increased the substitute teacher pool from more than 500 to more than 800 and returned substitute fill rates to pre-pandemic levels.
  - **CCSD continued to advocate for employees at the State level**, through the School Board's annual Legislative Partnership Priorities for the 2021 General Assembly (as will continue for the 2022 General Assembly). The Priorities call upon the State Legislature to: fully fund education in order to recruit and retain the best possible teachers and support staff; control the costs – to both school districts and employees -- for State healthcare benefits; and protect the Teacher Retirement System benefits for current employees and future employees who join in dedicating their careers to public education.





## 4. Encouraging Employee Growth and Celebrating Achievement

*The Cherokee County School District values all employees and encourages their professional growth through learning opportunities and celebration of achievement.*

# Evidence of Success:

- CCSD has furthered its commitment to teacher and leader development by **expanding the Superintendent's Leadership Academies professional learning program to include more opportunities**. The program now includes Teacher Leader Academy, Aspiring Administrator, New Assistant Principals, Aspiring Principals, New Principals, New and Aspiring Support Leaders, Aspiring Athletic Directors, New and Aspiring Head Coaches and the newly created Leadership Coaching Endorsement. These programs both provide current leaders with professional development and career ladders, and also deepen the pool for future leaders to the benefit of CCSD's students.
- CCSD this school year implemented a **new system for professional learning program proposals to be vetted and approved** by the Office of Curriculum & Instruction prior to being offered to teachers or support staff to ensure that all programs are high quality and aligned with CCSD goals and expectations. CCSD has expanded professional learning opportunities to include not only pre-planning and post-planning, but also one professional learning day per month in October, November and January.
- CCSD has developed a grants management program within Technology & Information Services, with a focus on supporting teachers and staff in seeking grants to improve classroom instruction and student services. **So far this school year, those grants have totaled \$1.1 Million!**
- CCSD offers annual employee recognition programs, including Teacher of the Year, Media Specialist of the Year, Counselor of the Year and Support Staff Employee of the Year, and **this past year added two more recognition programs thanks to outstanding sponsors**. The School Nurse of the Year Award, with gifts sponsored by Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, recognizes a top nurse for



each Innovation Zone and a CCSD overall winner. The Coach of the Year, with gifts sponsored by Shottenkirk Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram and BSN Sports, recognizes a top high school athletic coach for each high school and a CCSD overall winner.

- CCSD celebrates individual employee achievements through recognition at School Board meetings as well as through announcements on CCSD websites, social media and employee and parent newsletters. **Accomplishments from the past year include, but are not limited to:** 2022 Georgia STEM Scholar Teacher; 2021 Georgia Rise Up Award winner; 2021 Excellence in Teaching About Agriculture Award winner; 2021 Region 2 Library Media Specialist of the Year; 2021-22 Fast Pitch Softball 6A State and Region 7-6A Coach of the Year; 2020-21 Girls Basketball Region 7 6A Coach of the Year; 2021-22 Volleyball 7A State Coach of the Year; 2021 National Board Certified Specialist in Child Language Designation; three 2021 Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce Top 10 in 10 honorees.

## 5. Ensuring Safe and Secure Facilities for All Students and Staff

*The Cherokee County School District provides the highest quality facilities for students and staff and works diligently to ensure their safety and security.*

# Evidence of Success:

- **The CCSD Police Department this year earned recertification as a Certified Agency, a designation first achieved in 2006**, as awarded by the State of Georgia Law Enforcement Certification Program. This is the highest level of State accreditation that local law enforcement agencies can earn, and it is rare for school police departments to complete the required rigorous review. CCSD's Department, which is staffed by Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Council certified officers, **is one of only five school police departments in the State to hold this certification.**
- **CCSD, in addition to the \$1.2 Million annual operating budget for the Police Department, has spent \$3.5 Million on projects over the past four years to improve school safety and security.** These projects have included installation of camera and buzz-in visitor entrance systems, construction of security foyers, the hiring of more police officers and the expansion of campus security camera systems, with additional installations planned for next year.
- **For the third consecutive year, the Georgia School Boards Association has awarded the School Board its Leading Edge Award** in the Culture, Climate & Organizational Efficacy category



this year, for CCSD's Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) initiative. The awards recognize innovative practices that make a significant and positive impact on students.

- ◇ **CCSD's SEL initiative is focused on supporting all students in developing skills like resilience and decision-making**, which are important for success in college, career and life. **The initiative also provides additional support and connection to resources for students struggling with depression, and thoughts about harming themselves and/or others.**
- ◇ CCSD's initial 2019-20 SEL investments included the hiring of CCSD's first two mental health counselors; providing relevant training to teachers and support staff to help them better identify and refer to counselors those students showing signs or risk of depression, self-harm and suicidal ideations; the implementation of a districtwide annual student survey to assess SEL needs; and piloting national programs like Check & Connect and Sources of Strength.
- ◇ Since the initiative began, additional phases of SEL services and support have been rolled out, including bringing recently retired top educators in part time to work with the mental health coun-





selors and school counselors in developing K-12 SEL curriculum unique to CCSD to meet needs identified by student surveys; and the development of a districtwide employee wellness committee with representatives from all schools and central office operations.

- **CCSD continues to earn high marks for cultivating a positive school climate:** 4 stars (out of a possible 5) in the State's annual rating, which measure how a community – students, parents and employees -- views the quality of its school's culture and character.
- Due to their dedication to ensuring the safety of food service for students and staff, **CCSD's School Nutrition team continues to consistently earn excellent scores** for the health inspections of its cafeterias, with the **current districtwide average of 99%**. Numerous cafeterias consistently earn perfect scores, with River Ridge High School earning its 19<sup>th</sup> consecutive 100% score this fall.
- CCSD's Office of Support Services continuously reviews construction plans to meet and exceed

safety requirements in designing and building new facilities. **The latest projects for CCSD that opened this year** include new classrooms at Woodstock Middle School, a second gymnasium at Woodstock High School and a new agricultural science classroom and workshop building at Creekview High School. Upcoming projects include the construction of a new/replacement Cherokee High School and Free Home Elementary School, both of which will be built using new designs that incorporate the latest updates for safety and security.

- **The focus on safety and security extends even further to specialized training** offered to teachers, bus drivers, School Nutrition workers, administrators and other support staff for emergencies such as CPR, first-aid, Heimlich maneuver and Stop the Bleed training; and guidance for teachers, counselors, school nurses and administrators on identifying students at risk of harming themselves or others and referring them to student support specialists.





## 6. Providing Strong Stewardship of Taxpayer Investment

*The Cherokee County School District maintains strong stewardship of the investment by taxpayers in the best possible public school system for its community's children.*

# Evidence of Success:

- Led by the Office of Financial Management, the CCSD budget development process is zero-based, with requirements for every central office division and every school to reevaluate expenses for the current year in drafting requests for the next year ... which this year included accounting for \$9.4 Million in State educational funding “austerity budget cuts” but still **resulted in a balanced budget without the need for a local property tax millage rate increase.**
- The School Board, which begins the budget process by setting its own funding priorities such as a full 180-day school year and ensuring competitive salaries for teachers and support staff, approved for the current school year a balanced budget without the need for a local property tax millage rate increase. **It is the 11<sup>th</sup> consecutive year that the School Board has not raised the millage rate!**
- **The voters of Cherokee County on Nov. 2 voted overwhelmingly to renew the Education SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) for CCSD, which was approved by 75% of voters** – an even higher rate of approval than the last renewal. The continuation of the 1% sales tax was approved by the majority of voters in every precinct county-wide. The Ed SPLOST is used for school construction projects and other major capital outlay expenses like replacing aging high-mileage school buses and outdated technology. Planned construction projects include the new/replacement Cherokee HS and Free Home ES; new classrooms at Creekview HS, Woodstock HS, Creekland MS and Oak Grove ES STEAM Academy; second gyms at Creekview HS and River Ridge HS; and athletic facility improvements at Etowah HS and Sequoyah HS.
- Due to their fiscally conservative measures, the School Board learned in November that they will be able, in the spring, to **retire a bonds series from**



- past borrowing more than 10 years ahead of schedule -- avoiding \$7.8 Million in interest costs and further improving CCSD's fiscal position,** which influences borrowing capacity and credit ratings.
- **Thanks to efficient and planful budgeting, CCSD avoided the need to issue Tax Anticipation Notices** this fall for short-term borrowing to bridge the gap until local property tax revenue arrives. This avoidance meant that CCSD would not need to pay the associated interest for this borrowing.
- **CCSD has improved its already positive credit ratings from the world's top agencies, benefitting the community's taxpayers.** Moody's and Standard & Poor's financial service companies have reaffirmed CCSD's Aa2 and Aa+ ratings, respectively, and awarded Stable outlooks to both, which places the District in an outstanding position for future growth. Moody's commended CCSD for its “stable financial position supported by long-term planning, formal policies and conservative budgeting.” S&P commended CCSD's work to “improve budget assumptions and monitoring,” as well as its efforts to be “more conservative with revenue and expenditure estimates, which has led to positive operating results.”
- **CCSD this year earned National recognition for excellence in financial reporting.** CCSD's Office of Fi-

financial Management, which prepares all financial reports and the annual budget among its many responsibilities, has earned the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Financial Officers Association for its Fiscal Year 2020 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. The Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, also known as the CAFR, is considered the gold standard in financial reporting and is an optional higher level of accountability. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management. To earn this recognition, a governmental organization must submit a CAFR that passes muster with an impartial panel that judges reports for high standards, which include “demonstrating a constructive spirit of full disclosure to clearly communicate its financial story and motivate potential users and user groups to read the report.”

- CCSD’s Office of Financial Management every year **undergoes an external independent audit, performed by Certified Public Accountants** who visit CCSD offices and randomly selected schools to thoroughly review financial records to ensure full compliance with generally accepted accounting principles and local, State and Federal financial reporting requirements. This practice is above and beyond State requirements for school system audits. **This year, CCSD received its eighth consecu-**

**utive “clean” audit with no findings of any noncompliance.**

- **CCSD continues to earn high marks from the State for its financial efficiency, tying for the best rating among Metro Atlanta counties.** The State’s Financial Efficiency Star Ratings (FESR) measure school districts’ spending per student in relation to those students’ academic performance according to the College and Career Ready Performance Index. Ratings range from a half-star to the highest rating of five stars. CCSD currently holds a rating of 4.5 stars, which is among the top 10% of school districts in the State. Only 10 other school districts of the 180 in Georgia earned a 4.5, with just one of those being a metro Atlanta county system; only three districts statewide earned a 5.
- CCSD’s average per-pupil spending of \$11,379 places the District in the top quartile for conservative spending statewide. **Out of 180 school districts in Georgia, 144 are spending more per student than Cherokee County.**
- **CCSD continues to rank among the lowest 10% in the state when it comes to per pupil spending on general administrative costs.** CCSD’s rate of \$142 per student is 39% below the state average of \$232 per student. CCSD also compares well on school-based administrative costs, where it sits in the lowest quartile among Georgia school districts. School Nutrition Services is another area where CCSD stands out for financial efficiency, in the lowest 10% for program costs.





## 7. Implementing Outstanding Instructional Technology

*The Cherokee County School District delivers access to 21st century tools and training for students and staff to leverage technology to enhance teaching and learning.*

# Evidence of Success:

- CCSD was recognized at the 2021 Future of Education Technology Conference as the **winner of the Districts of Distinction Award for Educational Technology!** CCSD earned the national honor for its Minecraft: Education Edition initiative, which began during the 2017-18 school year when the District was selected by Microsoft to pilot the school-version of the popular video game.
- ◊ Through **Minecraft: Education Edition**, students master academic lessons while building in the virtual world of farms and castles that they already know and love. Teachers had the opportunity to volunteer for the CCSD pilot, through which they received one-on-one training with Microsoft staff. Word quickly spread among teachers about the quality of the program and training and the ease of use in the classroom, which helped grow the initiative districtwide.
- A CCSD school this year earned global recognition for its dedication to effectively using technology for teaching and learning! **Indian Knoll Elementary School was selected by Microsoft as a 2021-22 Microsoft Showcase School** in honor of its successful integration of educational technology in the classroom to benefit students and teachers. Only 38 schools were selected as Showcase Schools, and Indian Knoll ES is the only school in Georgia named to the list.
- ◊ Holly Springs ES STEM Academy, during the 2014-15 school year, became the world's first whole school ever to be Microsoft Innovative Educator (MIE) certified, and the following year was the first





CCSD school selected for the Showcase. Clark Creek ES STEM Academy earned the international Showcase recognition during the 2018-19 school year.

- **Twenty-seven CCSD teachers and staff have been recognized this year as instructional technology experts, and one has earned a national fellowship!** They have been named to the 2021-22 class of Microsoft Innovative Educator Experts (MIEE), and CCSD Instructional Technology Specialist Merry Hofmeister additionally is one of only 32 educators in the U.S. and three in Georgia named an Microsoft Innovative Educator Fellow. The technology company annually selects an MIEE cohort of several hundred elite educators, support staff and school leaders considered to be among the best in the nation at understanding how technology can improve learning. The Fellow title is awarded by Microsoft based on demonstrated leadership and excellence as an MIEE through coaching, mentoring, leading professional development and presenting at conferences. Fellows are considered “experts in technology integration by their peers” and are called upon to share their knowledge with other educators.
- The Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert builds upon the Microsoft Innovative Educator program, through which CCSD’s Office of Technology & Information Services trains CCSD teachers and support staff to best utilize the Microsoft Office 365 suite of productivity tools to improve teaching and overall work efficiency by all employees. Over the last five years, **2,636 teachers have achieved Microsoft Innovative Educator certification.**
- As the Microsoft Office 365 suite of productivity tools also is provided by CCSD to all students to use at school and at home, the Office of Technology & Information Services has created a Microsoft Kids certification program for students. Through the new program, 83 elementary students already have achieved this higher level of technical expertise through a teacher-led program this school year, with 300 more on their way to completion; at the middle and high school level, more than 20 students currently are participating in a self-paced program, which offers them three levels of certification.

- **CCSD schools continue to earn the Common Sense School designation from the national nonprofit organization Common Sense.** Schools earn the designation by demonstrating commitment to preparing students to think critically and use technology responsibly to learn, create, and participate, while also preparing them for the perils that exist in the online realm, such as plagiarism, loss of privacy, and cyberbullying. Common Sense Education offers schools research-based digital citizenship resources to teach students skills related to internet safety, protecting online reputations and personal privacy, media balance, managing online relationships, and media literacy.
- All CCSD students are afforded the opportunity to develop technology skills through their classes, as well as through extra-curricular activities, such as the annual Georgia Student Technology Competition. The statewide competition offers students in Grades 3-12 the opportunity to showcase their skills through 16 categories and vie for honors at Regional and State fairs. Thirty-six CCSD students won first place in their respective categories at the Regional contest, earning the opportunity to advance to the State competition. **Six CCSD students placed first, second or third at the statewide event.**
- CCSD’s instructional technology specialists deliver training to teachers and staff and instructional support focused on enhancing teaching. The Office of Technology & Information Services’ new Connect-ED YOUNiversity provides on-demand personalized learning for teachers and staff through a tiered gamified approach. **More than 1,300 teachers and staff are participating in the program this school year** (a 43% increase from last year’s launch), with topics ranging from how to create classroom podcasts to how to teach coding across the curriculum.
- **Funding CCSD’s investment in technology is a top priority for the School Board,** with dedicated resources from the Annual Budget and Education SPLOST revenue. This year’s investment of approximately \$17.5 Million, encompassing infrastructure, devices, training, support and more, reflects the value placed on providing the best technology possible to support teaching and learning.

## 8. Improving Business Operations for Organizational Efficiency

*The Cherokee County School District improves its operations daily to be not only the best public school system and the best employer, but also the best business organization.*

# Evidence of Success:

- CCSD three years ago took its financial reporting to the next level of accountability with the production of its first Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, also known as the CAFR. This optional additional level of transparency to all stakeholders requires financial management staff to further improve their already high skill levels. **This year, CCSD earned the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and financial reporting for this endeavor:** the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Financial Officers Association for its Fiscal Year 2020 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report.
- Regular surveys of stakeholders illustrate the community's appreciation for strong levels of communication from CCSD schools, which led the Office of School Operations this year to implement a new system to further enhance these services. The ParentSquare system **allows schools to send more dynamic communication to parents and employees and to use the platform for secured documents without the additional cost of document sign services.** Parents can excuse an absence securely through the system, and permission slips and additional documents that require signatures will be serviced through ParentSquare in the future. ParentSquare gives parents the control to add additional contacts to receive messages from their child's school; update contacts' email addresses and phone numbers; change their language preference; and adjust the mediums and timing for message delivery.
- Technology systems used throughout CCSD schools and offices are reviewed through the annual zero-based budget process as well as by a dedicated ad hoc committee with an eye toward ensuring these investments deliver the best possible services. This school year, the Office of Technology &



Information Services has embarked on **a new initiative to more closely evaluate the systems used by the central office for business operations to identify solutions to further improve productivity and efficiency.** This process follows recent implementations of systems to streamline functions for human resources, from hiring to evaluations to placing substitutes; to improve procurement services and purchasing responsibilities; and to enhance the professional development proposal and approval process.

- CCSD's School Nutrition program this year earned top honors from the Georgia Department of Education. The program earned the **State's Vision District award in recognition of its outstanding efforts to use Georgia grown foods on school cafeteria menus.** CCSD has received numerous accolades for its Farm to School initiative and collaboration with community partners including the Cherokee County Farm Bureau. These partnerships long have yielded the benefit of fresh locally grown produce and products to be incorporated into School Nutrition's recipes, and also have been especially fruitful in the

face of supply chain challenges.

- Excellent communications have been a hallmark for CCSD, with District and school websites, District and school direct communication systems (email, text, phone), District and school social media platforms, District and school parent newsletters, and School Board and School Council meetings among the many platforms utilized to ensure stakeholders stay informed. This year, **CCSD communications continued to earn top National and State honors for excellence.**
- ◇ CCSD's Office of Communications earned **the National School Public Relations Association's prestigious 2021 Golden Achievement Award.** This is the third consecutive year that the Office has earned this top honor, which "recognizes exemplary work in all aspects of school public relations, communication, marketing and engagement." Only 55 school districts nationwide earned the 2021 Award. The Award recognized CCSD's communications in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on school operations and the community as a whole. The communications work recognized by the honor includes the numerous messages sent by CCSD to parents, employees and other stakeholders; the dedicated webpage housing COVID-19 related information including CCSD's nationally recognized case tracking and public reporting system; and the Office's response to international media attention as one of the first school systems in the Nation to open on time and in person in August 2020.



- ◇ **CCSD earned the highest total number of awards presented by the Georgia School Public Relations Association this year**, with 15 Gold Awards and three "Best in State" awards among its numerous honors. The School District earned the top recognition statewide for its communications in regard to the COVID-19 crisis, including its numerous messages sent directly to parents, monthly parent e-newsletter and its webpages developed specifically to share information about the virus, CCSD's response and related community resources. The monthly CCSD Connections parent e-newsletter was recognized as the most outstanding education newsletter distributed in the State. CCSD also earned top honors for its Instructional Framework handbook designed to explain and guide implementation of new practices to further improve teaching and learning.
- CCSD's nationally recognized Open CCSD transparency project and webpage **further expanded this year with the inclusion of regular "Facts vs. Fiction" updates to address misinformation circulating on social media.** Open CCSD is a one-stop shop for stakeholders to review current and archived public information without the need to file an Open Records Request, with resources sorted by section: Budget and Financial Documents, Agency Performance, Public Records and Human Resources. The "Facts vs. Fiction" updates this year have corrected misinformation in regard to the Education SPLOST renewal and CCSD's COVID-19 response.





## 9. Engaging Parents and the Community in Student Learning

*The Cherokee County School District partners with parents and families, businesses and community organizations and volunteers to encourage their support of student learning.*

# Evidence of Success:

- While the pandemic's impact limited in-person opportunities for family, partner and community engagement, CCSD developed virtual solutions and then phased in a return to in-person access with a **full reopening of in-person opportunities this fall**. While virtual engagement solutions were developed as a temporary solution, through parent and family feedback, CCSD learned that such options do help some parents and families overcome barriers to participation such as transportation and work schedules. Based on this feedback, **CCSD will reconvene committees formed to develop best practices** for parent and family and business and community partner engagement to determine how virtual options can complement traditional in-person events.
- The PTA is CCSD's strongest partner, and this alliance benefits students and teachers and staff in multiple ways thanks to the volunteerism, fundraising and advocacy by its members. PTA members donate thousands of hours of their time to support CCSD schools and lead fundraising efforts that raise thousands of dollars for needs not covered by the District's operating budget. The advocacy by PTA aids CCSD and other school systems in lobbying for the State to fully fund public education and to allow control of local school decisions, like setting the school calendar, to remain in the hands



of local school boards ... not State legislators. **This year, the partnership between the PTA and CCSD schools resulted in two National PTA School of Excellence Awards**, which recognize exceptional efforts "to build an inclusive and welcoming school-community where all families contribute to enriching the educational experience and overall well-being for all students."

- Engagement in CCSD extends beyond providing access to parents and families to be involved in school activities, but also to ensure they understand student academic progress and their role in advancing that learning. The Canvas learning management system provides parents the opportunity to monitor their child's learning, with the opportunity to review the syllabus and, **new this school year, weekly lesson plan reports posted in advance**, see grades reported as assignments and tests that are graded, and communicate with teachers to address concerns throughout the school year. Curriculum Night programs are offered at all schools to allow parents to take a deeper dive into understanding the year's learning goals and their child's progress so far, followed by weekly academic progress reports delivered by email and quarterly report cards. This school year, the effort to enhance parent understanding of early childhood learning continued with



the expansion of standards based reports cards. Instead of a traditional letter grade system, standards based report cards provide parents with a detailed report outlining their child's strengths and areas for further improvement.

- **A CCSD school has won a State award for family engagement this year.** Teasley Middle School was named a winner in the Family School Partnership Competition sponsored by the Georgia Department of Education as part of Family Engagement Month. For the contest, schools statewide were charged with creating a virtual gaming opportunity that encourages families to engage in their children's learning at home together in a fun way. Winners were named for Georgia's three regions: North, which includes Teasley MS; Middle and South.
- CCSD's school-based business and community partners program has grown tremendously through intentional efforts like training school-based Partnership Ambassadors; developing an additional partnership agreement program (Companies That Care) for non-Chamber of Commerce members to complement the Chamber-supported Partners in Education program; hosting an annual Partner Up expo event to match potential partners with schools; and the CCSD Partner of the Year Awards recognition program. Every week, a different school Partner of the Year is featured on CCSD social media to congratulate the honoree and encourage partnerships. Additionally, CCSD partners, at the District level through a School Board approved process, with organizations that provide significant services districtwide, such as PTA, the retired educators association, the county and city governments, local colleges and universities. **This year, CCSD's partnerships have grown to 411 school-level agreements and 311 school and District partners.**
- CCSD consistently earns top honors from the Georgia School Public Relations Association for its community engagement efforts, including its use of newsletters, social media and special events. This year, CCSD earned the highest total number of awards presented and those honors included a **Gold Award for Special Event in recognition of**

**Partner Up! with CCSD**, an expo event that gives business and community partners the opportunity to meet Principals and school Partnership Ambassadors to talk about how they can partner and engage with the school to better serve students, teachers and staff.

- **A CCSD school this year earned a state award for cultivating outstanding business partners.** Clark Creek Elementary School STEM Academy earned the Georgia Association of Elementary School Principals' Education Patron Award for its partnership with EF2 Education First Fund Realty Team: Dr. Keith Ingram and Bruce Swanson. The partnership, over the past three years, led to \$8,600 in donations to Clark Creek ES STEM Academy and more than \$128,000 in donations to other schools throughout CCSD that also partner with EF2.
- The Cherokee County Educational Foundation, founded in 2012 by community leaders to raise awareness and funds to benefit CCSD schools, teachers and staff and students, **surpassed the \$1 million mark this year in grants awarded.** These grants support teacher "bright ideas" for classroom projects, as well as District initiatives not funded through the operating budget such as employee recognition programs like the Teacher of the Year and Support Staff Employees of the Year awards.





## 10. Leading the School District with Excellence in Governance

*The Cherokee County School District is led by a School Board and Superintendent of Schools dedicated to providing excellent leadership and governance every day.*

# Evidence of Success:

- **CCSD has earned the State's highest honor for leadership and dedication to providing the best education possible to every child!** The Governance Team of the Year Award is awarded to the School Board and Superintendent of Schools of only one Georgia school district in each of the three size categories -- small, medium and large -- by the Georgia School Boards Association. CCSD earned the 2021-22 honor for large districts, which are those with more than 10,000 students.

- ◇ **The prestigious award requires school districts' governance teams meet stringent requirements encompassing all duties:** Teaching & Learning Resources; Governance, Leadership & Accountability; Human & Organizational Capital; Teaching, Learning & Assessment; Climate, Culture & Stakeholder

Engagement; School Finance; Communications & Messaging; and Early Learning & Student Success.

- ◇ School districts are invited to apply for the award based on high scores on the State's system that measures how well students are prepared for college and career success. The detailed application process requires providing significant evidence including verifiable data that illustrates the school district's excellence and the governance team's role in ensuring that excellence. The vetting process also includes interviews of School Board members, the Superintendent and his senior staff by an impartial review team. **The judging committee that reviews the application, supporting evidence and impartial review team's report is made up of national educational experts and leaders.** The Georgia School



Boards Association has no input in the selection process. The awards program has no connection to the National School Boards Association.

- **The Cherokee County School Board provides the community with historic levels of service**, with all members in at least their second term and two members having served more than 15 years. The School Board, with the start of their service noted, is chaired by Kyla Cromer (2014) and made up of District 1 member Kelly Poole (2015), District 2 member Patsy Jordan (2013), District 3 member John Harmon (2015), District 4 member Robert “Rick Steiner” Rechsteiner (2005), who also serves as Vice Chair; District 5 member Clark Menard (2015); and District 6 member Mike Chapman (2002).
- For the third consecutive year, the Georgia School Boards Association has awarded the School Board its Leading Edge Award in the Culture, Climate & Organizational Efficacy category. The awards recognize innovative practices that make a significant and positive impact on students. **This year, the districtwide Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) initiative earned the honor**, following previous wins for CCSD’s Student Advisor and Student Delegates to the School Board program and VILLA parent academy.
- **CCSD student enrollment has grown to 41,873 students this school year**, which exceeded expectations! In addition to seeing higher levels of families choosing to enroll their children in CCSD, **the number of students opting to withdraw for home school or private school options has declined**.
- **Although student enrollment has increased beyond expectations, for the ninth consecutive year, no schools were considered “critically overcrowded” this school year**. The annual Inventory of School Housing report, which is developed based on the 20-day enrollment count, outlines the impact of sustained enrollment growth and highlighted where additional classroom space soon will be needed. The fact that increased enrollment did not lead to critical overcrowding reflects long-standing suc-

cessful management practices and School Board Policies governing student enrollment growth forecasts, school construction project planning and student attendance area decisions.

- The School Board and Superintendent of Schools’ leadership throughout the pandemic, especially the decision to reopen schools for in-person learning and on time in August 2020 and again this August, has led to **positive economic benefits for the community**. **CCSD is not only Cherokee County’s largest employer, its decision to reopen and stay open also had significant positive impacts on parents and families** as school closures require emergency child-care at an economic burden to them and/or could result in their inability to maintain employment. Cherokee County instead is benefitting from low unemployment rates, rising property values, a booming real estate market, and higher than anticipated consumer spending at local businesses as reflected in sales tax receipts. **Governor Brian Kemp in August chose to visit CCSD** and hold a press conference at Ball Ground Elementary School STEM Academy to commend the School Board, Superintendent of Schools and all of CCSD’s employees for their efforts to reopen schools, keep schools open and keep the local economy open during the pandemic.







**GSBA** Governance Team of the Year



**STATE WINNER FOR LARGE DISTRICTS**

## **CHEROKEE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Kyla Cromer, Chair

Robert Rechsteiner, Vice Chair

Mike Chapman John Harmon Patsy Jordan Clark Menard Kelly Poole

## **SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**

Dr. Brian V. Hightower