



School News



Art show reception

A reception for the [Seven Up+ high school art show](#) is 1-4 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 4. The reception, held at the Mattawoman Creek Art Center in Smallwood State Park, was rescheduled from a date last month. The show features artwork from some of the best student-artists at the seven Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) high schools and the Robert D. Stethem Educational Center. The park is at 2750 Sweden Point Road in Marbury.

Board town hall Feb. 6

The Board of Education of Charles County is hosting a Town Hall on Tuesday, Feb. 6, from 7 to 9 p.m. in the St. Charles High School auditorium. Community members are encouraged to attend to ask questions or provide comments about any education-related topics.

The overall topic for this Town Hall is school meals. To learn more about the format of the town hall, [click here](#).

Panel discussion set

A panel discussion — “An Evening of Learning: The African American Experience — From Segregated to Integrated Schools in Charles County” — is set for 6 to 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 20, at St. Charles High School. Sponsored by CCPS and the Bel Alton High School Alumni Association, the discussion will feature residents who attended segregated schools and lived through integration. The event will livestream at www.cdboe.com.

Costley to teach in the Philippines

NiYa Costley, Ph.D., is a long-time Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) teacher who strives to help students succeed. Costley has been with CCPS for nearly 25 years as a deaf and hard-of-hearing itinerant instructor. She started with the county in January 2005 after a vacancy for the position opened.



NiYa Costley

While her main office is Dr. Gustavus Brown Elementary School, she travels around to different schools to work with students there. She also teaches an American Sign Language (ASL) class at Thomas Stone High

School, conducts home visits for students, one local daycare and visits local libraries to conduct one-on-one and group sessions to students in need.

“Dr. Costley is a hard worker and an effective teacher and contributor to the Stone community,” Stone Principal Shanif Pearl, said. “She is enthusiastic and passionate about the work she does inside and outside the classroom. We are excited for her and this opportunity to expand her educational impact to the students in the Philippines and we look forward to her sharing her experiences when she returns.”

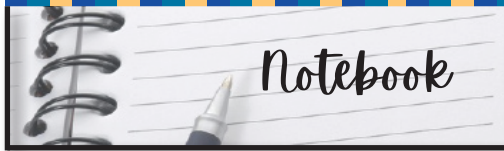
Costley enjoys the unconventional schedule that her position requires. “I have the attention span of a fly, so an itinerant position works

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Middle school teams dig volleyball

Middle school students competed in volleyball tournaments on Jan. 23 and 25. Above, John Hanson Middle School eighth graders Lawren Todd, left, Payton Jones and Karaganne Burroughs prepare for a game against Piccowaxen Middle School. Right, Tremaine Lee, an eighth grader at Benjamin Stoddert Middle School, sets up to serve against Milton M. Somers Middle School. The seventh-grade girls team from Mattawoman Middle School girls and seventh-grade Piccowaxen boys team took first place in the grade-level tournament. For the eighth-grade competition, Hanson girls took first place and Piccowaxen boys placed first. [For more about the tournament, click here.](#)



Chess tournament

The winter chess tournament is Saturday, Feb. 10, at Henry E. Lackey High School. [Students in kindergarten through 12th grade have until Feb. 7 to register.](#)

Teacher of the Year

High school a cappella teams are tuning up to compete in the Varsity Vocals quarter-finals of the International Championship of High School A Cappella (ICHSA) Feb. 10 at St. Charles High School.

The competition starts at 7 p.m. and features several high school a cappella groups from the Mid-Atlantic region including Takin' Charge from Henry E. Lackey High School, Screechin' Eagles of North Point High School and the Spartones of St. Charles.

The top two teams from the quarterfinals will move on to compete in a semifinal contest in March.

The finals will be held in New York City in April featuring semifinal champions from each U.S. and United Kingdom region and the wild card winner.

[General admission tickets are \\$20 per person and can be purchased at Freshtix.com.](#) St. Charles is at 5305 Piney Church Road in Waldorf.

Teacher of the Year

The CCPS 2024 Teacher of the Year ceremony is 5 to 6:30 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 22, in the St. Charles High School auditorium. The event recognizes excellence in teaching and will honor those nominated for the 2024 Teacher of the Year program by their schools.

From the six finalists, the CCPS Teacher of the Year will be named. The inclement weather date is March 7.

CCPS also nominates one of the finalists for *The Washington Post's* Teacher of the Year program. The *Post's* nominee will be announced in March.



Taking the plunge

Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) staff and students participated in the Polar Plunge Thursday, Feb. 1, at Sandy Point Park. The event is a fundraiser for Special Olympics Maryland. It has become a tradition for CCPS high school students and staff to take part in the plunge. Click the picture to see how this year's plunge went.

Staff earn the CCPS Canvas Certified Educator scholarship

Several Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) educators have recently earned the CCPS Canvas Certified Educator (CCE) program scholarship.

The scholarship reflects their professional achievements and supplements the support of a successful implementation of Canvas with CCPS in the Fall of 2024. Canvas is a web-based learning management system used by school systems, educators and students to access content and communicate with each other.

The program “empowers teachers to effectively use instructional technology to achieve specific learning goals.

Participants gain a deep understanding of designing engaging, dynamic and personalized learning experiences for students,” Laura Metz, CCPS instructional technology specialist said.

The following CCPS teachers received the Canvas Certified Educator (CCE) program scholarship.

- **Marissa Baker**, math teacher, Theodore G. Davis Middle School.
- **Letia Ballard**, social studies teacher, John Hanson Middle School.
- **Karena Bennett**, science teacher, Maurice J. McDonough High School.
- **Susan Cable**, special education teacher, T.C. Martin Elementary School.
- **Danielle Carpenter**, academic mentor, St. Charles High School.
- **NiYa Costley**, deaf and heard-of-hearing teacher, Dr. Gustavus Brown Elementary School.
- **Tami Dahm**, math teacher, Benjamin Stoddert Middle School.

- **Nancy Dennehy**, Spanish teacher, Matthew Henson Middle School.
- **Michelle Fryer Dommel**, science teacher, Berry Elementary School.
- **Marlene Harvest**, fifth-grade teacher, J.C. Parks Elementary School.
- **Teresa Johnson**, ESOL teacher, Thomas Stone High School.
- **Elizabeth Kreilick**, math teacher, Robert D. Stethem Educational Center.
- **Rebecca Legge**, vocal music teacher, Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School.
- **Jackson Long**, drama teacher, Westlake High School.
- **Laura Merryman**, language arts teacher, Stoddert.
- **Heidi Mickey**, instrumental music teacher, Arthur Middleton Elementary School.
- **Alicia Pierce**, computer resource teacher, North Point High School.
- **Molly Reip**, first-grade teacher, Higdon.
- **Erin Rhoades**, science teacher, Milton M. Somers Middle School.
- **Moriah Rochlinski-Evans**, Spanish teacher, North Point.
- **Katherine Schutte**, business education teacher, St. Charles.
- **Brooke Shnipes**, English teacher, La Plata High School.
- **Annemarie Simpson, Ph.D.**, math teacher, McDonough.
- **Carol Smith**, computer teacher, Thomas Stone.
- **Leah Whetzel**, science teacher, North Point.

CCPS teachers earn National Board Certification

Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) teachers have recently earned or retained National Board Certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The designation is an indicator of effective and accomplished teaching.

National Board Certified Teachers must complete a review of their skills and work that includes a portfolio, student work samples, videos and a thorough analysis of their classroom teaching and student learning.

Teachers also complete a series of written exercises designed to probe the depth of their subject-matter knowledge and understanding of how to teach that material to students.

The following teachers achieved National Board Certification.

- **Kelly Bryant**, CASE teacher, Maurice J. McDonough High School.
- **Jordan Combs**, special education teacher, William A. Diggs Elementary School.
- **A'leese Dickerson**, English teacher, North Point High School.
- **Amanda Gilbert**, fourth-grade teacher, Dr. James Craik Elementary School.
- **Matthew Howard**, social studies

teacher, St. Charles High School.

- **Kelly Lundeen**, third-grade teacher, Craik.
- **Daniel Meltsner**, computer teacher, John Hanson Middle School.
- **Teonna Scott**, reading interventionalist, Hanson.
- **Paige Serpone**, mathematics teacher, North Point.
- **Brooke Shnipes**, English teacher, La Plata High School.
- **Mary E. Smith**, prekindergarten teacher, Indian Head Elementary School.
- **Jessica Tompkins**, social studies teacher, Matthew Henson Middle School.
- **Sheila White**, second-grade teacher, Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School.

Teachers who achieved renewal of National Board Certification.

- **Laura Buzzell**, content specialist for high school mathematics, Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building.
- **Casey Cleary**, mathematics teacher, Benjamin Stoddert Middle School.
- **Juliana Herscher**, first-grade teacher,

T.C. Martin Elementary School.

- **Lynn Hopkins**, language arts teacher, Piccowaxen Middle School.
- **Sonia Matthew, Ed.D.**, assistant principal, Mary B. Neal Elementary School.
- **Tiffany Rybarczyk**, prekindergarten teacher, Early Learning Center, La Plata.
- **Monica Strobel**, language arts teacher, Milton M. Somers Middle School.

Certification is valid for five years after which a teacher may choose to remain NBCT certified through the Maintenance of Certification process in five-year intervals. Maryland has 3,673 nationally certified teachers in 2023 and is one of the top 10 states with the highest participation in the certification process.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future encourages teachers to earn and retain a NBCT designation with a salary increase and more opportunities for advancements while having a direct impact on students. Information about the application process is posted online at <https://www.nbpts.org/> or visit <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/nbct/>.

MSDE visits schools to view Blueprint implementation process

As part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future implementation, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) launched a comprehensive review process for local school systems. All Maryland public school systems, including Charles County Public Schools (CCPS), are in the school review process for the 2023-2024 school year.

The review process includes school visits from MSDE "Expert Review Teams," that consist of experienced teachers, leaders and experts with knowledge of effective school improvement practices.

MSDE identified four schools to participate in the review process for CCPS: Gale-Bailey Elementary, Matthew Henson Middle, and Henry E. Lackey and Maurice J. McDonough high schools.

Expert Review Team school visits started at McDonough last month, followed by Gale-

Bailey and Henson on Feb. 21 and 22, and Lackey on March 20 and 21.

As part of the visits, the team will observe classroom instruction, participate in focus groups to include administrators, teachers, parents and students, and review instructional strategies and interventions used to support student academic growth.

At the conclusion of each school visit, the Expert Review Team will summarize its findings and provide the school with a brief synopsis that will include recommendations for improvement. The school and the school system will later receive a report on the findings, recommendations and resources.

More information about MSDE Expert Review Teams, as well as the review process, is posted on the MSDE website at <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/expert-review-team/>.

School Counselor Week is Feb. 5-9

Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) is celebrating National School Counselor Week Feb. 5 to 9.



The week honors school counselors who provide vital support to students as they navigate the challenges of the 21st century. The week recognizes the role school counselors play in college and career readiness and in helping students examine their talents, strengths, abilities and interests.

This year's theme is School Counseling: Standards-Based, Student-Focused.

[Check out features on CCPS school counselors on the school system's YouTube page.](#)

School News is published by
Charles County Public Schools
301-932-6610
301-934-7220
Fax: 301-932-6651

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COSTLEY

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best for me,” she said.

She arrived in the county in 2005 from Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania where she obtained her bachelor’s degree with a special major in education and psychology with a concentration in Black studies.

She also received her master’s in administration and supervision from Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., and a master’s from Minneapolis’s Walden University in philosophy of education. She later obtained her doctorate degree from Walden in educational technology.

Gaming guru

Costley’s love for technology and games started early in her life. “I have been a tech geek since elementary school and interested in games since a young age,” she said. “It has been a running joke as a child that every Christmas I would get board games.” She enjoyed the thought of gamification in education, specifically in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), so much so that she obtained her doctorate in educational technology. “I just knew that I was going to do my dissertation on the digital divide, but then I realized that it has been researched to death,” Costley said. So, she started thinking about other topics which led to the topic of gamification.

Not only did she obtain her doctorate in gami-

fication in STEM through her childhood interest in the field, but she also aspires to help teach other students the joy of learning through gamification. “The idea of engaging students through play, technology and game mechanics was appealing to me,” she said. “Too many of our kids are checking out and part of the reason is because they are bored.”

Teaching in the Philippines

Costley continued to combine her loves – gaming and education, traveling and teaching. The opportunity for Costley to continue her education was one that she jumped on but not nearly as fast as one to travel and teach in the Philippines. “I love traveling – especially international,” she said. “I love meeting new people, experiencing new cultures and being able to engage with the community there.” The U.S. Department of State and the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board recently selected Costley for the Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Short Term Program where she will teach gamification of STEM instruction to students in the secondary school classroom. Costley is one of 20 U.S. citizens who will travel to 14 countries around the world in 2024 in the program.

Costley will be teaching classes with 50 or more students during her stint in the Philippines. As she went through the interview process, she wanted to make sure that the students in the class would be eager to learn and listen to the content being shared. The interviewers assured her that the students in the classroom had to apply for the course and that they wanted to be there which excited Costley even more for the opportunity.

“One morning I walked into Stone, and I was flooded with multiple messages of ‘Congratulations’ from students and staff at the school,” she said. “Apparently my teaching opportunity and award was announced that morning.” Costley usually arrives at the school after the morning announcements to teach the ASL class, so the response of the students and staff came as a surprise. The short-term teaching experience in the Philippines will begin in the spring this year and last for six weeks. “I am looking forward to it,” she said.

Personnel

Apply for positions online at www.cc-boe.com/jobs/currentopenings.php. All teaching positions require a bachelor’s degree and MSDE certification requirements.

Job openings

Executive Assistant to the Board — Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building, 12-month position. Apply by Feb. 5.

Certification Assistant — Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building, 12-month position. Apply by Feb. 9.

Director of Student Services — Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building, 12-month position. A master’s degree, APC and A&S certification required with at least four years of experience as a school administrator or a minimum of five years of related leadership experi-

ence in coordinating/supervising area required. Apply by Feb. 9.

Principal — J.C. Parks Elementary School, 12-month employee. A master’s degree from an accredited college or university required and candidates must hold or be eligible for a Maryland Advanced Professional Certificate with Administrator II endorsement. Three years satisfactory experience as an assistant principal or administrator required. Apply by Feb. 9.

Principal Pool for 2024-2025 — Middle and high school level, 12-month position. Apply by Feb. 9.

Assistant Principal Pool for 2024-2025 — Elementary school level, 12-month position. Apply by Feb. 9.

Empower, an investment advisor, will hold virtual retirement planning sessions this month. [To learn more, click here.](#)