

CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION



THE OPPORTUNITY ENGINE



Student Spotlight

Cohen Berry, has taken CTE classes at WBMS and is working on a CTE related project which advanced to the next level of the National Civics Bee competition. He will compete at Eastlake Community Church on April 9, 2026. His project focuses on Registered Apprenticeship, showcasing the importance of career pathways and workforce opportunities for students. We are proud of Cohen for this outstanding accomplishment and wish him continued success in the competition.

Opportunity Ready Portfolio Defenses

The Opportunity Ready Senior Portfolio Defense, held on March 17–18, marked an important milestone for our graduating seniors as they showcased the skills, experiences, and growth they have developed throughout their time with RCPS. These presentations highlighted a wide range of meaningful learning experiences, including classroom instruction, academic projects, and, for many students, Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities that extended learning beyond the classroom. Students reflected on how these experiences have prepared them for life after graduation, demonstrating both academic and career readiness. We were especially honored to welcome Jenna Conway, Virginia State Superintendent, who toured Roanoke County Career and Technology Center on March 17 and observed portfolio defenses at Northside High School. Her visit provided a valuable opportunity to showcase the incredible work happening across Roanoke County Public Schools, and we are grateful for her time and support in celebrating our students' achievements.



Photo of Caroline Frye defending her Opportunity Ready portfolio. She is a marketing student and DECA leader at Northside High School. Caroline highlighted her experiences through CTE including Cooperative Education through her marketing class, DECA Leadership, and the influence that CTE has had throughout her high school journey.

IN THE WORKS



General Advisory Committee (GAC) March 31, 2026

This meeting brings together industry and education partners to review programs, share insights, and strengthen opportunities for student career readiness.



Industry Insight Tour April 8, 2026

In partnership with Roanoke County's office of Economic Development, we will be hosting a tour at Trivium Packaging for teachers and students to learn about great career opportunities in the region.



Roanoke County Hiring Fair April 1, 2026 at Greenridge Rec Center

In partnership with the Greater Roanoke Workforce Development Board, this event connects graduating seniors seeking full-time careers and students looking for summer employment with local employers ready to hire.

Future Ready: Senior Summit

On March 19, 2026, Roanoke County Public Schools proudly sent 59 high school seniors to participate in the Future Ready: Senior Summit, an event designed to help students prepare for success in the workforce after graduation. Students from Cave Spring High School, Glenvar High School, Hidden Valley High School, Northside High School, and William Byrd High School attended workshops focused on career readiness and life after high school. Hosted by the Greater Roanoke Workforce Development Board, the event also brought together students from Salem City Schools and Roanoke City Schools. In addition to the workshops, students had the opportunity to attend a job fair featuring companies seeking to hire graduating seniors. Our students came prepared, represented Roanoke County well, and gained valuable knowledge to support their future success. We greatly value our partnership with the Greater Roanoke Workforce Development Board and appreciate their continued support in helping our students prepare for the future.



Teacher Feature

Meet Bill Slawson! CSHS TechEd Teacher!

Originally from Seville, Spain, and raised in New York, Bill brings a diverse academic and professional background to the classroom, holding degrees in Liberal Arts, Environmental Science, and Business Administration, along with a Master’s Degree from Hollins University. Prior to entering education, he spent nearly 25 years with the Walt Disney World Company, serving in a variety of roles, most notably in management.

After retiring early, he chose to pursue teaching, driven by a desire to share real-world experience with students in meaningful ways that extend beyond the classroom. In addition to teaching, he is an accomplished author, having written three books with a fourth set for release this July.



Mr. Slawson takes the greatest pride in his children and the many students he has had the opportunity to teach. Staying connected with former students is especially meaningful, and he makes it a point to remind each class that their journey together doesn’t end at the final bell—he is always welcome to hear from them.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

What a month! While late winter can sometimes appear to drag on... it has been an exciting time in the CTE office. In early March I visited Cave Spring High School for a cross-program collaboration between French classes and CTE Business classes (pics). Two business professionals – Mrs. Porier has worked in international government affairs all over the world and Mr. Squire works with the car company Rivian – iterated how they have used their French studies to further themselves in the business world. Thank you to Dr. Newbill for the invitation and to Mr. Slawson and Coach Gruse for helping their students to become Opportunity Ready by hearing from these well-traveled and successful business professionals. I had an opportunity to partner with Toni McLawhorn (Greater Roanoke Workforce Development Board) and Kara Joyce (Virginia Works) to present about work-based learning at the SWVA Construction Conference on March 11. Every year RCPS has students succeed at the highest levels of state competition in Career & Technical Student Organizations (CTSO’s) and this year is no different. Congratulations to our CTSSO state winners, most of whom qualify for national competitions later this calendar year! Of course much time has been spent by Mr. Jones (see his article in this newsletter) and yours truly working on the RCPS Perkins Plan and the related Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment that will be presented to the CTE General Advisory Committee and School Board around the time this newsletter is published. Until next time... thank you for taking time to peruse this newsletter and for your support of Career & Technical Education!

Jason Suhr
Jason Suhr



See the latest updates at: www.rcps.us/RCCTC

MARK’S REMARKS

Introducing Mark Jones, a vital part of the CTE team at central office, is instrumental in many aspects of CTE, most specifically curriculum development, certification testing, equipment purchases, and oversight of the Center for Engineering.

As we continue to refine how we prepare students to be truly Opportunity Ready, Roanoke County Public Schools has transitioned from the WISE Financial Literacy certification to the Workplace Readiness Skills (WRS) assessment. While financial literacy remains important, the WRS test expands our focus to the full range of skills employers consistently say matter most – communication, teamwork, problem solving, professionalism, and adaptability. Built around Virginia’s 22 workplace readiness competencies, this assessment helps ensure our students are not only knowledgeable, but prepared to succeed in real-world work environments. By emphasizing these essential, transferable skills, we are equipping students with the tools they need to thrive in any career pathway they choose.

That’s it for Mark’s remarks, stay Opportunity Ready!
Mark

**Opportunity
Engine
Podcast**

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