



School News

'High School Musical'

'High School Musical Jr.' will be staged this weekend at Maurice J. McDonough High School. Shows are 7 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 27, and Saturday, Feb. 28. Tickets are available online for \$11.28 for adults and \$9.20 for students, seniors, military members and CCPS employees with a badge. To purchase tickets, visit <https://mhsdrama303.booktix.com/>. McDonough is at 7165 Marshall Corner Road in Pomfret.

Early dismissal March 4

A two-hour early dismissal for students is Wednesday, March 4.

Spelling Bee is March 4

The Charles County Spelling Bee is set for 6 p.m., Wednesday, March 4, at Piccowaxen Middle School at 12834 Rock Point Road in Newburg. The top spellers at Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) middle schools and those in the county's private and home schools meet to determine who will spell their way to first place. The winner of the local Bee will represent Charles County at the [Scripps National Spelling Bee](#) in May.

Read Across Charles County

Read Across Charles County is Friday, March 6.

Board meeting March 10

The Board of Education of Charles County will meet 1 p.m., Tuesday, March 10. An agenda will be posted the week of March 2.

Teacher in-service day

A teacher in-service day is set for Wednesday, March 11. Schools will be closed for students only.



The finalists for 2026 Charles County Public Schools Teacher of the Year are Monica Strobel, left, English/language arts teacher at Milton M. Somers Middle School; Emily Leedy, third-grade teacher at J.C. Parks Elementary School; Kate Kozicki-Miller, English teacher at La Plata High School; Stefanie Buzby, English language development teacher at St. Charles High School; Christopher Brown, physical education teacher at Matthew Henson Middle School; and Karena Bennett, science teacher at Maurice J. McDonough High School.

CCPS names Parks' Leedy as Teacher of the Year

Emily Leedy, a third-grade teacher at J.C. Parks Elementary School, was named the 2026 Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) Teacher of the Year during a Feb. 19 ceremony celebrating this year's nominees.

She began her career in Pennsylvania before moving to Maryland and teaching at the Accokeek Academy in Prince George's County. After earning a master's in environmental education, Leedy took a job at the Alice Ferguson Foundation in Accokeek where she could blend her interests — education and the environment.

Leedy came to CCPS at the start of the 2020 school year as a teacher at Malcolm Elementary School. She was an elementary school science teacher at Parks before heading back to the classroom, staying at Parks to teach third grade.

"Mrs. Leedy explains complex concepts clearly and adapts instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners," Stephanie Hill, a fellow third-grade teacher, said. Her ability to adapt comes from her knowledge of each student she teaches. "Mrs. Leedy takes time to truly know each child," Hill said.

Parents recognize Leedy's nurturing nature toward her students. "Her impact on my child, Noah, during his third-grade year at J.C. Parks Elementary was nothing short of transformative," Rotishia Curry, the parent of a Parks fourth grader, said. "From the very first day

of school, Mrs. Leedy ignited in Noah a genuine excitement for learning."

Leedy is tuned into her students' personalities and strengths. "Her unwavering belief in every student's potential has created a classroom where all children felt seen, valued and capable of success," Curry said.

Leedy connects lessons to real world examples, and encourages students to take ownership of their academic growth. "Her classroom is one where curiosity thrives," Hughes Valmond, Parks principal, said. "Students are encouraged to think critically, take risks and celebrate their progress."

Leedy is well versed in curriculum and instructional practices, and often takes her students outdoors to enhance and broaden science lessons. "Her creative lessons not only deepen understanding but also help students see themselves as scientists, problem solvers and life-long learners," Valmond said.

Her outside-of-the-box approach and attention to her students have left an impact. "Mrs. Leedy is the best teacher," Parks student Rylee Hart said. "She makes learning fun and excit-



Emily Leedy

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Navarro shares love of reading with students

Students at the F. B. Gwynn Educational Center welcomed a series of special guests who visited the school to read books written by African American authors or books that highlighted Black culture and discussed notable figures. Alison Cheney, physical education teacher at Gwynn, and school staff put together a day of reading so that students could hear stories read by community members, representatives from the Charles County Sheriff's Office (CCSO), Board of Education of Charles County members, Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) staff and Superintendent of Schools Maria V. Navarro, Ed.D.



Superintendent of Schools Maria V. Navarro, Ed.D., left, reads to students at the F.B. Gwynn Educational Center.

“We started the initiative last year and it was well received by parents and the school and thought it was really important to do it again this year,” Cheney said. “Not only is reading important but especially during Black History Month to celebrate culture and diversity and the things that bring us together as a community and school system.”

Navarro visited classrooms and read “Hair Love,” by Matthew A. Cherry, a story about

a little girl who learns to embrace her natural hair through self-love and confidence, and “I Promise,” by NBA great LeBron James. “The best part is going out to schools and spending time with little ones and having fun as I read,” Navarro said. “I’m so proud that today at Gwynn they are celebrating Black History Month by reading books written by African American writers that have great messages in their stories.”

Calendar updates— Last day changes due to snow

Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) has again revised the 2025-2026 calendar to reflect the most recent use of an inclement weather day for students and teachers. As of Feb. 27, CCPS has used five inclement weather days. This moves the last day of school for students to Wednesday, June 17.

The updated schedule is below and is subject to change if additional inclement weather impacts the CCPS operating schedule.

- **Monday, June 15:** Full day of school.
- **Tuesday, June 16:** Two-hour early dismissal for students.
- **Wednesday, June 17:** Two-hour early dismissal for students.
- **Wednesday, June 17:** Last day of school for students (was previously June 16).
- **Thursday, June 18:** Last day of school for teachers (was previously June 17).

The online CCPS calendar has been updated to reflect these changes. CCPS built four inclement weather days into the 2025-2026 calendar. All four inclement weather make-up days identified in June 2026 are being used as make-up dates. Additionally, CCPS moved a closure day for students and teachers – Friday, May 8 – to a full day of instruction, giving CCPS another inclement weather make-up day.

State law requires that students attend school for 180 days per school year. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) does allow school systems to request a waiver to the 180-day student attendance requirement. Waivers are not considered by MSDE until a school system uses all of its inclement weather days built into the calendar. CCPS has used all of its inclement weather days in the calendar, and adjusted May 8 to a day of instruction to make up for inclement weather. States of emergency do not bypass the legal requirement for students to attend school for 180 days. CCPS will re-evaluate the 2025-2026 calendar and MSDE waiver process as needed if additional inclement weather impacts Charles County.



On the cover

The Board of Education honored staff members for their commitment to students, and teaching and learning. Among those recognized at the Feb. 10 meeting are pictured on the front cover. From left are Sydney Smith, fifth-grade teacher, Eva Turner Elementary School; Gregory Bongiorno, instructional assistant for mathematics, C. Paul Barnhart Elementary School; and Shantia Keys, third-grade teacher, Dr. Gustavus Brown Elementary School. To read more about the educators honored, visit www.ccboe.com.

Brick-by-Brick series

Brick-by-Brick is a family engagement series for parents who have children in CCPS special education programs. Sessions cover topics that are of interest to parents from navigating the IEP process to learning basic sign language, from understanding prekindergarten special education services to gathering resources and tools to assist children at every stage of their development. The sessions are held in person and virtually. To learn more about upcoming sessions, visit www.ccboe.com.

W-2s available online

The 2025 W-2 Wage and Tax Statements were mailed late last month from ADP in Georgia to CCPS employees' home address on file in Oracle as of Jan. 21, 2026. The statements are also available online to view and print. Employee pay statements are also available through the ADP app. Access to the ADP App in Microsoft 365 provides [instructions for current CCPS employees to access W-2s on the ADP App](#). This is the most direct way to access the W-2 Form online. Staff members who encounter issues with access through Microsoft 365 should follow the [instructions provided in the Accessing ADP](#) via website attachment. Staff members who experience any issues can email the payroll team at payroll@ccboe.com.

Teacher

ing and she always finds cool ways to help us understand new things. Mrs. Leedy teaches us to work together and help each other become our best, and our class feels like a big team.”

CCPS Teacher of the Year program

Leedy was among six finalists for the CCPS Teacher of the Year title. Leedy will represent CCPS in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Maryland Teacher of the Year program in which one teacher receives the overall state honor.

Leedy was joined by finalists Karena Bennett, a science teacher at Maurice J. McDonough High School, Christopher Brown, a physical education teacher at Matthew Henson Middle School, Stefanie Buzby, an English language development (ELD) teacher at St. Charles High School, Kate Kozicki-Miller, an English teacher at La Plata High School and Monica Strobel, an English/language arts teacher at Milton M. Somers Middle School.

One of the remaining five finalists — Bennett, Brown, Buzby, Kozicki-Miller and Strobel — will be named the CCPS nominee for *The Washington Post's* Teacher of the Year program this spring.

The Washington Post finalist from CCPS represents the school system in the overall awards program in which one teacher from the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area is named the newspaper's teacher of the year.

Karena Bennett

When Bennett took a job as biology teacher at McDonough, the surroundings must have looked familiar as she had graduated from the school only a few years earlier. Through the years, Bennett has continued as a member of the FRAMily at McDonough serving as the science department chair since 2005. She teaches Advanced Placement (AP) biology and Project Lead the Way Biomedical Science. “Teaching biology to high school students can be tough,” Bennett said. “Either they love it or they hate it, which is fine. I love it.” Her enthusiasm for the subject inspires students and tying classroom lessons to experiences gives them a glimpse into how their classwork could translate to scenarios in which they find themselves in “the real world.” “She creates such a safe learning environment and makes sure everyone in her classroom is on board with the topic,” Briseyda Reyes-Andrade, a McDonough sophomore, said. Bennett fosters

curiosity, confidence and a genuine love of science among her students.

Christopher Brown

A native of Charles County, Christopher Brown has spent his 26-year career with CCPS. Following graduation from Appalachian State University in North Carolina — where he earned a bachelor of science in physical education K-12 — Brown took a job as a physical education (PE) teacher at Maurice J. McDonough High School. Two years later he came to Henson as a PE teacher and has been there ever since. “Mr. Brown believes all students can achieve and sets high expectations for their success,” Matthew Golonka, CCPS content specialist for health and PE, said. “His approach empowers students with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead healthy lives.” Brown is the department chair for PE at Henson, and coaches the school's archery, boys volleyball and track and field teams. Brown cultivates a welcoming environment that gives students the confidence to try new things. “Mr. Brown's kindness has had such an impact on my son that he was eager to sign up for archery, despite having no experience at all,” LyKendra Watson, mother of a Henson sixth grader, Rhys, said.

Stefanie Buzby

In her more than two decades of teaching, Buzby has experienced all levels of learners in the kindergarten through Grade 12 journey. When she began her career, she taught first grade. “I expected to spend my entire career teaching six-year-olds,” she said. “I soon realized that my future held a wider scope.” After five years, she moved to the next level, teaching middle school at Piccowaxen Middle School. Buzby, a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT), was promoted to the position of reading resource teacher but she missed daily interactions with students prompting a return to the classroom, first at Benjamin Stoddert Middle School, then St. Charles. Alhaji Kamara, a St. Charles senior, has known Buzby since he was a freshman. “I spoke mostly Krio, African Pidgin English and Temme,” Kamara said. Reading was hard for him, so was speaking and writing — to say nothing of understanding English when it was spoken quickly. “Many days I was stressed. My eyes were always red because I felt like giving up,” Kamara said. “But Mrs. Buzby

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never gave up on me. ... Her patience is something special. She believed in me even when I did not believe in myself.”

Kate Kozicki-Miller

Kozicki-Miller has been a teacher from an early age. In elementary school she was chosen to work with younger students who needed a little extra help. Even as a youngster, Kozicki-Miller knew if she ensured each student was seen, validated and shown they were capable, they would rise to the occasion. She continues this practice as an English teacher at La Plata, and she finds it never gets old. “Even though I have been teaching for 17 years, each year feels just as fresh as the first,” Kozicki-Miller said. At the start of each school year, she is faced with a new group of students, one with their own personalities, quirks and goals. Maximus Meiser, a La Plata senior, said English was a subject he once dreaded, but Kozicki-Miller's class changed his tune. “Mrs. Kozicki made it enjoyable to work through her assignments in her courseload,” he said. “She never hesitated to challenge us, creating a positive, yet constructive environment.”

Monica Strobel

Strobel, a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT), has been an English language arts teacher with CCPS for more than two decades. She graduated from CCPS before studying English literature at University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), and returning to the school system as an eighth-grade teacher at Somers. “She has honed her skills as a teacher, engrained herself in the community and has become an instructional leader within the building,” Somers Principal Gary Lesko said. At the school, Strobel serves colleagues as a team lead and member of the professional learning team, while serving students as a sponsor of the yearbook and National Junior Honor Society. Students appreciate Strobel's skills as a teacher. “She is amazing at explaining and having reasoning while teaching, and is also great at encouraging participation,” Erica Coates, a Somers eighth-grade student, said. “Mrs. Strobel creates a classroom environment where students can feel safe and enjoy learning.”

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SCHS has drive

St. Charles High School staff and students held a FunDrive in January and February to collect donations of gently used clothing, shoes, linens and small household items. The items were donated to the Savers/Value Village which pays for the donations by weight. Pitching in for the St. Charles drive, Hilton Garden Inn donated plates, cups and linens to the effort. Pictured from left are Coty Werkau, a St. Charles English teacher, Hilton Garden Inn staff members Keri Pratt and Eboni Kirkland, and Danielle Carpenter, academic mentor at St Charles. Inset, Werkau sorts items for donation.

Services at Stethem

Students in the automotive technology and barbering programs at the Robert D. Stethem Educational Center are taking appointments.

The automotive tech students can perform select maintenance on vehicles.

Students in the barbering program are available to cut hair for adults and children on certain days.

For more information about booking, schedules and pricing, visit www.stethem.ccboe.com.

Awards

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Each CCPS school and center is asked to nominate an educator for the award programs, highlighting their commitment to teaching and learning.

Below are the names of those who were honored this year as their school's or center's nominee for 2026 Teacher of the Year. The names with asterisk are finalists in the 2026 award programs.

Elementary schools

- **Rebecca Wheaton**, fourth-grade teacher, C. Paul Barnhart Elementary School.
- **Amy Clements**, instructional specialist, Berry Elementary School.
- **Kendra Jones**, Dr. Gustavus Brown Elementary School.
- **Amanda Gilbert**, fourth-grade teacher, Dr. James Craik Elementary School.
- **Gabriel Gray**, music teacher, William A. Diggs Elementary School.
- **Ann Herbert**, prekindergarten teacher, Gale-Bailey Elementary School.
- **Gaynor Robben**, third-grade teacher, Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School.
- **Mandi Blades**, first-grade teacher, Indian Head Elementary School.
- **Evalene Marcus**, special education teacher, Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer Elementary School.
- **Brooke Lyon**, physical education teacher, Malcolm Elementary School.
- **Kaitlyn Roberson**, third-grade teacher, T.C. Martin Elementary School.
- **Maria Farnham**, kindergarten teacher,

Mary H. Matula Elementary School.

- **Erin Locke**, special education teacher, Arthur Middleton Elementary School.
- **Haley Hays**, first-grade teacher, Walter J. Mitchell Elementary School.
- **Taryn Paulin**, fourth-grade teacher, Mt. Hope/Nanjemoy Elementary School.
- **Jessica Wall**, media specialist, Dr. Samuel A. Mudd Elementary School.
- **Melissa Bridegum**, second-grade teacher, Mary B. Neal Elementary School.
- **Emily Leedy**, third-grade teacher, J.C. Parks Elementary School. *
- **Amanda Gwynn**, ELD teacher, J.P. Ryon Elementary School.
- **Emily Grusholt**, special education teacher, Margaret J. Thornton Elementary School.
- **LaTrice Chase**, prekindergarten teacher, Eva Turner Elementary School.
- **Nicole Brock**, fourth-grade teacher, William B. Wade Elementary School.

Middle schools

- **Michele Petricoin**, special education teacher, Theodore G. Davis Middle School.
- **Don Peavy**, sixth-grade math teacher and math instructional resource teacher, Glymont Middle School.
- **Christopher Brown**, physical education teacher, Matthew Henson Middle School. *
- **Tessa Thomas**, social studies teacher, Mattawoman Middle School.
- **Monica Strobel**, eighth-grade English/

language arts teacher, Milton M. Somers Middle School. *

- **Myra Gerald**, art and theater teacher, Benjamin Stoddert Middle School.

High schools

- **Kate Koziicki-Miller**, English teacher, La Plata High School. *
- **Sean Fox**, history and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) teacher, Henry E. Lackey High School.
- **Karena Bennett**, science teacher, Maurice J. McDonough High School. *
- **Naquai Roundtree, Ph.D.**, cybersecurity teacher, North Point High School.
- **Stefanie Buzby**, ELD teacher, St. Charles High School. *
- **Jason Churchill**, visual arts teacher, Thomas Stone High School.
- **Janelle Lewis**, English teacher, Westlake High School.

Centers

- **Lakeisha Webster**, special education teacher, F.B. Gwynn Educational Center.
- **Christopher Wogamon**, Physical Rehabilitation Teacher, Robert D. Stethem Educational Center.

To read the full release, visit www.ccboe.com.

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In Harmony

CCPS student shares Grammy award with dad

A Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) third grader made Grammy history as its youngest winner at the age of 8. Aura V — and her father who goes by the stage name Fyütch — took home the gold plated Gramophone Award for Best Children’s Music Album at the 68th Grammy Awards earlier this month. The duo’s album, “Harmony,” blends pop and hip-hop.



Evaluation update

The annual Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) performance evaluation process is underway.

As of Feb. 27, issues preventing staff from accessing the self-evaluation as well as affecting managers’ ability to view their direct reports’ evaluations, are currently being resolved.

An email will be sent to all CCPS staff once the self-evaluation tool is working properly.

Once working, employees are encouraged to complete a self-evaluation form, and managers/supervisors can collect feedback from contributing reviews and write final evaluations.

If a staff members requires training on the self-evaluation and performance management process, please view the recordings and shared presentations [posted here on the CCPS website](#).

Personnel

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

Job Openings

Building Service Worker — Henry E. Lackey High School, 12-month position. High school diploma or GED required. Position open until March 3.

Transportation Coordinator — Annex 1, 12-month position. A high school diploma required, with a bachelors in transportation planning, public administration or a related field preferred. Position open until March 5.

Computer Analyst — Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building, 12-month position. A high school diploma is required with one-to-three years of technically progressive current work experience in information networks and user support. Position open until

March 5.

Speech Language Pathologist — Starkey building, 10.5-month position. Masters in speech language pathology, communication disorders or hearing and speech sciences. Maryland license in speech and language pathology. Position open until March 5.

Administrative Intern for the 2026-2027 School Year — Location to be determined, 11-month position. Bachelor’s degree and Standard Professional Certificate issued by the MSDE required, along with three years of teaching experience. Apply by May 7.

JROTC Instructor — La Plata High School, 11-month position. Bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university required along with a minimum of 20 years of active duty or retirement under the TERA. Position open until filled.

Director of Finance — Starkey building,

12-month position. A masters in finance, accounting or a related field along with five years of experience in financial administrative role in a large public service organization or nonprofit. Position open until filled.

Special Education Teacher for SOAR Program — William B. Wade Elementary School, 10.5-month position. Position open until filled.

Building Service Worker — St. Charles High School, 12-month position. High school diploma or GED required. Position open until filled.

Extra Pay Positions

Varsity Volleyball Head Coach — Westlake High School.

Boys Lacrosse Assistant Coach — La Plata High School.

Assistant Baseball Coach — Lackey, apply by March 5.