

# SPOTLIGHT ONE

A Richland One Publication



**RICHLAND ONE**  
ENGAGE • EDUCATE • EMPOWER

Points of Pride • Program Spotlights • Class of 2025 Spotlights

# A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



As we approach the end of the 2024-2025 school year, we pause and look back with pride at the accomplishments of our schools, students and staff. From student achievement gains to prestigious state and national honors, awards and championship wins, this has been another successful year for Team One.

The school year is not over yet though, and we can expect many more reasons to celebrate between now and when we congratulate our newest graduates as they walk across the stage in May to receive their high school diplomas.

In this edition of Spotlight One, we introduce you to two outstanding members of the Class of 2025. We also feature the MedEx Academy program at C.A. Johnson High School (in partnership with Prisma Health) and our new esports program, which is offered at all of our high schools. Both programs reflect our commitment to creating diverse options and opportunities for our students as we prepare them for college and careers.

Spotlight One is just one of the ways we keep our stakeholders informed about our progress and other points of pride. Along with reading each edition of Spotlight One, please follow Richland One on social media (Facebook, X and Instagram); visit our website (RichlandOne.org); watch Richland One TV (Spectrum cable channel 1303 and YouTube) and R1TV On Demand on our website; and download our mobile app.

Richland One schools are the community's schools. Support and engagement from parents and the community are vital to the continued success of our district as we work collaboratively to provide our students with an exceptional education. Thank you for helping to make Richland One a place of excellence and opportunity. **#TeamOne #OneTeam**

*Craig Witherspoon*

**Craig Witherspoon, Ed.D.**  
Richland One Superintendent

## POINTS OF PRIDE



**Hopkins Elementary School**  
Visible Learning+ Certified School  
First Visible Learning+ Certified School  
in South Carolina



**Crayton Middle School**  
AMLE School of Distinction  
Association for Middle Level Education  
First AMLE School of Distinction in South Carolina



**Satchel Ford Elementary School**  
National Banner Unified Champion School  
Special Olympics



**America's Healthiest Schools**  
All 48 Richland One schools were named among America's Healthiest Schools by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. Richland One had more award recipients than any other South Carolina school district.

**Excellence in Financial Reporting and Accounting:** Richland One received the highest honors in financial reporting and accounting from the Government Finance Officers Association and the Association of School Business Officials International for the 36th consecutive year.

# POINTS OF PRIDE



**Aneysha Laureano**  
Arden Elementary

- Six Richland One students (four from Dreher High School and two from A.C. Flora High School) were named finalists in the 2025 National Merit Scholarship Program, which recognizes academically talented high school seniors across the country.
- Thirty Richland One art students received honors and awards in the 2024 South Carolina Fair Art Competition. Fourteen Richland One students were recognized in the State Fair's youth home and craft competitions.
- Sixteen Columbia High School students from the school's BLAST (Building Lasting Aerospace and STEM Trajectories) national defense magnet program earned certifications in recreational drone usage from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).
- Fourteen Richland One students were selected for the South Carolina Music Educators Association's All-State Chorus. Twenty-two Richland One students were selected for the South Carolina American Choral Directors Association Choir.
- Heyward Gibbes Middle School's Mock Trial Team won the 2024 Professionalism and Civility Award at the South Carolina Bar Association's Middle School Mock Trial State Competition.



**Lower Richland Army JROTC Drill Team**

- Aneysha Laureano, a fourth-grade student at Arden Elementary School, won first place in the second-third grade category of the National Association of Conservation Districts' 2024 Youth Conservation Poster Contest.
- Lower Richland High School's Army JROTC drill team won first place overall in the Fourth Brigade Regional Armed Drill Competition, qualifying for the National High School Drill Team Championship for the fourth consecutive year.
- Nine Richland One students were selected for the 2025 South Carolina Music Educators Association's (SCMEA) All-State Orchestra. Thirty-two Richland One orchestra students earned spots in the SCMEA Midlands Region Orchestra.
- Six Richland One students were selected for the 2025 South Carolina Band Directors Association's All-State Concert Bands, and two students were selected for the All-State Jazz Band. Thirty-nine students were selected for the Region III Honor Bands.



**Dreher Quiz Bowl Team**

- The quiz bowl teams from Crayton Middle School and Dreher High School advanced to the state academic challenge. Dreher's quiz bowl team won the lower high school division at the state competition and qualified for the National Academic Quiz Tournaments High School National Championship.
- W.J. Keenan High School's boys basketball team won the 2025 Class AAA state championship, the team's second state title in five years and the eighth under Head Coach Zachary Norris.
- Thirteen Dreher High School students were selected for the South Carolina Music Educators Association's All-State Guitar Ensemble.



**W.J. Keenan Boys Basketball Team**  
Photo: SC High School League

- Two hundred and forty Richland One elementary, middle and high school students were honored as Richland One Rising Stars for their extraordinary improvement in academics, attendance, behavior and/or overcoming obstacles.
- Heyward Career and Technology Center's SkillsUSA chapter won multiple medals and recognitions at the South Carolina SkillsUSA Leadership and Skills Competition. The 16 students who won gold medals have advanced to the SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference.

For more of our Points of Pride, go to [RichlandOne.org](https://RichlandOne.org).

# PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: MEDEX ACADEMY



For more than 10 years, the Health Sciences Center at Prisma Health has offered its MedEx Academy program in the Upstate. C.A. Johnson High School is now the first Midlands school to offer the program.

MedEx Academy is a one-of-a-kind program developed to help high school and college students explore and experience various health care careers. The goal of the program is to engage students early to increase the number of health care providers in South Carolina and make employment opportunities more accessible to a diverse group of students.

Twenty C.A. Johnson students will work at Prisma Health Richland every Wednesday through April, gaining hands-on experience.

"Prisma Health's MedEx program is partnering with C.A. Johnson High School and the Richland One school district to offer shadowing at Prisma Health Richland hospital. With a workforce shortage in health care, we need team members to fulfill our mission to 'Inspire Health, Serve with Compassion and Be the Difference,'" said Desmond Kelly, M.D., the associate chief academic officer for Prisma Health.

"We are thrilled that these young people are interested in health care careers and are honored to welcome them as they learn about the challenges and rewards of patient care. We thank the school leadership for this opportunity to inspire students and support their journey to rewarding health care careers in South Carolina."

C.A. Johnson senior Azazziya Slater says he has always been intrigued with the medical field. Thanks to his experience in the MedEx Academy, Azazziya now wants to become a respiratory therapist.

"There are a lot of things here that I never thought that I would see or experience. Now that I've seen it, it's changed my viewpoint on not only a career option but also my viewpoint of the world itself," he said.

C.A. Johnson is home to Richland One's health sciences magnet program. Junior Julaylie Morales says she's experiencing some things in the MedEx Academy that she learned about in the magnet program.

"It's like when you see a movie and you're like, 'Oh wow. I don't think I could ever see that happening.' Then, a few weeks later, you see it happening in real life and you're like 'This is amazing,'" she said.

Prisma Health (formerly Palmetto Health) has partnered with Richland One on several school and district-wide programs and initiatives since the 1990s. Last year, Prisma Health donated a decommissioned ambulance to C.A. Johnson to support the health sciences magnet

program. The decommissioned ambulance will be used for the magnet program's EMT pathway that is set to launch in the fall.

"The opportunity with Prisma Health is truly tremendous. We have grown our partnership to now doing work-based learning in Prisma Health. We have students in their building shadowing doctors, working with nurses and seeing babies being born as real-life work experience, learning about Prisma Health and all of the opportunities Prisma Health offers our community as well as our state," said C.A. Johnson Principal Dr. Brenton Coe.

MedEx Academy's expansion to C.A. Johnson is a pilot program. Applications for next year's MedEx Academy will open in the fall.

*"There are a lot of things here that I never thought that I would see or experience. Now that I've seen it, it's changed my viewpoint on not only a career option but also my viewpoint of the world itself."*

**Azazziya Slater**  
**C.A. Johnson High School senior**

# PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: ESPORTS

Gamers at all of Richland One's high schools now can play on a competitive level against students across North America.

Dreher High School was the first school in Richland One to have an esports program when it started in 2018. Madalyn Hazlett, Richland One's esports coordinator who was Dreher's esports program advisor back then, said the program was created to build a community of gamers.

"We saw how powerful that community was for students who didn't have one at school, to be able to come and join together," she said.

In 2024, the district approved funding for each of the seven high schools to have a gaming lab that includes 12-14 gaming computers and one to two Nintendo Switches. Hazlett said she thought she would never see esports expand outside of Dreher.

"I could not believe that we were not only getting approval to play games but also that the district was willing to invest money in it so that these students can actually compete in real leagues and have a fighting chance with this awesome equipment," she said.

Esports teams have fall and spring seasons, with each season lasting approximately two months. Both seasons will conclude with two weeks of playoff games. Practices are normally held early in the week, and games are played later in the week.

Interest meetings are held before the seasons begin, and students can try out for the team they'd like to join. Depending on the school, students have the option to join Overwatch 2, Mario Kart 8, Super Smash Bros. Ultimate, Rocket League and League of Legends teams.

There are 21 teams across the district, with each team having three to five players. Teams are structured similarly to regular sports teams. There is a head coach and two assistant coaches for each team, and every team has a team captain.

Online platform PlayVS organizes the matchups, while also allowing schools to build and manage their teams, check schedules and track match stats. There is also a rivals feature that allows schools to face off against their rivals.

"The esports team isn't just a place where we have fun and play games," said Iraeana (Rae) Flores, a junior at Lower Richland High and team manager of the school's esports team. "We use our mindsets to come together as a team. It's just a beautiful thing to experience. Everything is just amazing."

**For more information about Richland One's esports program, contact Madalyn Hazlett, Richland One's esports coordinator, at [madalyn.hazlett@richlandone.org](mailto:madalyn.hazlett@richlandone.org).**



**Lower Richland High School Gaming Room**

## CLASS OF 2025 SPOTLIGHT: ALEXANDRIA KOLOMOETS

Dreher High School senior Alexandria Kolomoets plans to study graphic design in college, but she says the decision to choose that major is a funny story.

At the time, she had taken a handful of art classes at Dreher and was involved in the school's National Art Honor Society. One day, Alexandria was working on a logo for the organization when her mom saw what she was working on.

"My mom was like 'You're really good at stuff like this. Have you ever thought about doing this as a career?' I was like 'That's a stupid thing to say. There's no such thing as doing this as a career.' She said 'Yes, there is,'" Alexandria said. "I did my research and, low and behold, there is."

Last summer, she got a head start in graphic design experience by doing work for local churches, businesses and organizations. Alexandria said the experience influenced her to pursue graphic design professionally.

"I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed working with people and helping organizations, even if it was for free. I liked the work I was doing. I thought it was great," she said. "I didn't know what I was going to do in college. It just kind of fell into my lap."

When Alexandria starts college in the fall, she hopes to become the first person in her family to have a bachelor's degree.

"I hope my parents will be excited that I'll be creating more opportunities for myself," she said.

Alexandria's advice to high school students who are figuring out what they want to do after graduation is don't be afraid to try different things.

"Not everything you do will work, but it's important to put yourself out there and you'll have those experiences," she said.



## CLASS OF 2025 SPOTLIGHT: CHASE BENNETT

If there's one musical instrument C.A. Johnson High School senior Chase Bennett could play for the rest of his life, it would be the drums.

"I've been playing the drums for so long, from doing it in church to being around a bunch of musicians. It's been in me," he said.

Chase grew up in a musically talented family. His father and five of his cousins play the drums. Every woman in his family, including his mother, sings.

Chase discovered his love for drumming when he was two years old. "I was too short to play drums when I was a kid. I used to sit on people's laps just to play," he said.

When he was 13, Chase started producing his own music for fun. Since then, he's produced 30 pieces.

One of the highlights of Chase's time at C.A. Johnson was performing with R&B singer Jeffrey Osbourne in 2022 during the Auntie Karen Foundation's Master Class, which is held annually in partnership with Richland One.

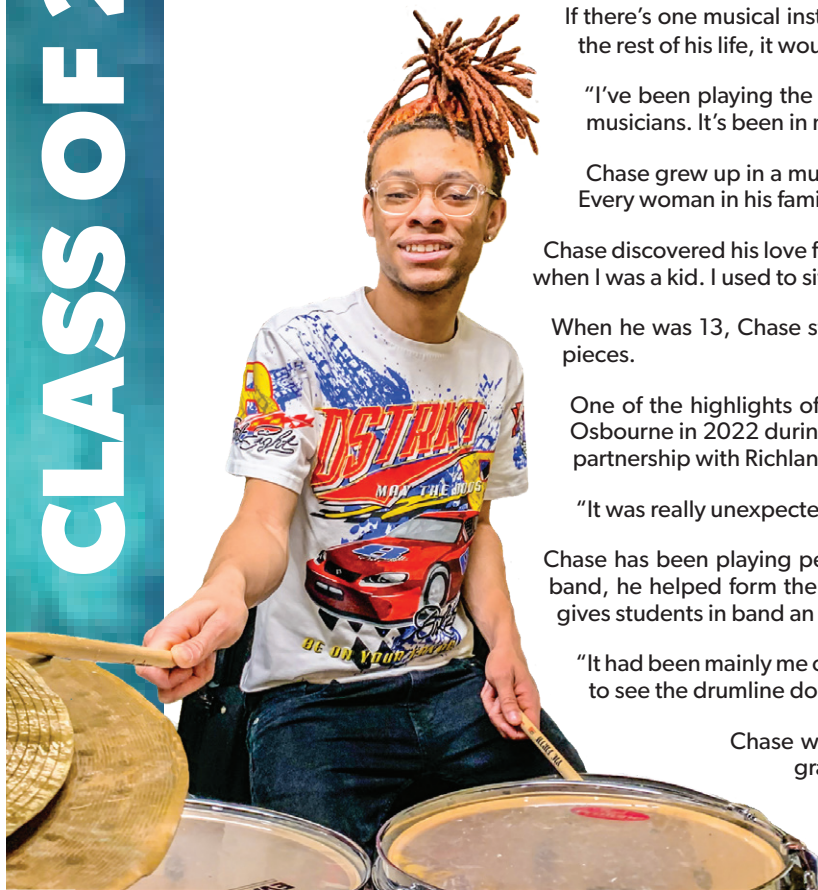
"It was really unexpected. I didn't think he was going to play alongside me," Chase said.

Chase has been playing percussion in C.A. Johnson's band since his freshman year. Through the band, he helped form the C.A. Johnson Marching Band Drumline last school year. The drumline gives students in band an opportunity to learn a second instrument.

"It had been mainly me on drums. I brought attention to the drumline," Chase said. "I would love to see the drumline do more performances after I graduate."

Chase will be attending Benedict College on a full-ride drum scholarship after graduating from C.A. Johnson in May. While he plans to study entrepreneurship, Chase says his love for music and drumming will never go away.

"I have a never-ending love for it," he said.



# FOR YOUR INFORMATION

## Electronic Report Cards

Richland One has made the transition from traditional printed report cards and interims to electronic versions. This change marks a new era in the district's approach to student progress reporting. Parents can access their children's report cards and interims online anytime through the PowerSchool Parent Portal. Along with increasing efficiency and accessibility, moving away from printed materials also considerably reduces paper usage. Families that have technology challenges can request printed copies of their children's interims and report cards.

**REPORT CARDS  
ARE NOW ONLINE!**



## 2025 High School Graduation Ceremonies

**May 23, 2025**

**Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center**  
Richland One Middle College – 11 A.M.

**May 27, 2025**

**Colonial Life Arena**

Lower Richland High School – 8 A.M.  
C.A. Johnson High School – 11 P.M.  
W.J. Keenan High School – 2 P.M.  
Columbia High School – 5 P.M.

**May 28, 2025**

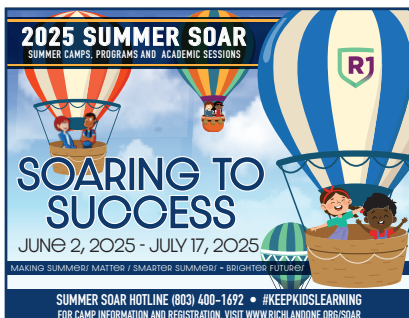
**Colonial Life Arena**

Dreher High School – 8 A.M.  
A.C. Flora High School – 11 A.M.  
Eau Claire High School – 2 P.M.



## Pre-K Registration

Round Two registration for Richland One's free, full-day pre-kindergarten programs for three- and four-year-old children is open through June 30, 2025 for the 2025-2026 school year. Our Pre-K programs provide developmentally appropriate teaching and learning opportunities that help prepare children for kindergarten. Children must be three by September 1, 2025 for the 3K program and four by September 1, 2025 for the 4K program. Parents must view a live or recorded information session before registering their children. The next virtual parent information session will be held May 8. For details about Pre-K registration requirements, go to [www.RichlandOne.org/4K](http://www.RichlandOne.org/4K) or call the Office of School Readiness and Pre-Kindergarten Programs at (803) 799-9494.



## Summer SOAR 2025

Registration is open for our 2025 Summer SOAR camps, programs and academic sessions. Summer SOAR will be held June 2 through July 17 at elementary, middle and high school sites throughout the district. From aviation, drones and robotics to sports, arts and crafts and theatre, our Summer SOAR programs provide structured activities that not only enhance students' academic skills but also appeal to their interests. The Summer SOAR brochure, which includes details about registration, is posted at [www.RichlandOne.org/SOAR](http://www.RichlandOne.org/SOAR). For more information, call our Summer SOAR Hotline at (803) 400-1692.

## BLAST Aerospace Festival

Richland One's BLAST (Building Lasting Aerospace and STEM Trajectories) K-12 Aerospace Magnet Programs will hold an Aerospace Festival on Saturday, April 26 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at W.A. Perry Middle School. All Richland One families and community members are invited to attend. The festival will feature a retired attack helicopter and a Hunter drone, along with hands-on activities provided by various vendors and community organizations. There also will be food trucks on site. All festival attendees will receive a giveaway.





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#### About This Publication:

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