

# School News

## Fall play season opens

The Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) fall play season has debuted. Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot is aboard for "Murder on the Orient Express" at La Plata 6:30 p.m., Oct. 24 to 25. Ticket prices are \$7.18 for students and \$12.51 for adults. To get tickets, visit [event-bright.com](http://event-bright.com).

The woodland fairies of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" are busy in other fairy tales in "Fairycakes," a play by Douglas Carter Beane put on by Henry E. Lackey High School. An Oct. 30 show starts at 6:30 p.m., with a 2 p.m. matinee on Nov. 1. General admission tickets are \$11 and tickets for children are \$6. To buy tickets, visit [gofan.co](http://gofan.co).

### Future shows include:

- "Peter Pan and Wendy," 7 p.m., Nov. 14 and 15, and 2 p.m., Nov. 16, at Maurice J. McDonough High School.
- "The Bugs: A Greek Comedy," 7 p.m., Nov. 20, 21 and 22, at Westlake High School.
- "Peter and the Starcatcher," 7 p.m., Nov. 20, 21 and 22, at North Point High School.
- "The Con," 6:30 p.m., Nov. 20, 21 and 22, at Thomas Stone High School.
- "Harry Potter and the Cursed Child: High School Edition," 7 p.m., Nov. 21 and 22, and 2 p.m., Nov. 23.

## Work session Oct. 27

The Board of Education of Charles County is set to meet at 4:30 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 27, for its scheduled work session. The agenda is posted online at [www.ccboe.com](http://www.ccboe.com). At the start of the work session, Clerk of the Circuit Court Lisa E. Yates will officially swear in Bridgette Patterson of White Plains as the new District 4 Board member. Patterson replaces former Board Member Linda Warren, who resigned in August for personal reasons.

## Judy Center celebrates 25 years

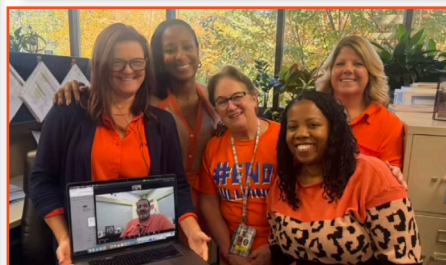
The Judy Center at Dr. Samuel A. Mudd Elementary School celebrated its 25th anniversary earlier this month. It was the first Judy Center in the county, followed by one opening a year later at Eva Turner Elementary School. Judy Centers provide services for children from birth to 5 years old, and work with community partners to ensure that children are socially, emotionally and physically ready for school. Right, during a celebration, Mary Whetzel, play group assistant, right, and Caliyah Owens use a sensory bin. Read more on Page 2.

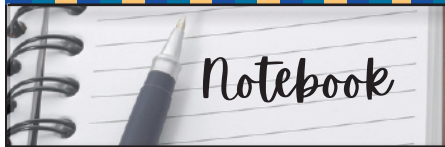


## Simply the 'zest!' — CCPS wears orange for Unity Day



Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) [staff members got the memo to wear orange](#) Oct. 22 for Unity Day! Clockwise from left, staff pictured is from Maurice J. McDonough High School, Margaret J. Thornton Elementary School, Mattawoman Middle School, Title I staff at the Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building and St. Charles High School.





### On the cover

The Board of Education at its Oct. 14 meeting recognized outstanding staff members. Pictured from left are Brett Gerhart, learning resource teacher, Theodore G. Davis Middle School; Melissa Moreta, secretary to the principal, Billingsley Elementary School; and Louis Butler Jr., building service manager, Indian Head Elementary School. To read more about them and other staff members recently honored, [click here](#).

### Pink out Oct. 29

In support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, CCPS will hold a “pink out” on Wednesday, Oct. 29. Students and staff can wear shades of pink to support those who are fighting, in remission or who have been lost to cancer.

### i-Ready meeting

CCPS is hosting a virtual Zoom meeting at 6 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 30, for parents to learn about i-Ready student assessments and data reports. CCPS recently administered fall i-Ready assessments in both reading and mathematics. Learn more and find a link to the meeting at [www.ccboe.com](http://www.ccboe.com).

### Early dismissal

A two-hour early dismissal for students is Friday, Oct. 31.

### Student town hall

A virtual town hall for students in Grades 5-12 will be held Nov. 3. Hosted by Yonelle Moore Lee Esq., chairperson of the Board of Education, and Munachi Obinali, student member of the Board, the town hall will allow students to ask questions and share thoughts. Learn more at [www.ccboe.com](http://www.ccboe.com).

## Judy Center at Dr. Mudd celebrates 25th anniversary

The first Judy Center in Charles County celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary earlier this month. The center, housed at Dr. Samuel A. Mudd Elementary School, opened in fall 2000 after state lawmakers enacted the Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Education Enhancement Program earlier that year.

“Early childhood education is the cornerstone of lifelong success. It builds cognitive, emotional and social foundations children need to thrive — not just in school, but in life,” Jennifer Gimmel, Judy Center specialist, said. “At the Judy Center our mission is to provide enriching, nurturing and inclusive experiences for children and families.”

[The Judy Center](#) provides services and programs for children ages birth to 5 years old and their families. Center staff works with community partners to ensure that children are socially, emotionally and physically ready to enter school. Judy Center services, programs and activities are free through grant funding.

The centers are the legacy of the late Judy Hoyer, an early childhood advocate and supervisor of early childhood education for Prince George’s County Public Schools, who passed away in 1997. The wife of U.S. Rep Steny H. Hoyer, Judy Hoyer helped launch two similar early childhood education programs in Prince George’s — one in Cheverly and another in Adelphi.

Judy Hoyer believed in the “it takes a village” approach to educating children. “Judy was a teacher,” Steny Hoyer said during the anniversary event. “She had other talents, but she was a teacher.” She knew from the time she was in second grade that she wanted to be a teacher. “She never deviated from that conviction,” Hoyer said of his late wife.

The Judy Centers were originally called the Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Education Enhancement Centers. Then Gov. Parris N. Glendening, a friend of Judy Hoyer and her husband, thought it was a mouthful. He suggested the center’s title be shortened to what they were called behind the scenes — The Judy Center. Everyone was onboard, Steny Hoyer said.

In 2000, 13 centers opened in Maryland. The following year, counties could apply for one of 11 grants to open additional centers. Dr. Mudd’s coordinator, Cheryl DeAtley, asked if Charles County could apply to get a second



The Judy Center at Dr. Samuel A. Mudd Elementary School held a 25th anniversary celebration which included proclamations from state and county officials. Pictured from left are Del. Edith J. Patterson, Jennifer Gimmel, Judy Center specialist, Cheryl DeAtley, first director of Mudd’s Judy Center, and Portia Parker, principal of Dr. Mudd.

center but was told it was a long shot — counties without a center would have preference. A few counties didn’t apply, allowing the second Judy Center to open within CCPS, this time at Eva Turner Elementary School.

Today, there are three Judy Centers in CCPS — Dr. Mudd, Indian Head and Eva Turner elementary schools — that offer various services including adult education and English classes, case management services for families, health services and screenings, a dental program for children up to 5 years old, family engagement activities, parent workshops, playgroups and early intervention identification through developmental screenings and referrals to the Infants and Toddlers program.

Corissa Owens and her family are new to the area. The first-time mother was in a new place, not knowing too many people when a co-worker of her husband’s suggested they check out The Judy Center. She was looking for ways to engage her daughter Caliyah and maybe pick up tips along the way that would help Owens prepare her daughter for school.

“We love it,” Owens said of the center. She has seen Caliyah build confidence through play and has been able to gather resources that are helping the family make a smooth transition to their new home. Play groups and field trips organized by The Judy Center are connecting Owens to parents like her and helping build

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# Billingsley Elementary welcomes Omegaman for a no bullying assembly

Omegaman touched down at Billingsley Elementary School earlier this month to talk to students about making good choices and being a dream maker, not a dream breaker.

Billingsley invited the Omegaman program to enhance the school's Bullying Prevention Week and Unity Day, which Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) celebrated Oct. 22. For the Oct. 14 assemblies, students were encouraged to dress up as their favorite superhero.

Omegaman and Friends was founded in 2008 by Marc Wilkes, a former road manager for a motivational speaker. When his boss was set to retire, Wilkes wasn't ready to quit. He developed the character of Omegaman, a superhero who could teach children the importance of good behavior and embracing social-emotional skills.

"We want to bring a message of 'Be a Hero,'" Wilkes said, taking a break between two assemblies. "I realized that if you can get someone's attention, you can bring a message of hope and changes into their lives."

With so much vying for a kid's attention — video games, social media content — Omegaman and his crew of five friends use comic book-style visuals, strongman skills and illustrations to relay the "Be a Hero" message.

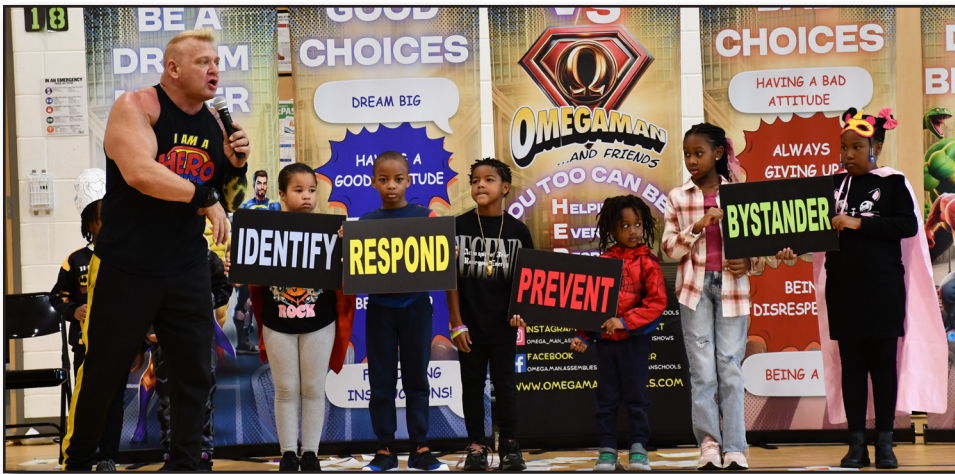
The company is set to hold about 900 school-based events this year around the country, with assemblies tailored for elementary, middle or high school students. The assembly for middle and high school-aged children is less superhero, more real world.

For students in fifth grade and younger, the assembly features feats of strength — the superhero spinning two students overhead as they hang from a "steel beam," breaking a baseball bat over their knee — coupled with messages that build confidence and character.

"Each year, we make sure that our assemblies have a strong message for students that will stick with them beyond elementary school and assist them in



Above, Jasmine Law, left, assistant principal at Billingsley Elementary School, is pictured with kindergarten student Justise Boone. Staff and students dressed as superheroes during a visit from Omegaman. Left, Omegaman, played by Marc Wilkes, visits schools around the country to talk to students about making good choices.



making good choices," Jasmine Law, an assistant principal at Billingsley, said.

Throughout the school, staff integrated the program's HERO pledge into the school day to further the assembly's message. The pledge calls for students to help and respect others, while promising to listen to teachers and parents, not be a bully and to always do their best.

"When you walk down the hall or enter a teacher's classroom, you may see the pledge signed by students, adding their own creativity," Law said. "Spirit days come and go, but the impression of Omegaman and the impact he had on our students will last."



## Judy

a sense of community. "It's a great resource for both parents and children," she said. As of 2024, Maryland has 86 Judy Centers throughout the state. The center's mission aligns with the [Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#), education reform legislation aimed at providing equitable education to all students while preparing

## continued from Page 1

most for college and careers after graduation. According to a [Maryland State Department of Education Judy P. Hoyer Early Care annual report](#), the number of Judy Centers is expected to increase in the state to more than 180 centers by 2030.

Left, U.S. Rep Steny H. Hoyer speaks during the 25th anniversary of the Judy Center at Dr. Samuel A. Mudd Elementary School. Inset, Judy Hoyer, an early childhood advocate, passed away in 1997.

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# Middleton holds event to honor Hispanic Heritage Month

Arthur Middleton Elementary School staff and families celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month with an Oct. 21 event at the school.

Held from 5 to 7 p.m., students and their families were invited to enjoy food and activities at an event organized by Middleton teachers, Heily Veizaga and Imani Phelps. North Point High School students volunteered at the event.

After filling up on Latin and Latin-inspired food and desserts, guests could play the bingo-like game la loteria, and have their face painted, decorate maracas and create bracelets and flags depicting the different countries honored during Hispanic Heritage Month including Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

Children took turns hitting a piñata and a group of Middleton students performed traditional dances including bachata, cumbia and merengue.

Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated annually Sept. 15 to Oct. 15.



## Personnel

**Job Fair**

**Food Service Job Fair** is 9:30-11:30 a.m., Oct. 27, at the Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building. [Register here.](#)

**Job openings**

**CTE Coordinator** —

Robert D. Stethem Educational Center, part time, 12-month position. High school diploma or equivalent required. Apply by Nov. 1.

**Literacy Instructional Assistant** —

La Plata High School, 10-month position. High school diploma required. Apply by Nov. 4.

## Open enrollment is Oct. 27-Nov. 21, increase in co-pays in 2026

The annual Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) health benefits open enrollment period is Oct. 27 through Nov. 21. During open enrollment, CCPS benefit eligible employees can update their current benefit elections. During open enrollment, employees should review their personal information, benefits offered by CCPS, and the plans that they are enrolled in to determine if they would like to make any changes. This information is located within the Oracle platform.

There are no changes to insurance premiums for the coming benefit year. However, co-pays were adjusted to help balance and offset projected cost increases for claims and what CCPS pays toward its benefit plans for employees.

**Co-pay changes for plan year 2026**

CCPS worked with the Education Association of Charles County (EACC) and American Federation of State, County and Municipal (AFSCME) unions to agree upon changes to co-payments. Co-pays for medical services will increase by \$5; diagnostic lab

co-pays will increase to \$10; and emergency room visit co-pays will increase from \$100 to \$175, unless the covered benefit holder is admitted. These changes apply to the medical services under the plan which require a current co-pay, and are effective Jan. 1, 2026.

As a result of these changes:

- A new medical card will be mailed to all members enrolled in CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield.
- Prescription cards will not be reissued.
- The Medical Flexible Spending Account (FSA) limit will increase to \$3,300. You do not need to be enrolled in a medical plan to participate in the FSA. New FSA elections must be submitted annually to continue participation.

Employees with questions about open enrollment should contact the Office of Fiscal Services, Employee Benefits, by phone at: 301-934-7202 or 301-934-7317, or by email at [employeebenefits@ccboe.com](mailto:employeebenefits@ccboe.com). An email with more details about open enrollment and co-pay changes was emailed to all CCPS employees on Oct. 24.