

R1
RISING
TOGETHER.



Spotlight One
2025-2026
Year In Review
A Richland One Publication



SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE



As we get ready for a new school year, I find myself reflecting on the 2025-2026 school year and what a truly meaningful first year it was for me as Richland One superintendent. It was a year defined not only by progress but also by resilience, collaboration and a shared commitment to moving this great district forward. It was a true team effort, one where we navigated challenges and celebrated successes together. Congratulations to everyone on an incredible school year!

In February, we launched R1 Vision 2030 and Beyond. This vision is grounded in our belief that every student deserves access to high-quality learning experiences, supportive environments and opportunities that prepare them for success outside of the classroom. **Learn more about R1 Vision 2030 and Beyond and watch the presentation video at RichlandOne.org/Vision2030.**

To our students: Your growth, creativity and perseverance inspire me every day. One of my favorite highlights of the year was keeping my promise to our students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade that if they collectively read for 2.5 million minutes, I would skydive out of a plane. It was definitely a frightening moment but also a moment of exhilaration and excitement. I couldn't have been more proud that our students surpassed their reading goal by almost double the time.

To our teachers and staff: Your dedication and care are the foundation of everything we accomplish. I'm excited about our Convocation later this summer where all staff will come together before the start of the 2026-2027 school year. We will spend the day engaging in meaningful dialogue and professional learning experiences that connect to R1 Vision 2030 and Beyond and the important work ahead.

To our families: Your engagement in your children's education not only enhances the learning experience for them but also enriches our school communities. When parents and schools work together, we create a supportive network that fosters students' academic success and personal growth.

To our community partners: Your support is enriching opportunities and experiences for our students, strengthening the connection between our schools and our community. Thank you for being an integral part of our district.

We are **#RisingTogether** and I cannot wait to see us build on our success this year and into the next. Enjoy the rest of the summer – I know I'll be brainstorming some ideas for our next reading challenge!

Sincerely,


Todd A. Walker, J.D., Ph.D.
Richland One Superintendent

2025-2026 HEADLINES

Richland One has no schools rated Unsatisfactory on state report cards

For the first time since the state began issuing school and district report cards in 2001, Richland One has no schools rated Unsatisfactory. The report cards measure schools across key performance indicators, including academic achievement, student progress, college and career readiness, and school climate. Schools are rated Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average or Unsatisfactory. Along with having no Unsatisfactory schools, Richland One's graduation rate has increased to over 84% and College and Career Readiness has increased to 73.3%.

SC Department of Education releases Richland One from fiscal caution status

In August 2024, the S.C. Department of Education escalated the district's status from fiscal watch to fiscal caution due to concerns about its financial and operational practices. State Superintendent of Education Ellen Weaver notified Richland One leaders in April 2026 that the district had satisfied the requirements for release from its fiscal caution designation, based on information provided and progress demonstrated.

Forbes ranks Richland One among South Carolina's best employers

Forbes magazine named Richland One as one of the best employers to work for in South Carolina. Fifty-five South Carolina employers made the magazine's 2025 ranking; Richland One was ranked 44th and was one of only eight school districts and one of only two Midlands districts on the list.



Class of 2026 graduates earn over \$95.2 million in scholarships

Richland One's Class of 2026 graduates collectively earned more than \$95.2 million in scholarship money, surpassing last year's total by more than \$15 million. Graduates who earned scholarships will use those funds to help further their education at colleges and universities in South Carolina, in other states and abroad. This year, 1,362 Richland One students received their high school diplomas.

POINTS OF PRIDE



Superintendent's Book Club Challenge

On January 12, Richland One Superintendent Dr. Todd Walker challenged students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade to read for 2.5 million minutes by March 16. If students met or exceeded that goal, Dr. Walker promised he would skydive out of an airplane. Students exceeded the goal by reading for 4,703,436 minutes! On March 26, Dr. Walker traveled to Skydive Carolina in Chester where he put on his skydiving gear and jumped out of a plane. Surabhi Raut of Rosewood Elementary School, who was the top elementary school reader of the 2026 Superintendent's Book Club Challenge, is pictured with Chief of Teaching and Learning Dr. Eunice Williams and Dr. Walker.



W.A. Perry Middle School, home of Richland One's middle school BLAST (Building Lasting Aerospace and STEM Trajectories) magnet program, was named a 2026 Magnet School of Distinction by Magnet Schools of America. W.A. Perry also was named the 2025-2026 National Aerospace Connections in Education (ACE) School of the Year by the Civil Air Patrol.

7

Schools earned Palmetto Gold and Silver Awards from the South Carolina Department of Education.

8

High school seniors were named semifinalists in the 2026 National Merit Scholarship Program.

70

Dual enrollment students earned certificates or associate degrees from Midlands Technical College.

819

Students completed career and technical education (CTE) programs of study within the 16 national career clusters.



A'Mya Goodwin

Southeast Middle School
CEO of Bubble Poppin' Glosses
2026 Young Entrepreneur of the Year Honoree
SC Council on Economic Education

POINTS OF PRIDE



10 STATE CHAMPIONS

Richland One sports teams and individual student-athletes won 10 state championship titles during the 2025-2026 school year.

- C.A. Johnson High School Boys Basketball (top photo)
- A.C. Flora High School Girls Soccer (bottom photo)
- A.C. Flora High School Baseball
- A.C. Flora High School Boys Tennis
- A.C. Flora High School Competitive Cheerleading
- A.C. Flora High School Girls Tennis
- Graicen Edwards (A.C. Flora) – Girls 3200-Meter Run
- Jhnai Sumter (Lower Richland High School) – Girls Discus and Girls Shot Put
- Lamareon George (Columbia High School) – Boys High Jump

122

South Carolina Seals of Biliteracy were awarded to 118 high school juniors and seniors who achieved proficiency in English and at least one other world language.



211

High school seniors were honored as Richland One Academic All-Stars.



AMERICA'S HEALTHIEST SCHOOLS



All 48

Richland One schools were named America's Healthiest Schools award winners by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. Richland One had more award winners than any other South Carolina school district for the third consecutive year.



212

Visual and performing arts honors and awards were earned by students, staff and schools.

CLASS OF 2026 SPOTLIGHTS

Avery Thompson A.C. Flora High School

Avery Thompson's mother is in the Air Force and she and her family have lived all over the world, flying from destination to destination throughout her childhood.

"I love being high up on planes. Right around middle school, I realized I had a passion for this. It's something I can see myself doing and loving," Avery said.

Avery came to A.C. Flora her sophomore year and immediately enrolled in engineering classes.

"The first day I stepped into my first engineering class, I loved it and I haven't stopped," she said.

Avery says that while she was one of the only girls in some of her engineering classes, she always felt welcomed. She said she enjoys engineering because she says there's always a way to fix a problem.

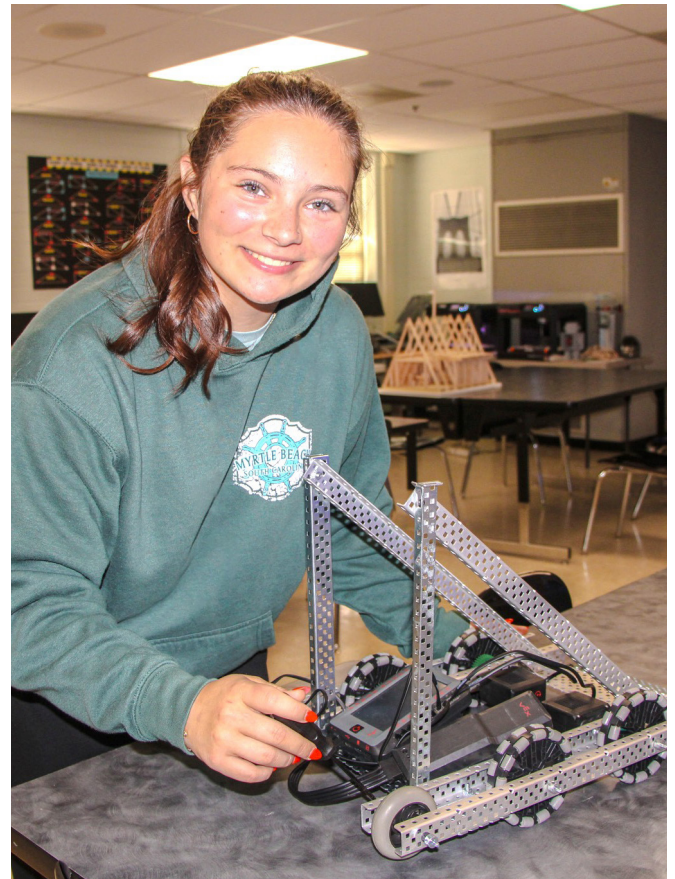
"There's never just one solution or one right answer. There are multiple ways to get what you need done," Avery said. "Planes aren't just a one-person thing. There might be one pilot, but there's a whole team behind it."

Avery is a career and technical education (CTE) completer in Project Lead the Way pre-engineering. She also earned her OSHA 10 certification and was A.C. Flora's 2026 CTE Student of the Year.

"I wasn't expecting to be named the CTE Student of the Year, but I was happy to receive it and proud to represent my school," Avery said.

Avery will study aerospace engineering at the University of South Carolina in the fall. She is working on getting her private pilot's license.

"If STEM and aerospace is something you love, you'll reach that goal," Avery said.



Malek Cherry Columbia High School

If you asked Columbia High School senior Malek Cherry a few years ago what he wanted to do after graduating, he would've said cybersecurity. But a field study for his school's Teacher Cadet program opened his eyes to the education profession.

Last year, Malek did his field study in a third-grade class at W.S. Sandel Elementary School. He recalls working with a small group of students on an assignment.

"Seeing the students form their own ideas and help each other out, it really made me fall in love with education. I saw myself being an educator in the future," Malek said.

When Malek became a Teacher Cadet, he was the only junior in the program. In his senior year, Malek took on a leadership role, helping his fellow Teacher Cadets gain confidence in themselves.

"Having that leadership position gave me an idea of what it would be like to work with older students. It made me want to teach secondary education even more," he said.

Malek will be attending Columbia College in the fall with a major in middle level education and a concentration in social studies. He also has been accepted into the college's Call Me MiSTER program, a teacher recruitment and retention initiative dedicated to increasing the number of educators in public schools.

Returning to Columbia High to teach is one of Malek's goals, but he hopes he can make an impact beyond the classroom. He wants to become Richland One superintendent and be inducted into the Richland One Hall of Fame. Malek is already at an advantage when it comes to his goal of being in the Hall of Fame. He was named Columbia High's 2026 Legend in the Making.

"I want to come back to Richland One and help it be even better than it is now. Being a Legend in the Making really keeps me on track of achieving that goal," Malek said.





PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: Westinghouse Electric Company

Candice Simons-Cash grew up in the Lower Richland community, attending Webber Elementary, Hopkins Elementary and Hopkins Middle schools before graduating from Lower Richland High School in 2000.

Today, she serves as what she calls a “good neighbor” in her role as communications consultant at Westinghouse Electric Company in Hopkins.

“I have so much pride in my community and so much pride in being educated in Richland One. When I do this kind of work, I do it with such pride,” said Simons-Cash, whose mother was a teacher at Hopkins Elementary and whose father worked at Westinghouse for over 40 years.

Since 2023, Westinghouse has donated nearly \$200,000 to schools in the Lower Richland cluster to help fund STEM programs, school supplies and other classroom needs. But Simons-Cash says that Westinghouse has been making an impact in Lower Richland cluster schools even before 2023, with employees teaching fire safety to students and participating in reading buddy programs.

In May 2026, Westinghouse donated \$10,000 each to Gadsden, Horrell Hill, Hopkins and Webber elementary schools, Hopkins and Southeast middle schools and Lower Richland High School. An additional \$10,000 was donated to Lower Richland’s robotics team, the Electric Hornets, which the company sponsors.

Members of the robotics team said that the donation will help them get the parts they need and give them opportunities to build different kinds of robots.



Rising senior Alyssa Barefoot said she’s hopeful for the future of the Electric Hornets, thanks to the support from Westinghouse.

“I hope that with Westinghouse’s continuing contributions that we can compete in state-level competitions,” she said.

Simons-Cash says she hopes the partnership between Westinghouse and Richland One helps the company find talented, locally based workers and continue to grow the area that she calls home.

“We’re building the future of Lower Richland and we’re building the future of Westinghouse,” she said.



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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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First Day of School for StudentsAugust 6
Labor Day Holiday September 7
Thanksgiving Break November 23-27
Winter Break December 21-January 1
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday January 18
Spring Break March 22-March 29
Last Day of School for Students (Early Dismissal) . . . May 26

View the full calendar at RichlandOne.org or scan the QR code.

