

Superintendent's Corner

TEACHER
of the
YEAR

Jan. 2025





Superintendent's Update

Happy New Year!

I hope this message finds you well and refreshed after a much-deserved winter break. As we begin the second semester, I'm filled with gratitude and excitement for the opportunities that lie ahead for our students, staff, and families.

The winter months in Southwest Virginia bring their own unique charm. Whether it's the quiet beauty of a snow-dusted morning or the crisp chill that makes our classrooms even more inviting, this season reminds us to cherish what keeps our hearts warm. Of course, with winter comes the challenge of unpredictable weather. While we do our best to make timely and accurate decisions about school closures or delays, we know we don't always get it right (https://youtu.be/-VUtbnRe_vl). I can't help but look forward to the longer days and warmer temperatures of spring—it'll be here before we know it.

The start of a new year and semester is the perfect time to refocus and set fresh goals. It's a chance to build on the progress we've made and finish the school year strong.

- To our students: I encourage you to stay curious, work hard, and support one another.
- To parents and families: your encouragement and involvement are invaluable, and I thank you for the vital role you play in your child's success.

I'm also excited to share the progress we've made on the renovation of Christiansburg High School. If you've driven by recently, you've likely noticed the incredible transformation taking shape. This project is about more than bricks and mortar—it's about creating a space where our students can thrive, grow, and dream big. I'm grateful for the vision and dedication of everyone who has contributed to this effort. For those interested, here's a [link](#) to the live-stream camera of the ongoing construction. We can't wait to celebrate the ribbon-cutting ceremony in August 2026!

Meanwhile, our secondary schools' winter sports are in full swing, with district and regional tournaments just around the corner. The school year is moving quickly, and soon, we'll be planning for graduation, final exams, AP tests, and summer activities.

This spring, we'll also host more meet-and-greet sessions with the superintendent in our school communities. Keep an eye out for announcements, and I encourage you to attend. These sessions are a valuable opportunity to connect, share feedback, and address any concerns.

Thank you for being such an integral part of the Montgomery County Public Schools family. I'm excited to see all that our students will accomplish in the months ahead and look forward to a successful second semester.

Sincerely,

Bernard F. Bragen, Jr. Ed.D.
Superintendent

Engage! Encourage! Empower!



Bus Patrol

To help keep our students safe while traveling to and from school, we've partnered with the MCSO and BusPatrol to crack down on illegal bus passings. Starting Feb. 1, any vehicle that illegally passes a bus while the stop sign is out and the lights are flashing will receive a valid summons from the MCSO. More information is available in the video below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RNffnTeeLo>

Winter Weather Simulation

Check out this behind-the-scenes look at how inclement weather school delays and cancellations take place.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VUtbNre_vI



Curriculum & Instruction Update

As we navigate an ever-evolving educational landscape, one of the most exciting developments is the emergence of generative AI tools. These technologies, once the stuff of science fiction, are now accessible to students and educators alike. At their best, they are powerful allies in learning, offering new ways to inspire creativity, enhance understanding, and foster critical thinking.

But what exactly is generative AI, and how can it support your child's education?

Generative AI refers to artificial intelligence systems that can create content—text, images, music, and code—based on prompts and input from users. Think of it as a highly advanced assistant that can provide ideas, explanations, and feedback. In the classroom, students are beginning to use these tools to brainstorm ideas, practice writing skills, and create exciting projects. The clarity and specificity of the user's prompt improves the quality of the output from the generative AI tool. Therefore, students must be trained on how to use these tools appropriately.

Here are some practical examples of how students can use generative AI to support their learning:

1. **Writing Assistance:** Generative AI can help students draft essays, develop outlines, and improve sentence structure. It's a fantastic tool for encouraging revisions and improving clarity.
2. **Math Problem Solving:** AI tools can explain how to solve challenging math problems step by step, helping students build confidence and deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts.
3. **Creative Exploration:** Whether crafting a short story or designing a project, generative AI can spark ideas and offer new perspectives.
4. **Language Learning:** AI can translate text, offer grammar suggestions, and even simulate conversational practice in other languages.
5. **Research Support:** Generative AI can help students summarize information, generate questions for further study, and organize notes.



Curriculum & Instruction Update

While these tools are impressive, they work best when paired with human oversight. Students should use them to supplement—not replace—their own efforts and creativity. Teaching our children to think critically about AI outputs and to ask thoughtful questions will be essential skills in this new era. In Montgomery County Public Schools, we are committed to helping students learn to use generative AI ethically and responsibly. To that end, we are working to:

- Create a comprehensive plan for appropriate use of generative AI. This will include partnering with families to discuss strategies for effective and appropriate use of these tools at home.
- Provide professional development for teachers on how to integrate AI tools into instruction.
- Ensure that students understand the importance of originality, intellectual property, and the ethical use of AI-generated content.

We encourage you to explore generative AI with your child. Ask them how they might use it to enhance their learning. Perhaps try a tool together and discuss what you discover. By engaging in these conversations, we can help our students navigate this exciting technology with confidence and curiosity.

As always, thank you for your partnership in your child's education. Together, we can ensure they are prepared for the opportunities and challenges of the future. Look for additional information in the future regarding the use of AI tools in your child's classroom and school.

Sincerely,

Barbara M. Wickham, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent

Job Fair

We're hosting our annual Educator Recruitment Fair on Feb. 8. We'll be hosting interviews for all certified education positions. You can meet our team and learn all about our open positions for the 2025-2026 school year. Apply online at: <https://www.mcps.org/> to secure your interview!



Montgomery County Public Schools

We're seeking passionate and qualified candidates for **all** certified education positions. This is your chance to meet our exceptional team and explore exciting career opportunities.

Apply now to our 2025-2026 job postings to receive an invitation to register for a pre-scheduled interview. Don't miss out—apply today!

Apply Here:



MCPS is hiring!

MCPS Annual Educator Recruitment Fair

 **February 8, 2025**

 **750 Imperial St.
Christiansburg, VA
24073**

 **(540) 382-5100**

We Are MCPS



Starting teacher pay: \$50,072.26

<https://www.mcps.org/>

Teacher of the Year

Congratulations to Auburn Middle School's Phillip Ashby on being named the MCPS Teacher of the Year. Mr. Ashby teaches Technology Education. He will represent MCPS in the Region 6 Teacher of the Year competition.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dklmu_eld6k

Engage! Encourage! Empower!





Equity Update

Honoring Diversity and History: January Observances for Our School Community

Martin Luther King Jr. Day (January 20, 2025)

On Monday, January 20, our school community will join the nation in celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. Day. This holiday honors the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a leader in the civil rights movement who championed equality and justice through non-violent action. His famous "I Have a Dream" speech continues to inspire hope for a world free of racial injustice.



Dr. King's unwavering commitment to peaceful protest earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, making him the youngest recipient of this prestigious award. Tragically, his life was cut short when he was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968, while supporting sanitation workers' rights. After years of advocacy, Martin Luther King Jr. Day was signed into law as a federal holiday in 1983, with the first official observance on January 20, 1986.

In 1994, this day became a National Day of Service to encourage community engagement in Dr. King's spirit of service. We encourage our families, students, and staff to participate in service activities that strengthen our communities and to "Make it a Day On, Not a Day Off."

International Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27, 2025)

On January 27, we observe International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a time to reflect on the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945 and to honor the memory of the six million Jewish victims and millions of others who perished during the Holocaust. The United Nations established this day in 2005 to promote Holocaust education and combat hate and intolerance.

The Holocaust is a stark reminder of the dangers of prejudice and the consequences of unchecked hatred. It is critical for us to teach and learn from these lessons to build a more compassionate and just society. In 2025, the world marks 80 years since the liberation of Auschwitz. A special virtual program will feature stories from survivors who endured unimaginable hardship and loss. Their testimonies remind us of the importance of remembrance and education.



#WeAreMCPS



Equity Update

We encourage families and students to learn about the Holocaust, discuss its significance, and confront antisemitism and hate wherever they arise. Together, we can foster a future grounded in understanding and respect.

Lunar New Year (January 29, 2025)

Lunar New Year is a joyous celebration observed by many of our students, families, and staff. This year, the holiday begins on January 29, marking the Year of the Snake. The 15-day celebration is one of the most significant cultural holidays in countries such as China, Vietnam, and South Korea.



The festivities begin with the first new moon and conclude with the full moon, known as the Lantern Festival. Families gather to share meals, honor ancestors, and enjoy traditions unique to their heritage. Red decorations symbolize good fortune and protection from evil spirits. Each year is associated with one of 12 animals in the lunar zodiac cycle, adding a layer of symbolism and meaning.

We wish all who celebrate a prosperous and joyful Lunar New Year! May this time bring happiness, health, and good fortune to you and your loved ones. Our school community embraces and honors the diverse traditions that make our world more vibrant.

By recognizing these important observances, we affirm our commitment to education, diversity, and unity. Let's continue to learn, grow, and celebrate together as a school community.

Guylene Wood-Setzer
Director of Equity and Diversity

Student Spotlight

During winter break, BMS student Charlotte Slider performed twice at Carnegie Hall. She won first place for the age group of 11-14 in both classical and musical theatre music in the American Protege International Music Competition. The competition had applicants from 72 countries. Congratulations, Charlotte!



December Seniors of the Month

Congratulations to our January Seniors of the Month. These students were recognized for their hard work at a recent school board meeting.

Auburn High School – Natalie Aguilar Lara

Blacksburg High School – Thomas Repass

Christiansburg High School - Vo Bao Han Pham

Eastern Montgomery High School – Waylon Richmond



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