2024-25 Year In Review

cms
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

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MESSAGE
FROM THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Dear Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community,

A high-quality education system is the foundation of a great society, and *public* education exists to serve all students from many walks of life. It adheres to the premise that each student deserves an exceptional education so they can become contributing members of society.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education could not agree more. The Board of Education is here to support and guide the district's more than 140,000 students to graduate with the knowledge, critical thinking skills and the diversity of experience that children need to thrive in an ever-changing world. Ultimately, we want our students to graduate enrolled (in higher education), enlisted (in the Armed Services) or employed (on a gainful career path).

How do we set our students up for success? Through unity of purpose.

From the Board to our Superintendent, from our families to our community partners, we are united—united in our purpose to "live" by our goals, which are centered on the community's input that math and reading literacy are two foundational elements that allow students to be college and career ready, and graduate with one of the three E's—enrolled, enlisted or employed.

We are also unified that the CMS guardrails support the Board's goals and are essential for our students' success.

It is our belief that children learn best when they feel seen, supported and heard. That our differences, our uniqueness, our strengths and even lessons from life's inevitable mistakes can make us better—can build character.

Setting academic standards in foundational subjects critical for a student's life success and providing them with the environment that is conducive to learning is how CMS supports the whole student.

Join us in supporting and delivering a true education for your child, your family and your community. Stand with us in unity.

Stephanie Sneed
Chair, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education

MESSAGE
FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Families, Staff, Partners and Friends,

The 2024–25 school year was defined by academic excellence and innovation. As I reflect on the year, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the collective efforts that have strengthened our school community.

Throughout the year, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools students and staff continued to shine—achieving impressive academic milestones and earning state and national recognition. Notable highlights include the class of 2025 earning more than $97 million in scholarships, opening doors to higher education and bright futures; increased community engagement through events that brought families and staff together, enhancing our sense of belonging; and national recognition for our district's implementation of a program that builds relationally connected and emotionally safe learning environments.

These accomplishments reflect the dedication of our exceptional teachers and staff, who go above and beyond every day. Their unwavering support makes all the difference. We are so grateful for their hard work and passion.

While we celebrate these achievements, we must also acknowledge the challenges we faced this year. From navigating shifts in national educational policies to addressing the diverse needs of our students, we met obstacles head-on. These experiences have shown us the importance of adaptability and perseverance, teaching us that challenges are not setbacks but stepping stones toward improvement. Despite the challenges, we remain committed to ensuring that all Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools students graduate enrolled, enlisted or employed and well-prepared to step into their future.

I am pleased to share our *Year in Review* for the 2024–25 school year, which showcases our milestones and celebrates our successes for the year. This review is merely a snapshot of all the great things that happened during the year, and you will see examples of excellence displayed throughout these pages.

With hope and excitement, we will continue our pursuit of excellence without exception, build upon our successes and tackle our challenges with unfettered determination. I encourage you all to stay engaged, share your ideas and continue to be the amazing partners you are.

Thank you for the opportunity to partner with you in your child's education and for your unwavering dedication to our students and community. I am proud to serve as your superintendent and look forward to continuing this journey together. The possibilities and options are endless here in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

In service and partnership,

Dr. Crystal L. Hill
Superintendent

AT A GLANCE

Our Mission

To create an innovative, inclusive, student-centered environment that supports the development of independent learners.

Our Vision

To lead the community in educational excellence, inspiring intellectual curiosity, creativity and achievement so that all students reach their full potential.

2024–29 Goals

Early Literacy
Percent of kindergarten through second grade students scoring at or above benchmark in early literacy as measured by DIBELS will increase from **67%** in June 2023 to **91%** by June 2029.

Grades 3–8 Literacy
Percent of students scoring college and career ready (CCR) on reading end of grade assessments in grades 3–8 will increase from **30.5%** in September 2023 to **50%** by June 2029.

Math I
Percent of students scoring college and career ready (CCR) on Math I assessments will increase from **27.4%** in September 2023 to **57%** by June 2029.

Postsecondary Readiness
Percent of high school students graduating with their graduation cohort on track to be enrolled, enlisted or employed, as demonstrated by achieving at least one indicator, will increase from **72%** in June 2023 to **85%** in June 2029.

CORE BELIEFS

Public education is essential to democracy and necessary for economic opportunity, mobility and the broader public good.

We are responsible for building and maintaining a high-performing school district.

Each student is uniquely capable and deserves an engaging, relevant and challenging educational experience.

Our principals and teachers make the critical difference in student achievement and building a positive school community.

The school system, families and communities are necessary partners in ensuring the academic, social, emotional and behavioral success of students.

2024–29 Guardrails

Equity over Equality: Equitable Distribution of Outcomes (Closing Gaps)
While ensuring schools have the resources needed to meet student needs, the Superintendent shall not neglect strategies or resources for significantly reducing achievement gaps.

Safety
The Superintendent shall not allow an unsafe environment in schools, at school-related events or on transportation.

Attend to the Whole Child: Student Well-Being & Engagement
The Superintendent shall not neglect social-emotional support, character development support, attendance support or access to enrichment activities that successfully engage students.

Staffing: Teacher Recruitment, Retention & Engagement
While ensuring all schools have teachers equipped to deliver high-quality instruction, the Superintendent shall neither neglect targeted nor comprehensive strategies for teacher recruitment, retention and engagement.

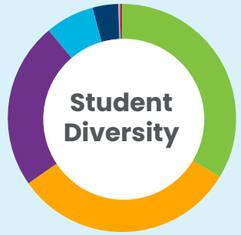
AT A GLANCE

Scan for more information about the Strategic Plan

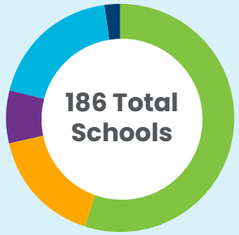
Pillars of Excellence/Strategic Plan

Our strategic plan enables excellence without exception.
Our vision and mission have driven our Goals and Guardrails, which collectively enable four Pillars of Excellence across our school system—academic excellence, people excellence, operational excellence and engagement excellence.

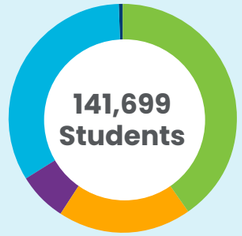
Academic Excellence | **People Excellence** | **Operational Excellence** | **Engagement Excellence**



33.8% Black
31.5% Hispanic
23.6% White
7.0% Asian
3.8% Multicultural
.1% American Indian
.1% Pacific Islander



103 Elementary Schools
28 Middle Schools
16 K–8 Schools
35 High Schools
4 Alternative Schools



57,148 Elementary Students
26,992 Middle Students
9,834 K–8 Students
47,191 High Students
534 Special Program Students

We employ more than **19,000 teachers, support staff and administrators**, making CMS one of the largest employers in Mecklenburg County (49% of the workforce are teachers and 40.4% of them have advanced degrees).

More Than 141,000 Students

We proudly serve a richly diverse population of students and families. Our students come from **158 different countries** and speak **201 languages**. Our top 10 languages spoken by students other than English are Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, French, Portuguese, Arabic/Egyptian/Lebanese/Syrian, Telugu, Hindi/Indian/Urdu, Tamil and Burmese.

AT A GLANCE

CMS Celebrates Historic Gains in Student Achievement

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction released data for the 2024–25 school year in September 2025 with the district showing tangible improvements across numerous metrics, including school performance and academic growth. Among the highlights:

- **Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools ranks No. 10 out of 115** public school districts in North Carolina for percent of schools meeting or exceeding growth — the highest ranking in CMS history.

- **Record Growth**
  89.1% (156) of CMS schools met or exceeded growth; 65.7% (115) schools exceeded growth — the highest in district history.

- **Outstanding increases in grade-level proficiency** with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools outperforming North Carolina in:
  - Reading (grades 3–8) +5.2%
  - Math (grades 3–8) +4.6%
  - Math III +8.2%

- **Phenomenal School Performance**
  - 123 schools (70%) earned a school performance grade of A, B or C (21 more than in 2023–24) — the largest single-year increase in CMS history.
  - 55 schools improved their school letter grades — the largest single-year increase in CMS history.
  - 31 schools no longer have a state low-performing designation — largest single-year decrease in number of schools with the low performing designation in CMS history.

Scan for more Student Achievement Results

"As we celebrate these accomplishments, we recognize that they are just the beginning. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is committed to continuing this upward trajectory by providing ongoing professional development for our educators, enhancing our curricula, engaging families in their children's education and working with our community to ensure that every CMS student graduates enrolled, enlisted or employed. We are excited to continue our pursuit of excellence in building brighter futures and creating endless possibilities for every student."

— Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill

2024–25 Operating Budget

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools 2024–25 operating budget was prepared with the urgent needs of our students in mind. The budget aligns with the district's resources and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education's priorities outlined in the Goals and Guardrails. The Board approved the **$1.9 billion budget** at its April 30, 2024, meeting.

Sources of Funding

54% State

34% County

8% Federal

4% Other Special Revenue

Uses of Funding

53% Salaries

23% Benefits

13% Purchased Services

6% Supplies and Materials

5% Charter School Pass Through

<1% Furniture and Equipment

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Wisdom Walker, Harper Middle College High School

Walker is the proud founder and CEO of Sweet Designs Websites and Logos, LLC.

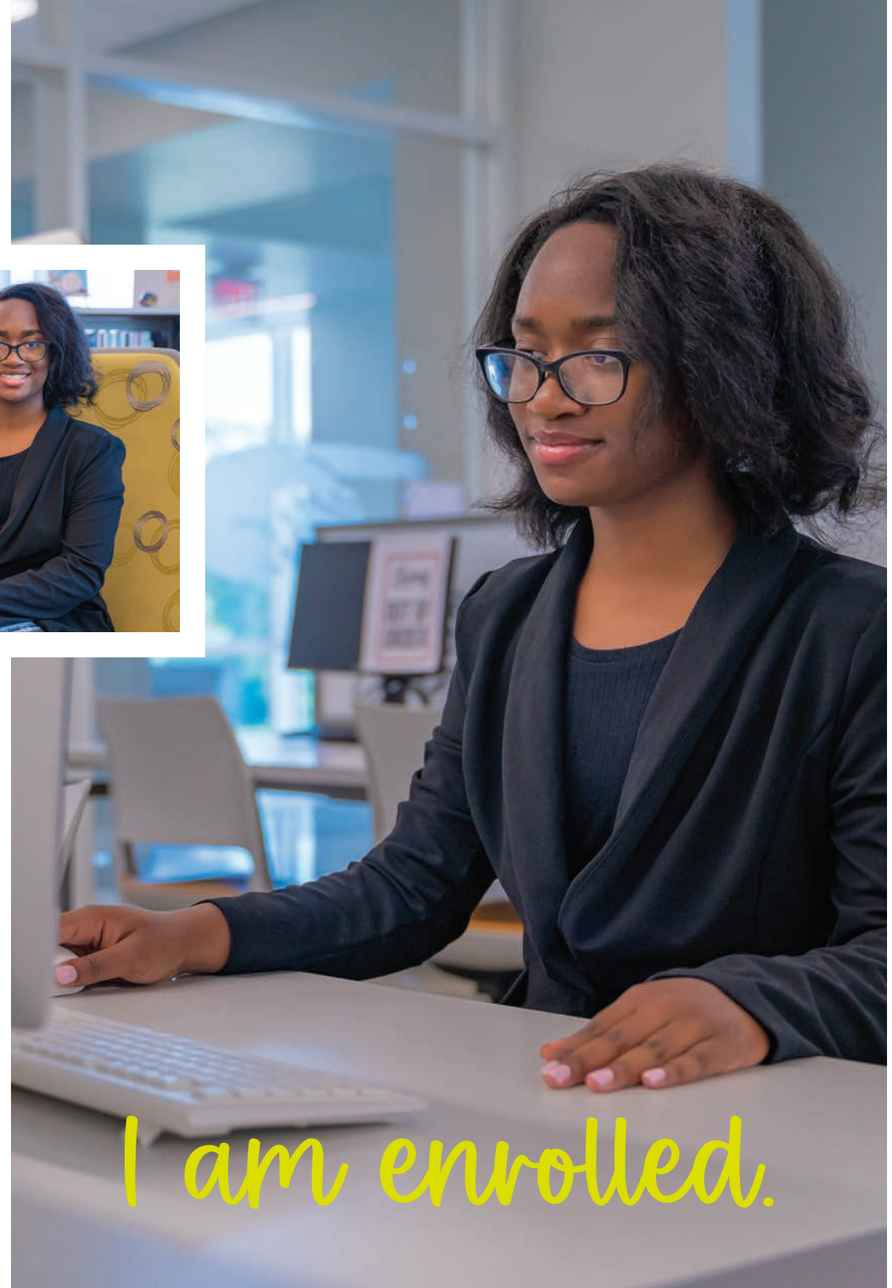
A virtual job fair in middle school opened Wisdom Walker's eyes to the world of computer science. After hearing a presenter share their experience working in cybersecurity for the government, Walker was hooked.

Walker, a graduate of Harper Middle College High School, is the founder and CEO of Sweet Design Websites and Logos, LLC. Its purpose is to create websites that allow entrepreneurs to share their platform quickly and effectively across the globe.

"I feel very accomplished, which I didn't think I was for a long time," said Walker. "But just looking back at everything, it's like, 'wow, I really did a lot.'"

Her limited background in technology, coding and design didn't deter Walker from pursuing her interests. She immediately got involved with Girls Who Code, an international nonprofit organization that aims to support and increase the number of women in computer science. There, Walker said she learned how to code websites with HTML, JavaScript and CSS.

Before transferring to Harper Middle College, Walker took an AP Computer Science Principles course at Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology where she was able to further delve into her computer skills. There, she also joined the Dottie Rose Foundation, whose mission is to set the standard in computer science education while bridging the gender gap in the technology field.



"As Wisdom's teacher, I've had the privilege of watching her grow from a curious and eager learner into a confident and skilled young technologist," said Ivanna Gutierrez, director of High School and Career Readiness Programs at the Dottie Rose Foundation. "In my AP Computer Science Principles class at Phillip O. Berry, she stood out for her thoughtful questions, determination and genuine excitement for problem-solving. Over time, I saw her transform that curiosity into action—building projects in the StackBytes Program at the Dottie Rose Foundation, taking on challenges in web development and ultimately using these skills learned to launch her own business."

"(Through the Dottie Rose Foundation) I learned about all jobs in technology," said Walker. "I just came in only knowing about cybersecurity, and once I stepped into the computer landscape, I learned so much more—there's UX design, front and end design, backend design, project management, etc.—and learned that there are other things I can do. My head was spinning with all the possibilities."

In addition to the Dottie Rose Foundation, Walker participated in Freedom in Me; Ready, Set App!; and E2D. Through these groups, Walker was able to network and get connected with clients she currently works with.

After graduating from Harper, Walker plans to attend North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University where she wants to study computer science with a minor in cybersecurity. When looking at different schools, Walker said she wanted to find a program that would allow her to explore all branches of computer science. After visiting NC A&T, she immediately felt a sense of belonging.

Walker also plans to continue growing her business with hopes of transforming it into an agency. Looking back on her journey to discovering her love for computer science, Walker said she's glad for the connections she made while in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, taking chances and joining groups that helped her learn and grow.

"Closed mouths don't get fed," said Walker. "I was struggling thinking I had to do everything on my own. But by reaching out and getting help from teachers and my family, I was able to get the support I needed to be who I am today."

And to other girls interested in entering the tech space, Walker says to just go for it.

"You don't have to be a coding or math genius to get into tech," said Walker. "Find what you're good at—whether it be art, building Legos, etc.—take what you know about yourself and what you like, and there's a pathway in the tech industry for you."

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Kasia Hurlburt and Jocelyn Gaines, Ardrey Kell High School

OCS students are excited to make new memories in college.

Kasia Hurlburt and Jocelyn Gaines have both made a lot of friends and lasting memories while at Ardrey Kell High School. From prom to the carnival to yoga, Hurlburt and Gaines said they had a lot of fun.

"It has been an amazing year to be a senior," said Gaines.

And now that Hurlburt and Gaines have accepted their diplomas, turned their tassels and closed the chapter on high school, both are looking forward to making new memories in college.

"Thank you so much for your love and support throughout all these years," Gaines shared about her teachers.

"Yes," agreed Hurlburt. "I'm going to miss them all and will visit again soon. Thank you for helping me and supporting me through these years."

Hurlburt and Gaines were part of the Occupational Course of Study (OCS) program at Ardrey Kell — a modified curriculum designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for successful employment and independent living after high school.

Kristan Gehrman, Exceptional Children teacher at Ardrey Kell, said Hurlburt and Gaines could "light up any classroom they entered."

"Through the OCS program, Jocelyn and Kasia have developed essential life skills, confidence and social connections," said Gehrman. "They both have demonstrated remarkable growth over the years, becoming more engaged, assertive and prepared for the challenges of post-secondary education."

Hurlburt and Gaines will have the opportunity to continue building on those skills at their respective programs at Appalachian State University and Clemson University. Hurlburt will attend Appalachian State's Scholars with Diverse Abilities Program (SDAP), and Gaines will attend Clemson University's ClemsonLIFE program.

For Gaines, the decision to go to Clemson was made when she was a newborn. Her grandma is an alum and would dress her up in Clemson gear at a young age. Hurlburt's brother attends Appalachian State, so she looks forward to seeing him on campus.

"I already have a roommate," exclaimed Hurlburt.

SDAP prepares college students with intellectual disabilities for personal growth and occupational success with a focus on health and wellness. The ClemsonLIFE program is similar in that it offers a collegiate experience that prepares students with intellectual disabilities for competitive employment and independent living through a combination of academic coursework and career exploration.

"These programs are particularly beneficial for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities because they offer tailored support, inclusive learning experiences and opportunities for personal growth," said Gehrman. "Their programs foster independence and self-advocacy skills, which are crucial in helping individuals with disabilities thrive in vocational and community settings."

Both moms Jennifer Hurlburt and Sybil Gaines are excited for their daughters and the opportunities that await them in college. Hurlburt and Gaines are both thankful for their parents' love and support.

"I appreciate my parents for helping me become an independent young adult," said Gaines.

"I'm very social, and I would like to thank my mom for that…for helping me through the years," Hurlburt said with a smile.

After completing their programs, Hurlburt said she has dreams of being a graphic designer, singer and actor. Gaines said she wants to be an ambassador and health coach for others with different abilities. She also has aspirations of becoming an international swimmer, an astronaut and a violinist.

"I hope Jocelyn and Kasia will lead fulfilling lives personally and professionally," said Gehrman. "I am confident that they will make a meaningful, positive impact on the world while pursuing their individual goals and aspirations."

"A diagnosis doesn't define who you are," said Gaines. "I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions."

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Xavier Rhodes, Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology

Rhodes is excited for what the future holds and to be "part of something bigger than myself."

After graduating from Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology, Xavier Rhodes traded his cap and gown for a hard hat and tools and began working as a field engineer for DPR Construction.

Rhodes comes from a family of real estate professionals, and has dreams of starting his own business and becoming a general contractor himself. But Rhodes said he first needed to build his knowledge on the construction side of being a contractor.

Rhodes' dreams are now a reality thanks to The ROC, Rebuilding Opportunities in Construction.

"It's a strong community," said Rhodes of the program. "A lot of community building, learning and working with your hands. I advise a lot of people to go there."

The ROC is a nonprofit, two-year pathway for high school juniors whose mission is to educate and mentor high school students for technical education and career opportunities in the construction industry.

Being part of The ROC was the first time Rhodes said he constructed anything, but felt confident going into projects because of what he learned from his instructors.

"They taught us all this stuff before — how to properly use the tools and take care of our stuff," said Rhodes. "They set us up for success."

While in the ROC, Rhodes was dual-enrolled in classes through Central Piedmont Community College. During the summer before his senior year, Rhodes was placed in an internship with DPR Construction. During his internship, Rhodes said he completed reports and worked on on-site projects. Toward the completion of his internship, DPR Construction offered Rhodes a full-time position.

Rex Mangiaracina, social studies teacher at Phillip O. Berry, said he and Rhodes would discuss his time in The ROC, what he was learning from it and how he planned to apply what he learned to his future goals. Mangiaracina also teaches an Economics and Personal Finance (EPF) course to seniors that's required for graduation.

"I think my EPF course, and its respective content allowed Xavier to better fit these things into a larger context and how it might look unfolding in his day-to-day life as he moved forward," said Mangiaracina. "We communicated often about his interest in becoming a general contractor and at every stage of the EPF course I found ways to connect this interest of his to what we were covering and make his learning that much more real and relevant. Xavier returned my efforts tenfold through his consistent attendance, follow through and positive contributions to the class. I viewed him then (and now) as a thought leader within the class; reserved and a bit more outwardly quiet, yes, but consistently inquisitive and respected by his peers and teachers alike. I'm confident that Xavier will move forward and do great things because I know he's capable and eager to do so."

Rhodes said he learned a lot in Mangiaracina's course and took a lot of what he learned with him post-graduation. Rhodes is excited for what the future holds and to be "part of something bigger than myself."

"I'm excited to grow and learn because there's so much to learn in construction," said Rhodes.

I am employed.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

I am enlisted and enrolled.

Xavier Roa, Mallard Creek High School, U.S. Military Academy

Roa is proud to join the cadets at West Point en route to an elite military career.

Xavier Roa always wanted to join the military and envisioned himself enlisting in the U.S. Army right after high school. But joining the Army Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) at Mallard Creek High School broadened his perspective and empowered him to find a more rigorous — and prestigious — career path.

Roa, a cadet lieutenant colonel and battalion commander, is the third cadet from Mallard Creek's JROTC to be appointed to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He was introduced to the idea of attending a military college or university when he was a junior; he applied to several and received scholarships — totaling $706,000 — to all of them. West Point was his first choice.

"Being offered an appointment to West Point is a dream come true," Roa said. "I come from a family of airmen, so dedication toward service and excellence has always been a big part of my life. I chose West Point because I truly believe there is no other institute that strives to build leaders of character and excellence like West Point."

Being appointed to any of the five U.S. military academies is no easy feat. Roa began the application process his junior year and spent a week at West Point for the annual Summer Leadership Experience, which convinced him to continue the process. He juggled his senior studies with meeting the academy's demanding requirements — physical and academic — and received his nomination from U.S. Rep. Alma Adams' office.

Roa said he's fortunate to have attended Mallard Creek, where he had amazing support from his teachers, who developed him as an individual, as well as academically. He credits his JROTC instructors, Lt. Col. James Mosteller and 1st Sgt. Brian Edwards, with shaping him into "a man of integrity."

"We are very proud of him," Mosteller said. "He is the type of cadet that we strive to have here at Mallard Creek in that he wants to succeed. He wants to make a difference in the world, and this is how he plans to do that. I think interacting with us swayed him to maybe think about the military academies, and of course, being Army, we said, 'What about West Point?' That is to us the premier. I said, 'Let's try it,' and he did it, but he's always been that way. He sees something, he goes forward and gets it."

Roa left on July 1 for basic training at West Point. He plans to major in War Studies because he believes that the best way to secure peace and freedom for America is to study previous conflicts. After he graduates, he wants to serve as a second lieutenant in the Army, preferably in Germany as an intelligence officer, providing crucial aid to the U.S. by developing counterintelligence missions and improving foreign relations.

"My experience in JROTC led me to discover that a military career is my pathway," Roa said. "I think everyone is called to do something with their life, and my purpose is to help our country by defending our values. Being able to stand proudly among America's brightest young men and women is one of the greatest achievements of my life, and I am blessed to have this opportunity."

ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHTS

Brianna Castro of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Virtual School secured more than $1.2 million in scholarship offers. She began her high school career at Ardrey Kell High School before transitioning to the virtual school in her sophomore year. She will attend the University of Miami on a full scholarship. 1

DeJané Cade of Charlotte Teacher Early College graduated with a dual major in special education and elementary education. She is an entrepreneur and owner of Angel Love Crochet Co. 2

Ericia Turner, executive director of athletics for CMS, launched flag football programs at the district's high schools with the help of the Carolina Panthers. The team provided seed money to help with uniforms, equipment and other necessities. 3

Mallard Creek High School student creations were displayed at Recycle the Runway. Students won both the Best in Show and Crowd Favorite awards by creating custom clothing using only materials that are recyclable in Mecklenburg County. 4

The 20th annual JROTC Cadet Achievement Awards event was held at Bojangles Coliseum. The awards celebrated the achievements of 2,700 enrolled students. The district has 22 JROTC programs—14 Army, five Air Force, two Navy and one Marines—that focus on the values of citizenship, leadership and academics. 5

Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology was recognized by the W!SE Organization as one of the Top 100 schools in the nation for its Economics and Personal Finance course. The course equips students with critical financial skills and prepares students for college and career readiness while fostering financial confidence and habits that extend beyond the classroom. 6

Twelve schools were recognized as National Showcase Schools by Capturing Kids' Hearts. The honor is awarded to schools that demonstrate exceptional implementation of the Capturing Kids' Hearts process, leading to significant improvements in school culture, student behavior and academic performance. 7

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Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools was named a Promising District by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. CMS is one of 13 districts and two charter schools that received the recognition, which highlights districts and schools that have a commitment to students and staff by offering an innovative and comprehensive Academically or Intellectually Gifted program.

Nine magnet schools have been named National Merit Award winners by Magnet Schools of America, the national association for magnet and theme-based schools. The awards are given to schools that demonstrate outstanding dedication to academic standards, curricular innovation and diversity. 8

CMS Spelling Bee winner Dhurva Srivatsa of Davidson K–8 School won first place for the third year in a row. Anika Ladde of Knights View Elementary School placed second. Both students advanced to the regional level. 9

The fourth annual Mallard Creek JROTC Military Signing and College Selection Ceremony recognized cadets' post-secondary plans, including college acceptances, majors, scholarships earned and enlistments. Collectively, cadets earned $1,274,000 in scholarship offers. 10

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ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHTS

Endless Possibilities: Exploring Education Options at CMS Fair was held at the Park Expo Center for current and prospective CMS families. The fair was designed to help families make informed choices about their children's education and showcased themes like Performing Arts, Early and Middle Colleges, STEM/STEAM, Montessori and International Baccalaureate programs. 11

CMS students won Blumey Awards and honors for high school musical theater: Jack McRee, Best Supporting Actor; Dylan Vezendy; Best Student Set Designer; Gavin Vezendy, Best Student Stage Manager, all from William Amos Hough High School; and Elijah Phillips of Northwest School of the Arts, the $10,000 Mary Doctor Fine Arts Scholarship.

West Mecklenburg High School students experienced firsthand what it takes to thrive in the world of hospitality through a 16-week, 120-hour internship program at some of the region's premier hotels — The Ritz-Carlton Charlotte, Charlotte Marriott SouthPark, The Westin Charlotte and Charlotte Marriott City Center.

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Chef Deidre Mallow, Independence High School's Career and Technical Education culinary teacher invited guest chef Edwin Cruz to visit during Hispanic Heritage Month and teach her students to make traditional Hispanic cuisine, with a focus on tamales. Independence is one of several schools that offer a CTE culinary pathway program taught in a commercial kitchen environment. 12

The Read to Achieve Summer Learning Program is for rising third and fourth graders and is currently offered at 20 schools across the district. The program helps students achieve their literacy goals and pushes back on the summer slide. It provides whole group, small group and individual instruction in reading, as well as enrichment time and outdoor activities.

South Academy of International Languages (SAIL) welcomed Japanese Ambassador Excellency Shigeo Yamada. In anticipation of his visit, the students, faculty and parents prepared local gifts, artwork, and Japanese music and dance performances. The ambassador toured the school, met with students, signed SAIL's official guest book and saw an engraved plaque in the school's entryway commemorating his visit. 13

CMS celebrated the opening of two new schools — Knights View Elementary School and Ballantyne Ridge High School — and the replacement of Bruns Avenue Elementary School with dedication ceremonies. These schools are part of the 2017 bond referendum that launched 29 projects including 17 new schools and the upgrade, renovation, addition to and repurposing of existing schools. 14

McClintock Middle School dance teacher Elsie Mufuka's teaching techniques transform her classroom into a vibrant community where students learn more than just dance moves. Embracing the philosophy of Ubuntu, it is a dynamic dance that celebrates unity, culture and artistic expressions. Mufuka guides her students through expressive choreography, fostering creativity, self-confidence and valuable life skills. 15

McClintock Middle School and William Amos Hough High School competed in the Ten80 STEM Challenge's radio-controlled race car team category. The event was held at the Charlotte Motor Speedway. 16

Northwest School of the Arts student Eva Hurley discovered her love of performing at a very young age. Beginning in sixth grade, she immersed herself in the school's culture of commitment to the arts. She's now headed to New York University to study drama and pursue her dream of becoming a working actor.

Twenty-one students won MLK Arts & Writing Contest awards. Students in kindergarten through eighth grade competed in writing, art and digital media categories.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Student-Athlete Advisory Council held the third annual All-Star Gala, powered by OrthoCarolina, at The Revelry at Camp North End. The event recognized CMS student-athletes, coaches and athletic leaders for their stellar accomplishments throughout the school year. 17

PEOPLE
EXCELLENCE

Gregory Gabriel, Teacher of the Year, Winterfield Elementary School

Gabriel gives his students courage and confidence to succeed.

Gregory Gabriel teaches fifth grade math at Winterfield Elementary School and firmly believes that all students can and will learn in his classroom. But at his celebration for Teacher of the Year for Performance Area B, he learned from former students that the scope of his influence had gone well beyond numbers and equations.

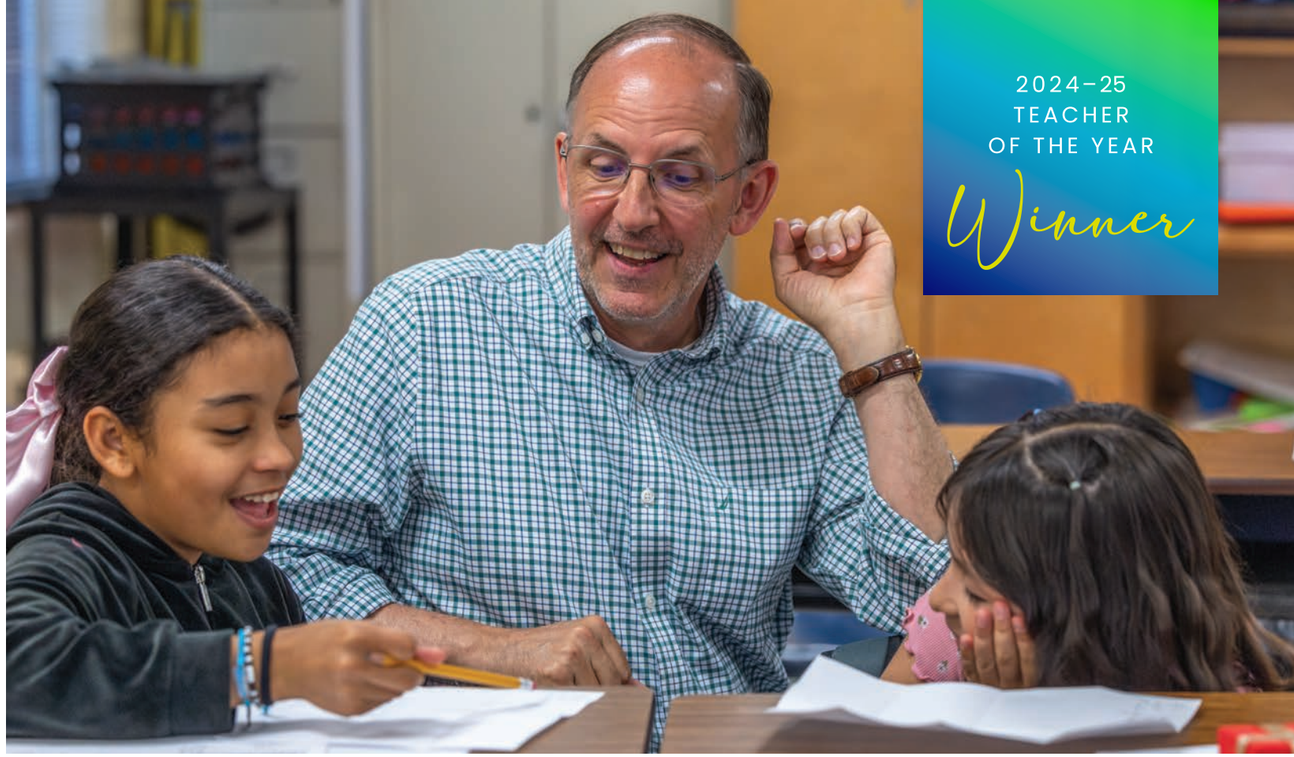
"They were asked to comment on the impact I've had in their lives, and that was a learning lesson for me," Gabriel said. "My students said things like, 'Mr. Gabriel really cared about me,' or 'Mr. Gabriel gave me confidence when I didn't really have confidence in myself.' It really wasn't about math at all. It was more of the relationship that I didn't really know was happening at that time. I learned that the work I've done inside the classroom has generated things I hadn't even seen—the confidence that you instill in students to really believe in themselves. Giving them the courage to reach that potential in their lifetimes has really been inspiring to me."

Gabriel went on to become the 2024–25 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Teacher of the Year, but his first career wasn't in education. A native of Uniontown, Pa., outside Pittsburgh, Gabriel was an Academic All-American basketball player at Carnegie Mellon University and entered his family's retail business after graduation. Eventually, he and his wife moved to Charlotte where Gabriel wanted to teach in Title I schools. He was a substitute teacher for a year before there was an opening at Community House Middle School. He then spent 13 years at Eastway Middle School where he met now-Principal Hastie Hovey, whom he followed to Winterfield two years ago.

"At Eastway, I was a brand new math facilitator, and he was one of my teachers. I was fresh out of the classroom and had grand ideas, and he politely told me to sit down," Hovey laughed. "Through his graciousness, his demeanor and stepping into his world and how he does things, I learned so much from him as a baby facilitator about just being a leader, being there for kids and seeing the way he interacts with staff, students and their parents. It's an absolute honor and a blessing to have him here with me and to know he trusts my leadership. He is changing the lives of generations to come, and I cannot say that enough."

Gabriel said his career transition to education came naturally to him. His father was an art history professor, his sister is a teacher, and being around educators has been part of his journey as a teacher.

"I think it's in my DNA," Gabriel said. "Once I began to teach, it became a real passion for me from day one, almost like a calling. Teaching for CMS has been the joy of a lifetime."



Gabriel tries to teach every student as if they were his own and goes the distance to ensure they have what they need. A National Board-certified teacher, he loves to talk about his amazing students and families, making home visits, having Saturday study halls at apartment complexes and just being present in their lives. What he doesn't talk about is himself or his accomplishments, but his list of honors and achievements more than speaks to his talent and dedication, including co-founding GenOne Charlotte, a college preparatory program that helps talented, first-generation students from underserved communities navigate to and through college.

Winterfield celebrated last year when its schoolwide growth index was 10.85 (an excellent "exceeds growth" score would be about a three or four schoolwide). Hovey said their math scores are a large part of that gain, thanks to Gabriel's impact. He and his teammates have set a high bar that they expect the rest of the school to meet.

"That kind of excellence does trickle down," Hovey said. "He is relentless for these kids—whatever it takes. Kids are going to be homeowners because of him. Kids are going to have college degrees, doctorates and things they could never imagine because of the impact that he has on their lives, and that is not an exaggeration. We talk about changing the lives of kids—he's really doing it."

PEOPLE
EXCELLENCE

Freddie Pinkney, Teacher Assistant of the Year, Ardrey Kell High School

Pinkney finds motivation from the resilience of his students.

When Freddie Pinkney was announced as the 2024–25 Teacher Assistant of the Year for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, he said he "pinched himself" because it didn't feel real.

Reflecting on his 20-plus years in education, Pinkney didn't always see himself as an educator. Originally from Queens, N.Y., Pinkney went to a vocational high school to become an electrician. But after seeing a couple of his friends get injured, he changed his mind.

"I was lost and didn't know where to go next," said Pinkney, an Exceptional Children (EC) teacher assistant at Ardrey Kell High School.

His foster dad worked in a special needs school where Pinkney would spend time and tutor. Realizing that being an electrician wasn't what he wanted to do, Pinkney went to work at the school's after-school program and was later hired as a substitute teacher.

While working as a substitute teacher, Pinkney said he filled in for a teacher who was injured and was paired to work one-on-one with Douglas Fung — a student who Pinkney said changed his view on life.

"When I was young, I thought I had all these problems," said Pinkney. "I was homeless. I was in foster care. But (Douglas) came to school every day with a smile on his face. We had a school party and I'm pushing him in his wheelchair and he was so happy. I looked at him and was just like, 'Wow, despite his condition, he's still enjoying himself.' God put me in a position to make me understand how blessed I was, and from that point on, I just became a different person. I could have made different decisions in life and went another way, but God had other plans for me."

Over the years in the classroom, Pinkney said he's learned a lot not only about himself, but also how resilient his students are.

"These kids work so hard, and their resilience motivates me," said Pinkney. "They are willing to push themselves and they're not scared to take chances and step out of their comfort zone."

And seeing his students learn new skills that they apply not only in school, but at home are moments that bring Pinkney a lot of joy.

"It's the most rewarding feeling," said Pinkney. "Something money can't buy."

Prior to working at Ardrey Kell, Pinkney was an EC teacher assistant at Jay M. Robinson Middle School. He said he move from Jay M. Robinson to Ardrey Kell was easy because he was able to move with his students and continue to build on their skills and relationships.

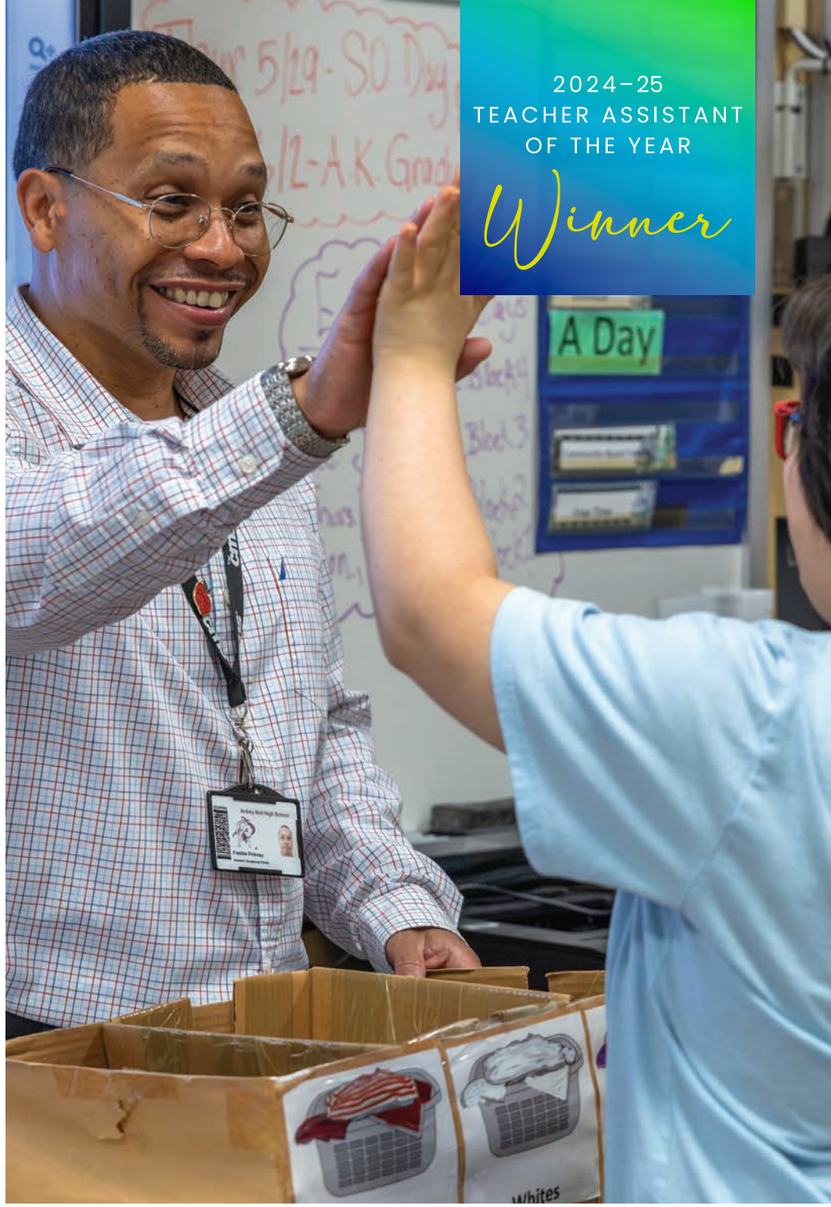
"I knew all the students, their behaviors, their wants, their needs, the skills they had and what we still needed to work on," said Pinkney. "You could also see the joy in the parents because they knew that I was here."

Being recognized as Teacher Assistant of the Year was a win that Pinkney said wasn't just for him, but also for his school, his team and his family. Heather Earnhardt, EC department chair at Ardrey Kell, said Pinkney is "well known and loved by staff and students."

"He has worked with many of the families when they were younger and continues to support them as they've transitioned to high school," said Earnhardt. "Mr. Freddie will jump into any situation and does not have to be asked to do anything."

Pinkney recently earned his bachelor's degree from Grand Canyon University and will enter the district's Teaching Residency program in the fall, putting him one step closer to having his own classroom. Earnhardt said they're excited to see him transition into a new role.

"I want my students to remember me for being the coolest teacher they ever had," Pinkney said with a laugh. "I hope and pray that my classroom will be the safest and funnest learning environment, and that we're going to have awesome lessons and build with each other."



PEOPLE
EXCELLENCE

Sean Bryant, Beginning Teacher of the Year, Newell Elementary School

Bryant sees each lesson as a student's life-changing moment.

Sean Bryant was destined to be a physical education teacher and gives his parents—a teacher and a coach—all the credit for his career.

"My mom taught third and fourth grade, and my dad coached basketball," Bryant said. "Watching her mold and shape the next generation, and then watching my dad coach the youth was very inspiring. When you put both together, you get a PE teacher. Even my aunties and my grandma taught, so my whole family is a never-ending cycle of educators. I just fell right in line."

Those positive influences are reflected in Bryant's teaching at Newell Elementary School, where he has already forged a successful career path. In May, he was named the 2024–25 Beginning Teacher of the Year, the first such award given at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' annual Gem Awards.

"Mr. Bryant is a platinum beginning teacher," said Newell Principal Kyerra Oglesby. "He consistently shows up in the Wolfpack with a smile, eager to help, and is an advocate for his students and teammates. He frequently meets with his co-teacher to ensure he has all the required knowledge and tools to be successful, and he is innovative, finding various ways to track our students' health and fitness data."

Bryant is a Charlotte native who attended elementary school just a few miles from Newell at Joseph W. Grier Academy. There, he gained many memories from teachers and PE classes that made a huge impact on his life. He also attended Mint Hill Middle School and David W. Butler High School, where he played basketball. Bryant earned a bachelor's degree in sports management with a minor in sports ministry from Pfeiffer University, where he is currently in a physical education residency program, and he is also a Teach for America Corps member.

Bryant said that learning to be a teacher takes trial and error, and beginning teachers need to find their own voice and run their own race.

They should be intentional in what they do and what they stand for, and to teach with students' futures in mind.

"Tap into a bigger purpose and realize that your journey is unique," he said. "This moment, or this lesson, could be a life-changing moment for each kid. Teach with a sense of urgency, knowing that these kids need the skills, the confidence and the knowledge to go out and pursue any career they want. Every moment, I'm constantly reminding myself, 'OK, we're trying to mold and shape these kids for the next step.'"

Teaching at the elementary level is important to Bryant because it's where students form their first perspective of school. He said it is a critical stage for a young child, and there is nothing better than being the first teacher to spark their interest in school.

"These kids have taught me to not lower the bar," Bryant said. "No matter what grade, these kids can do it. That lesson or standard that you may think is too complex, if you set the bar at a high standard, the kids will meet it. There are no limits."

PEOPLE EXCELLENCE

2024–25
PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR

Dr. Tracey Harrill, Principal of the Year, Providence High School

Dr. Harrill builds success with teamwork and high expectations.

Tracey Harrill, Ed.D., has been a principal for most of her 33 years with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and has collected many accolades in that time. Last year was no exception, as she was named the 2024–25 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Principal of the Year in October.

The surprise announcement left Dr. Harrill speechless, but she was quick to thank the teachers and staff who support her at Providence High School.

"You make my job so much easier," she said. "We all work together as a team, and I appreciate all the work. The wonderful accolades are because our staff works so hard. Thank you for the honor; I am very humbled."

Dr. Harrill said that being recognized for her work never gets old, and it has been special each time she's been a finalist for Principal of the Year.

"To get to this level, you are nominated and voted on by your colleagues," she said. "I don't necessarily see them every day, but I talk to my colleagues on the phone. We try to problem solve and figure out how to fix the latest issue that's coming our way together. So it's an honor for them to see that I can contribute and to recognize me in that way."

Dr. Harrill is beginning her 17th year at Providence, which each year has met or exceeded local, state and national goals. For 2022–23 and 2023–24, Providence was ranked the highest performing comprehensive high school in North Carolina for growth.

"We're very proud of that, but it's something we work on every year," Dr. Harrill said. "We don't take for granted our success in reaching our students, because every group of students is different and special and has their own individual needs, especially with their academics."

A native of Monroe, Dr. Harrill graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and taught at Independence High School for three years. After a year as assistant principal at Northeast Middle School, she became the school's principal, then went on to open Mint Hill Middle School. She also served as executive director of professional development, was an adjunct professor at Winthrop University and was principal at Jay M. Robinson Middle School before finding her home at Providence.

"I love teaching; I especially love principaling," Dr. Harrill said. "I've had a good, long time here, and I still get joy out of coming to work. Hopefully, I am able to give joy to my students, my parents and my teachers by what I can contribute at school."

Her staff and students make Providence a special place for Dr. Harrill. She said staff members take their work seriously but have also created a culture where everyone loves coming to work and having fun. And her students, she said, "are wonderful."

"Of course, they're teenagers, and they will try to test the waters and do what teenagers do to see where the line is," Dr. Harrill said. "But with very high expectations for student behavior, student work and collaboration, they rise to the challenge every year. We are just very clear with what the expectations are. We explain it, we teach it, we model it, we show it, and we are never surprised that the students will rise to our level of expectation."

Mark McHugh, director of safety at CMS, has worked with Dr. Harrill as a dean of students, as an administrator and an assistant principal. He said she is an established presence in the Providence community, and that families know she has high expectations that include them and their kids, as well as the staff and everyone involved in the school.

"When I was a principal, she was obviously someone I relied on and talked with frequently," McHugh said. "What I respect about her is she's very clear and consistent in what she expects and consistent in what she says—she walks the walk. You know that you're going to be supported by her if you're following through with the things that she's asked for."

Dr. Harrill said that along the way, they have had to make shifts in how teachers teach and how she leads, particularly following the COVID pandemic. Every year, students bring more challenges to school, she said, and they have to figure out the best way to reach them. While the work may seem to get harder, it doesn't affect how she views her job, and she said the time has gone by so fast.

"I love my job. It's a new day of new challenges, and no day is ever the same," Dr. Harrill said. "If you're a good principal and you are bored, something is wrong, because the students always have something going on. It's a fun job, and I feel very blessed to have been able to be an educator."

PEOPLE
EXCELLENCE

Vanessa Smith, Croft Community School, Milken Educator Award

The national award winner is passionate about advocating for her students and colleagues.

An assembly Vanessa Smith thought was to kick off the holiday season and celebrate the school's academic gains from the 2023–24 school year, turned into a recognition beyond her belief.

On Dec. 18, 2024, Smith, a first grade teacher at Croft Community School, was recognized as a winner of a national Milken Educator Award—which recognizes early-to mid-career education professionals for their dedication to excellence in education and leadership. As a recipient, Smith received $25,000 and attended a three-day Milken Awards Forum in California where she met past and current Milken Educator Award winners.

"I think the whole view on the award is it's a milestone, and not a lifetime achievement," said Smith. "(The award) helps you push yourself and reaffirms your hard work and that you're making a difference."

Smith, who is also an Expanded Impact 2 teacher, is entering her seventh year teaching first grade and is very data-driven in her work. As a National Board Certified teacher, Smith loves to dive deep into her students' data to make instructional decisions that fit their individual needs.

Principal Shannon Hamilton said Smith is "all in" when it comes to getting her students where they need to be.

"Vanessa is the most passionate, positive, bubbly teacher out there and comes in positive and supportive every single day," said Hamilton. "She prides herself on knowing where her students come in. They have their own individual goals and she's pedal to the metal until they get there."

But it's not just data Smith focuses on. She also looks at nurturing the whole child and advocating for the needs of not only her students, but her colleagues as well. Smith serves as a mentor to beginning teachers and is passionate about ensuring that they have the support they need to be successful in the classroom.

"The stronger they are, the stronger the education the kids get and the better they are at their jobs," said Smith. "And it makes them want to be here and feel supported. No matter what your job is like, you want to have people that believe in you and support you."

Looking toward the 2025–26 school year, Smith said she's going to continue to advocate for her students and colleagues. She rejoined the district's Teacher Leader Pathway program and is looking to expand her impact in roles like a multi-classroom leader or an Expanded Impact 3 teacher.

"I feel really passionate about making (teachers) see realistic ways of teaching, but then also being in their classroom to adapt things to the students they see in front of them," said Smith. "Getting the opportunity to coach, support, model and adapt things in the moment makes such a big difference in having teachers stay in the field to then become better teachers. And hopefully that will be next year's mission—to push beyond the classroom a little more because I love teaching and I love the impact in the classroom, but I definitely want to help uplift new teachers and teachers alike."

Hamilton is in full support of Smith's leadership goals and knows she has a lot of knowledge to share.

"Even before the award, due to how she shows up, you need only walk into her class to see high levels of engagement at all times, high accountability and high expectations for kids everywhere they go in the building," said Hamilton. "She has the respect of her colleagues and peers just for how she shows up every day."

PEOPLE
EXCELLENCE

CMS Teaching Residency paves the way to education careers

Fast-track program supports residents through the process.

Fifteen years ago, enrollment in traditional teaching preparation programs was declining, but alternative licensure programs were steadily gaining students. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools prioritized developing its own quality educators and opened the CMS Teaching Residency in 2018.

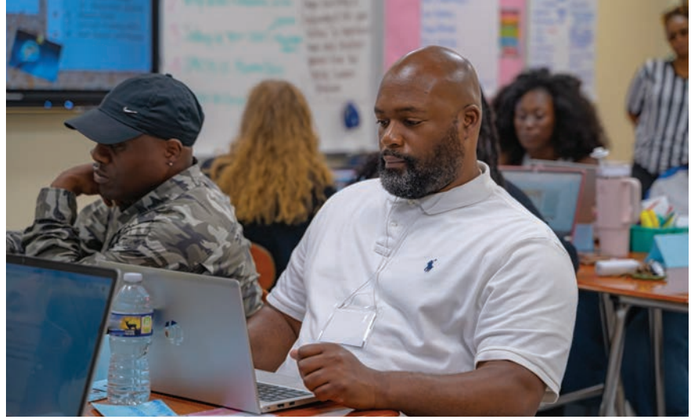
CMS Teaching Residency is an accelerated and cost-effective pathway to a teaching career with the district. In its first year, the program graduated 38 residents; its most recent cohort totaled 180 graduates. Of those who complete the program, CMS has a 92% average retention rate for them returning the next year.

The residency is a popular option for diverse, second-career teachers to enter the district and get on-the-job training. The intensive program fast-tracks the process for gaining the proper credentials and blends classroom experience with rigorous coursework and plenty of support.

"If you want people from all different backgrounds, we've got it," said Shannon Stehmeier, director of Alternative Licensure and CMS Teaching Residency. "We've got executive leadership from management, operations, IT, government, contract workers and finance. There have been some in the medical field, and then we have a lot of current teacher assistants and other CMS employees who are coming in. About 80% of our 2024–25 cohort was a CMS employee or former employee."

Stehmeier's team screens new applicant transcripts for experience, relevant coursework and what is needed for the courses/grade levels they want to teach. State requirements can seem overwhelming and confusing, but the team can advise on needed next steps.

"Because of the different requirements now, there are a lot of factors to consider," Stehmeier said. "We have to really think through and coach people on what the best pathway is for them — what they are eligible for, what they need to do to be eligible and where they feel most confident."



Stehmeier said a lot of second-career teachers feel the need to give back and improve their communities by supporting public school education. She said the growth of the program shows there are more alternative-licensed teachers coming into the district than those who are traditionally licensed. For 2025–26, the program had a rolling enrollment with about 250 to 300 residents and a waiting list for the first time. Some of those were eligible to teach in 2025–26 with another alternative license and chose that option, which will allow them to participate in the residency's spring training while in their own classrooms.

"It's a shift that we need to prepare for and change the way we're thinking about teaching and the way that we are supporting teachers as they come into the district," Stehmeier said.

PEOPLE
HIGHLIGHTS

The inaugural CMS Arts Educators Awards Ceremony brought art educators and CMS leadership together to shine a brighter light on all that CMS' collective programs accomplish. The ceremony raised awareness of the work of performing and visual arts educators. 1

Elsie Maurice, multilingual department chair at South Academy of International Languages was awarded the prestigious 2024–25 English Language Development Recognition Award by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction The award highlights her strategic use of various assessment tools, including ALFA, ACCESS and I-Ready and her culturally inclusive leadership within the school community. 2

Lorraine Zelenz was recognized as CMS' 2024–25 School Psychologist of the Year. Zelenz supports Charlotte-Mecklenburg Virtual School, Levine Middle College and Elbert Edwin Waddell high schools and also conducts private evaluations. 3

Amanda Rogers from Myers Park High School was awarded CMS' 2025 School Nurse of the Year. Rogers' commitment to the health and well-being of our students is recognized and celebrated. 4

The North Carolina School Public Relations Association (NCSPRA) honored CMS for excellence in communications. CMS earned a total of 15 Blue Ribbon Awards, three of which are Best of the Best Awards in marketing, publications, and special events and programs. A Best of the Best is given to the entry with the highest score in each category. 5

Dr. Ingrid Medlock, chief of Staff and Community Engagement, received the 2025 Dr. Samuel Houston Leadership Award. This annual award is presented to a graduate of the North Carolina School Superintendents' Association's Aspiring Superintendent Program, a program designed to empower transformational education leaders for North Carolina's public schools. 6

Dashae Ferrell, Ridge Road Middle School, and T'Nyah James, Renaissance West STEAM Academy, were named the 2024–25 Middle School Co-Athletic Directors of the Year. Reese Felder of Julius L. Chambers High School was named the High School Director of the Year. 7 & 8

Laura Mena, Winding Springs Elementary School; Christina Brown, Mint Hill Middle School; and Alison Graves, William Amos Hough High School, were recognized as School Counselors of the Year during National School Counseling Week in February 2025. 9, 10 & 11

Bailey Wilcox and Vanessa Halling, English teachers at Mallard Creek High School, were named Student Teacher of the Year and the Outstanding Clinical Educator for fall 2024. Representatives from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's Cato College of Education shared that this was a "unique opportunity" to recognize a student teacher and clinical educator who were both at the same school. 12

PEOPLE
HIGHLIGHTS

Elizabeth Canute at Tuckaseegee Elementary School received the Extra Yard for Teachers Award. The award is given through the College Football Playoff Foundation's Extra Yard for Teachers Program, which is dedicated to elevating the teaching profession by inspiring and empowering teachers in four core areas: resources, recognition, professional development, and recruitment and retention. 13

Mallie Burton was named CMS' 2024–25 Social Worker of the Year. Burton has more than 20 years of experience working as a school social worker and serves South Pine Academy, Palisades Park Elementary and Harper Middle College High schools. 14

Cierra Burdick, David W. Butler High School alum and Charlotte native, is a USA Olympic Bronze Medalist for Women's 3X3 Basketball.

Atiba D. Bethea Sr., Mallard Creek High School, and Jasmine Smith, Olympic High School, were selected for the 2025–26 cohort of N.C. State University's Kenan Fellows Program for Teacher Leadership. As part of the fellowship, teachers participated in immersive summer externships across various industries vital to North Carolina's economy to observe and gather insights to inform their teaching.

Ericia Turner, executive director of athletics, was recognized by the Carolina Panthers with the NFL Inspire Change Changemaker Award. The award recognizes an individual in each NFL team market making a difference in their community with their social justice work, either individually or as part of a community organization. Turner was also recognized as an EQUALibrium Award winner by WFAE which recognizes Charlotte-area residents and organizations that have made outstanding contributions in advancing issues of equity within the community. 15

Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill was named one of the 2024–25 Superintendents to Watch by the National School Public Relations Association. This prestigious program honors superintendents with fewer than five years of experience in the role who demonstrate exceptional leadership in innovative communication and community engagement.

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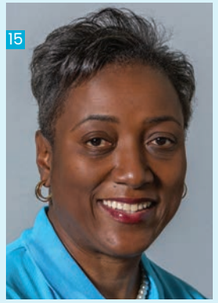

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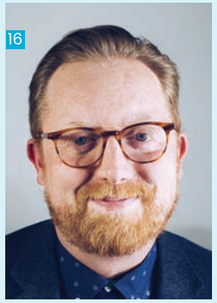

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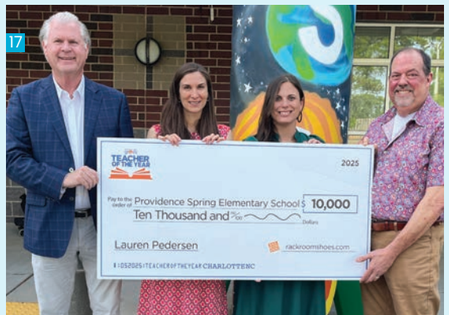

Justin Pierce, director of CMS Arts Education, was selected by his peers to receive the National Supervision and Administration Art Educator Award from the National Art Education Association. Pierce was presented the award at the 2025 national conference in Kentucky in March. 16

Teachers Lauren Pedersen, Providence Spring Elementary School, and Danicia Randolph, Ridge Road Middle School, were recognized by Rack Room Shoes as Teachers of the Year. Both Pedersen and Randolph were awarded $500 Rack Room Shoes gift cards and both schools received $10,000 technology grants. 17 & 18

Willa Yeary was recognized as the Crossing Guard of the Year by Mecklenburg County, Charlotte Department of Transportation and CMS. 19

CMS recognized April Wells of Piedmont Middle School as Media Coordinator of the Year and Dr. Rochelle Stanley, Clear Creek Elementary School, and Valarie Watson, Ranson Middle School, as Outstanding Media Coordinators of the Year. 20

CMS announced the recipients of its prestigious Teacher of the Year, Teacher Assistant of the Year and Beginning Teacher of the Year awards at the third annual Gem Awards ceremony. Hosted by Molly Grantham, the awards ceremony took place at the Dale F. Halton Theater at Central Piedmont Community College. The Gem Awards is a celebration of excellence in education, recognizing the extraordinary contributions of educators within CMS. 21

Cameron Cyr of William Amos Hough High School was awarded the Jimmie Lee Kirkpatrick Award. The award is presented by Dr Pepper and given annually by the Charlotte Sports Foundation to a senior football player from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools who displays both talent on the field and a passion for their community. The award is named after Jimmie Lee Kirkpatrick of Myers Park High School and comes with a $10,000 scholarship, trophy and recognition at the Duke's Mayo Bowl. Cyr was also recognized in December by the Charlotte Observer as player of the year.

Gabrielle Clemons of Ardrey Kell High School was selected for the NASA STEM Enhancement in Earth Science (SEES) summer internship program. SEES is a nationally competitive STEM program for high school students. Students are exposed to Earth and space research with the opportunity to learn how to interpret NASA satellite data while working with scientists and engineers in their chosen area of work. The content knowledge, coupled with hands-on experiences, allows participants to gain experience in authentic NASA research through field investigation and data analysis.

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OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

At Home in CMS aims to ease housing instability

The program supports educators with a wide range of resources.

In 2024, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools launched At Home in CMS, a bold initiative designed to address one of the most pressing needs of educators in the district: housing stability.

The program was created in direct response to employee feedback identifying housing insecurity as a barrier to staying in or joining the district. Over the past several years, prices for single-family homes and rental properties in Mecklenburg County have risen sharply — far outpacing teacher salaries.

"At Home in CMS is an initiative that directly ties back to our students' success," said Board Chair Stephanie Sneed. "Teachers who are able to live in the community they serve are more engaged and better able to help their students reach their full potential."

At Home in CMS brings together more than 40 builders, banks, housing nonprofits and other organizations to provide a range of resources — including discounts, grants and education — to help educators find and sustain affordable housing.

"We've been incredibly pleased with the partnerships we've been able to garner, and how willing they are to do things like offer homes below market value and provide down payment assistance," said Nancy Brightwell, chief of Recruitment, Retention and Talent Development for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. "With these benefits, what might seem like an unattainable home quickly comes within reach for our educators."

A core component of the program is a webinar series led by subject-matter experts on topics such as budgeting, credit repair, moving from renting to owning and navigating the homebuying process. To date, more than 2,000 CMS employees have participated.

The program has also sponsored three housing fairs, providing employees in-person touchpoints with partners so they can learn firsthand about the opportunities available to them.

"What's unique about At Home in CMS is that we understand there's not one solution that meets the needs of all educators," Brightwell said. "We have so many wonderful partners who've helped build awareness and comfort for our educators by giving them the knowledge they need to make informed decisions — wherever they are in their housing journey."

The first educators to purchase homes through the At Home in CMS program are moving into Dukes Ridge, a development of 52 new three-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath townhomes on Charlotte's west side. The neighborhood was built by True Homes, the largest private homebuilder in the Carolinas, which has committed to selling a portion of its new properties to educators at cost.

"We're building 100 homes this year and have 600 more in the pipeline over the next two to three years in the Charlotte metro market," said Ron Staley, True Homes senior manager of Affordable Housing Initiatives. "We're setting aside homes specifically for CMS teachers in each community. This is about building generational wealth."

To make homeownership more attainable, At Home in CMS is facilitating down payment assistance in collaboration with the CMS Foundation and partner organizations. This includes a $400,000 grant from Truist Financial Corporation, which is being used to directly reduce mortgage costs for program participants. By combining multiple forms of support, some educators have received as much as $145,000 in down payment assistance.

"I had been looking to buy a home for a little while when I learned about a homeownership opportunity offered by one of CMS' housing partners. I'm a CMS graduate, and the chance to be part of the community where I grew up, to create generational wealth and leave something for my family in that community, fit my goals."

— Zephaniah Hawkins, *CMS educator*

In addition to the wins for those who've already improved their housing situation through the program, At Home in CMS appears to be making a measurable impact on employee sentiment.

In a 2023 employee survey, 60% of educators identified housing as one of the top barriers to staying in the district. By spring 2025, that number dropped to 43%.

As At Home in CMS looks to the future, plans include a purpose-built educators' community and potentially a CMS-specific housing marketplace to further streamline access to affordable housing options.

"We're excited about the traction we've gained so far," Brightwell said. "It's tremendously rewarding to see and hear educators feeling truly valued, heard and cared about, especially when it comes to something as essential as housing stability and being able to live in a place that they feel comfortable and safe in the community where they're serving our children."

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

CMS takes a strategic approach to using AI

Students, safety and data privacy are key to the district's vision.

Safety, responsibility and student success are the key tenets of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' strategy around the use of artificial intelligence (AI). The district rolled out its vision for AI this spring, making clear that the implementation of artificial intelligence in the district is inextricably rooted in data privacy and student success.

"AI is not the goal, it's the catalyst," said Dr. Crystal Hill, CMS superintendent. "The question is not just, 'How do we use AI?' but 'What can AI do to help us learn, teach and operate better together?'"

Feedback from more than 10,000 families, community members and students informed the district's approach to AI, which is characterized by thoughtful intentionality — tactics that will help set Charlotte-Mecklenburg apart from other school districts implementing the technology.

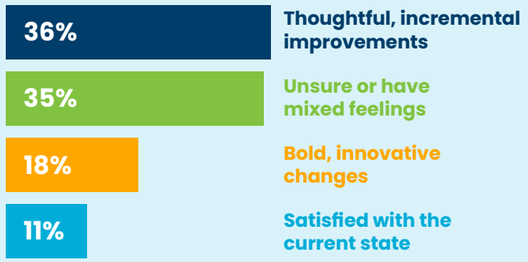
"CMS considers itself a national leader in how public school systems are approaching artificial intelligence. We have taken a proactive approach in navigating the complexities of integrating artificial intelligence into the educational environment. With this process, we have placed an emphasis on community involvement, data privacy and responsible innovation."

— Dr. Candace Salmon-Hosey, *Chief Technology Officer*

The district's second annual AI and Data Privacy summit in April included presentations highlighting the critical intersection of AI and data security, as well as its appropriate use as an enhancement of, rather than a replacement for, work — hallmarks of the strategy.

"I'm incredibly proud that we've been prioritizing safe and responsible use in our implementation of AI," said Rebecca Lehtinen, executive director of Educational Technology. "We want to give students and educators the tools and skills that they need to really use AI in a way that is going to support teaching, learning and operational efficiencies."

Opinions on AI Use in Education



Guiding principles for the technology are organized around the district's four pillars of excellence. Workstreams around the use of AI by students are centered around academic integrity and helping students understand how to critically evaluate the output of generative AI so it can supplement rather than substitute for learning.

"This work is not just about technology, it's really about building critical thinking skills, digital responsibility and lifelong skills that prepare students to navigate the road ahead," Lehtinen said.

AI in the form of the content curation is already at work helping streamline the path to answers for users of the district website via the Let's Talk! chatbot. The tool is an example of how the technology can be applied for operational efficiency.

With the strategy's foundation firmly in place, the district is embarking on its next phase — training — in the 2025–26 school year. All students and staff will receive foundational instruction on AI literacy and critical thinking in its use. Sixty district leaders will receive deep-dive training focusing on AI integration and will participate in the development of use cases to improve operational efficiencies. They will then train other central office leaders, principals and assistant principals via the strategy's train-the-trainers model.

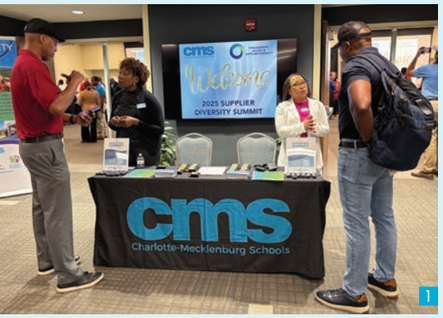
Thirty schools will be designated "AI Champion" schools and will explore different ways teachers can use AI to enhance learning. Best practices from both central office and school-based use cases will be evaluated and eventually serve as a blueprint for scaling AI implementation districtwide.

Training for families also will be made available through the district's Family Academy.

Dr. Salmon-Hosey and her team are also evaluating options for implementing closed models of generative AI for potential adoption into the district, but with the thoughtful approach that drives the whole body of work.

"I'm just really excited about how we've been so intentional with our AI implementation, and how we've focused on how AI could enhance what we're doing and not replace it by starting with our vision. I'm proud that we took that approach, and we stuck with what we knew would set a strong foundation as we move into the next phase," Lehtinen said.

OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS



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Supplier Development Summit

In April, CMS proudly hosted its annual Supplier Development Summit, continuing efforts to bring together local businesses, community leaders and district staff. The event aids in building relationships and creating more opportunities for Minority, Women and Small Business Enterprises who wish to be a part of the district's supplier network. Attendees had the opportunity to have one-on-one conversations with department representatives including Transportation, Building Services and more. The Supplier Development Summit emphasizes the district's commitment to economic inclusion, ensuring the businesses that support our schools supply quality goods and services. By continuing to open doors for various suppliers, CMS strives to ensure its business partnerships reflect the community it serves. 1

Classified Compensation Study

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education voted in favor of the recommendations presented in the Classified Compensation Study during its Jan. 28, 2025, meeting. This approval marked an important milestone in aligning Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' compensation structures with current market conditions and reinforcing the district's commitment to equity, competitiveness and excellence across CMS.

With this approval, eligible employees received information outlining their placement within the new pay structure and how the change would impact their compensation. They began receiving the increases in their February paychecks, reflecting the approved adjustments. The pay increases were applied retroactively to July 1, 2024, which was the start of the fiscal year.

Transportation Hiring Fair

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools continues to prioritize student safety and operational efficiency by investing in its transportation workforce. To address staffing needs, the district hosted multiple Transportation Hiring Fairs throughout the year, offering on-site assistance with applications for qualified applicants. These events focused on recruiting bus drivers and technicians, who play a critical role in ensuring students arrive at school safely and on time. Competitive wages, comprehensive benefits and professional development opportunities were highlighted as part of CMS' efforts to recruit and retain skilled transportation employees. A reliable, well-supported transportation team is essential to maintaining daily operations and supporting student success across the district.

Sources of Strength Program Introduction

CMS understands the importance of attending to the "Whole Child" through its implementation of the Sources of Strength program within the district. This student-led program aims to increase help-seeking behaviors and promote connections between peers and caring adults. Sources of Strength equips students with tools to support one another, promote mental health awareness and foster a positive school community. This model strengthens multiple protective factors around young individuals so that when times get hard they have strengths to rely on. Introducing this nationally recognized program reflects CMS' proactive approach to creating safe, inclusive learning environments where students can thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

Oracle transition

This year, CMS launched Phase 1 of the Oracle Modernization Project, an essential step toward building a stronger, more efficient district. The project focuses on stabilizing and improving the district's financial performance systems, providing the tools necessary to reduce manual processes, minimizing human error risks and increasing overall efficiency. By modernizing these critical processes, CMS is laying the groundwork for smarter, more efficient operations that support employees. While Payroll and Human Capital functions are not included in this initial phase, the district remains committed to ensuring a smooth, effective transition in all areas of operational excellence within the district.

Operations By The Numbers

78,000
Students Transported

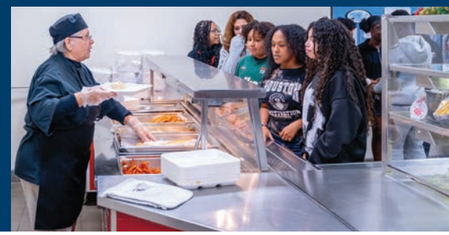
25,500
Bus Stops

98,000
Daily Miles

17,346,000
Annual Miles

115,000
Meals Served Daily

300,000
Meals Served During Summer



ENGAGEMENT EXCELLENCE

Hawthorne partnership creates career pipeline

Students can choose from four health sciences pathways.

Did you know what you wanted to be when you grew up? For high school students at Hawthorne Academy of Health Sciences, it's an easy question because they have a direct pipeline for workforce development into the health care industry. Recognizing Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' goal to see its students enrolled, enlisted or employed upon graduation, the district and Carolinas College of Health Sciences, in collaboration with Atrium Health (Advocate Health), is preparing students for four specific pathways of health sciences degrees, certificates and careers.

"Atrium Health, Carolinas College of Health Sciences and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools have established a strategic partnership to reimagine Hawthorne Academy of Health Sciences and empower the next generation of health care professionals," said Patricia Beckas, senior human resources consultant, Workforce and Career Development, Human Resources, Talent & Culture for Advocate Health. "Supported by the Bloomberg Philanthropies Healthcare Education Initiative, this collaboration is designed to eliminate barriers to higher education and career entry, providing students with direct pathways to high-demand, family-sustaining careers.

Launched in February 2023 with a generous $26.3 million grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the program is one of 10 across the country and the only one in a public school system. Students must apply while in eighth grade to enter the program. There are only 100 seats available per grade-level cohort so the competition is fierce.

Mikayla Harlin is one of the students who qualified for the program: "I wanted to accelerate my learning. I wanted the chance to collaborate and work with others who are in the same levels as me and I felt that at this school I would have the best opportunity of an education as far as going into health sciences."

Following a rigorous transcript review by school leaders and a student success coach, the pathway to a career in health care begins in the ninth grade of this early college program.

"In our first year, 95 students from grades 10 to 12 have jumped into the program and are already earning college credit. It's been a true team effort; every partner has brought something to the table to support these students," said Merritt Davenport, early college liaison for Carolinas College of Health Sciences. "We're shaping and refining the program in real time, which allows us to stay flexible, respond to student needs and continuously improve. Most importantly, students are getting hands-on experience and a front-row seat to the many paths in the medical field."

During the 2024–25 application period, more than 140 students applied and qualified for the program. Students accepted into the program participate in on-site, work-based learning observations with Atrium Health, and during the summer, they take college courses at Carolinas College of Health Sciences. In the spring of 10th grade, students will choose from four specialized pathways at Carolinas College to customize their health care education:

- **Healthcare Simulation** is a merging of health care and technology to create realistic simulation scenarios for diverse health care professionals. It's perfect for those who want to make a significant impact in health care without direct patient interaction.
- **Neurodiagnostic Technology** teaches students to record electrical activity from the brain and nervous system to help physicians diagnose and treat disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerves, somatosensory and motor nerve systems.
- **Nursing** trains students to become registered nurses (RNs), who provide comprehensive care, treatment, counseling and health education to individuals, families and communities.
- **Radiologic Technology** students learn to become radiographers and to safely utilize X-rays to perform diagnostic imaging procedures using state-of-the-art equipment.

The average starting salary for a radiology technologist can be $63,000; for a registered nurse, it can be as much as $80,000. Salaries can rise into the six-figure range with years of experience and additional training.

This initiative will create real access to stable, good-paying jobs and upward family mobility for Mecklenburg County students while filling critical health care shortages. A plus for Hawthorne Academy students in the program is that not only will they receive a high school diploma, they also can receive an associate degree in General Science, an associate degree in Applied Science or an industry certificate within an additional one to two years after high school graduation with prioritized hiring by Atrium Health.

The question "Do you know what you want to be when you grow up?" has been answered with this unique strategic partnership.

ENGAGEMENT
EXCELLENCE

Atrium Health BANK OF AMERICA cms Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Meaningful Medicine changes the game for CMS student health and future career pathways

Partnership provides in-school virtual health and wellness services, plus health-related career programs.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has made it easier for students to access health and emotional wellness services through a unique program called Meaningful Medicine. Students and staff at select schools now enjoy the convenience of virtual access to a health care provider or therapist on campus, during school hours. The initiative also offers CMS high school students the opportunity to participate in health-related career pathways programs at Atrium Health.

The public-private and philanthropic partnership launched in 2022 with a $10 million, five-year grant from Bank of America. Led by Atrium Health Foundation, Meaningful Medicine was designed to help improve access to health care and emotional wellness needs by using virtual technology to meet with patients whether at school or at community locations. Another key focus of the program is economic mobility and job training. Through the Meaningful Medicine program Atrium Health expanded three of its student career development programs.

School Based Virtual Care

Meaningful Medicine offers comprehensive health-related services through Atrium Health and Atrium Health Levine Children's Hospital. The School-Based Virtual Care clinics are located in 113 CMS locations. Here students and staff can meet with a health care professional virtually when they aren't feeling well. This service has helped CMS support the needs of the community and reduced absenteeism by allowing the student or staff member to return to the classroom if they are not contagious or needing additional health needs. Since mid-2022, the clinics had more than 13,000 visits.

School Based Virtual Therapy

Atrium Health School-Based Virtual Therapy is available in 32 CMS locations where students and staff can meet with a therapist during school hours. Since 2022, nearly 900 patients have used teletherapy service.

Social Health Needs in the Community

During visits, patients are also assessed for social drivers of health and are routed to Atrium Health's Community Health Worker team, which provides referral to resources such as food, housing and transportation.

Future Health Care Professionals in Training

Meaningful Medicine also supports three instrumental student career pathway programs led by Atrium Health. Since 2022, approximately 300 CMS students have participated in the cohorts building their skills and career advancement opportunities in the health care field. The program includes:

- **Propelling Adolescents Towards Careers in Healthcare (PATCH):** Students in 10th and 11th grade participate in an eight-week curriculum, focused on research, health care shadowing, career exposure and professional development.
- **Summer Internship:** High school students participate in a seven-week, nonclinical paid internship. This is integrated with the Mayor's Youth Employment Program.
- **Rise to Success:** This sponsorship program enables high school graduates to earn an associate degree or a certification in a health care-related discipline from a local community college.

Meaningful Medicine by the Numbers: 2022–2025

School Based Virtual Care

113 Locations

13,531 Visits

10,619 Patients Seen

School Based Virtual Teletherapy

31 Locations

11,258 Visits

897 Patients Seen

Social Health Needs

7,797 Patients Screened

≈2,000 Screened positive for need for social health support

Health Care Career Pathways

279 CMS Students

132 PATCH

71 Summer Internship

76 Rise to Success

ENGAGEMENT
EXCELLENCE

Family Academy provides information hub for education

Outreach efforts empower families to seek success for the whole child.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Family Academy launched in July 2024 as a direct effort to strengthen the district's engagement with families and build support for the success of each student as a whole child. The program takes a grassroots approach to partnering with families to provide essential information and make the district's many resources more accessible. The goal is to empower families to be active participants in their children's education.

"Our Family Academy is an opportunity for families to be informed, to gain resources and to learn about how to best support their child outside of the school day," said Latisha Hensley, director of CMS Family and Community Engagement. Hensley was part of a similar program that focused on Title 1 schools as the district recognized the benefits of this approach for every family.

Family Academy programming focuses on six key areas, all of which were identified through family focus groups. They are academic success, navigating CMS, health and wellness, financial awareness, life and leadership skills, and technology and cybersafety.

A key component of the outreach is delivered through weekly virtual webinars, which provide families essential information and a touchpoint with representatives from CMS departments and community organizations in support of student success from a holistic standpoint. Topics range from helping parents interpret standardized test results to budgeting during a crisis. In addition to instruction, each virtual session includes time for families to ask questions.

"When we saw 300 and 400 people logging in, that was huge, especially for something that just started this year," Hensley said. "And we have folks sending us emails saying, 'Thank you so much. We don't know what we don't know. How do we share this with other families?' That's been very rewarding."

Virtual webinars are recorded and added to the Family Academy on-demand library for anytime accessibility. It's just one piece of the district's family portal, designed to streamline access to resources and information, which can be challenging to pinpoint quickly in a district as large and matrixed as Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

"For us to be able to work collaboratively with our CMS departments and pool together resources, to have almost a one-stop shop where families can with just a few clicks know exactly what they need to navigate a certain situation, that's been a huge win," said Hensley.

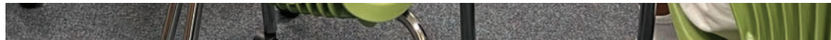
Family Academy is also keenly focused on in-person events and meetings to connect. One work stream that has garnered a great deal of positive feedback is Family Academy On the Go!, where district subject-matter experts and relevant community partners go into neighborhoods to bring resources and open dialogues about their specific needs and concerns.

"It's about being in community with community rather than doing to community."

— Chiquitha Lloyd, *Executive Director of Engagement, Access and Supplier Development*

The district held about two-dozen community-based Family Academy On the Go! sessions during the 2024–25 school year. Leaders are eager for more engagement as the program moves into its second year.

"We can only continue to soar and strengthen this collaboration with our community. So I'm really looking forward to continuing to grow in this work and strengthen our partnership with our families and community," said Hensley.



ENGAGEMENT
EXCELLENCE

Annual 'What's Your E?' event celebrates post-graduation plans

Students explore and declare plans to graduate enrolled, enlisted or employed.

Hornets Sports & Entertainment, in collaboration with Bank of America, hosted more than 1,000 students from 33 CMS high schools at the Spectrum Center for the second annual "What's Your E?" event that engages and empowers graduating students as they explore and declare their post-graduation pathways.

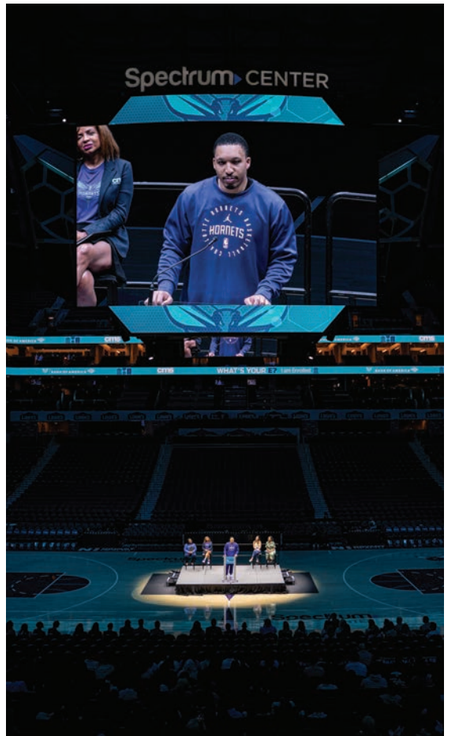
"Ensuring that our students graduate enrolled, enlisted or employed is among our top priorities, and we are proud of our students for pursuing their passions and the endless possibilities that lie ahead for their futures."

— Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill

The event featured remarks from class of 2025 graduates Luke Barron, Mallard Creek High School; Aubree Martin, Harding University High School; Xavier Rhodes, Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology; and Hornets' Forward Grant Williams.

"To my fellow seniors — whether you're enrolled, enlisted or employed — remember this: It's not about waiting for someone to hand you your future. You build it," said Rhodes. "One brick at a time, one decision at a time. Find your passion, take the opportunities that come your way and don't be afraid to say 'yes' to something that scares you a little — that's where growth lives."

"What's Your E?" aligns with the fourth district goal in the 2024–29 Strategic Plan which seeks to increase the percentage of rising 12th grade students on track to graduate from high school enrolled, enlisted or employed from 72% to 85% by June 2029.



ENGAGEMENT
HIGHLIGHTS

CMS Foundation invests in innovation

Philanthropy is key to transforming the school experience.

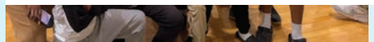
The CMS Foundation (CMSF) invests in innovation to help CMS address big challenges and expand opportunities for our students and educators. As the nonprofit fundraising partner for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the foundation harnesses the power of philanthropy to seed innovative ideas and accelerate systemwide transformation. During the 2024–25 school year, the foundation deepened its focus in four big areas:

- **Strengthening the teacher pipeline:** The CMS Teaching Residency provides an alternative route to teaching licensure for qualified candidates who are ready to make a difference in the classroom. In 2024–25, the foundation supported 266 teaching residents, providing tuition assistance, state portfolio support and/or retention bonuses to qualifying teachers. The foundation has invested nearly $1.4 million in the program since 2019–20.
- **Elevating teacher voice:** The foundation hosted its seventh annual Teacher Talks experience. At the Teacher Talks 2025 live event, four CMS educators took the stage to deliver powerful and inspiring talks based on their ideas and experiences in the classroom.
- **Transforming the school experience:** Launched during the 2022–23 school year, the CMSF Innovation Center empowers schools to bring their big ideas to life. With dedicated coaching, community learning experiences and project funding support, four schools implemented projects to transform the learning experience for their students during 2024–25. To date, 12 schools across two Innovation Center cohorts have completed this program experience.
- **Redefining engagement with our business community:** Through a unique partnership with the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council, the foundation manages an innovative public-private partnership to leverage the talent, resources and commitment of city/county's corporate community and higher education partners to strengthen our public school district. During the 2024–25 school year (third year of the partnership), the foundation facilitated executive residency experiences, consulting projects and financial investments in CMS from about 40 companies through this partnership.

CMS students had the unique opportunity to experience **Space Explorers: The Infinite,** a space-inspired immersive and multisensory exhibit presented by Blumenthal Arts. This exhibit allowed our scholars to engage with interactive installations combining art, science and technology in a way that sparks curiosity and creativity. By participating in The Infinite, students were able to explore concepts and gain exposure to cutting-edge cultural experiences that extend learning beyond the classroom. Engaging with the arts remains an essential part of CMS' commitment to providing well-rounded, enriching educational experiences. Through collaborations with organizations like Blumenthal Arts, CMS ensures students continue to have opportunities to engage with the arts. 1

Through our partnership with the **Hornets Foundation and the Chairman's Legacy Fund**, CMS completed several gym remodeling projects across the district. These projects provided students with improved athletic spaces, new equipment and updated facilities that support physical education and extracurricular activities. The upgrades to our facilities showcases the shared commitment of CMS and community partners to promote student health, wellness and school pride. These enhancements reflect a shared commitment between CMS and community partners to create supportive, high-quality environments that extend beyond academics. 2

This year, CMS hosted the **Strategic Partnerships Summit**, bringing together business leaders, nonprofit organizations and community partners to explore ways to support student success. The summit served as a platform for fostering meaningful connections between CMS and its external partners, with a focus on building relationships that directly benefit students, schools and families. Attendees had the opportunity to engage in breakout sessions, hear from district leadership and learn about ways their organizations can align with CMS' goals, mission and vision. The summit demonstrated the vital role community partnerships play in advancing educational equity and opportunity. Through ongoing collaboration, CMS continues to create pathways for student achievement while strengthening its connection to the broader Mecklenburg County community.



Engagement by the Numbers

480+
Partners

55.8K
Registered and Active Volunteers

145,900
Volunteer Hours

$4.9M
Value from Volunteer Hours

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

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