Winter/Spring 2026

the Buzz

Highlights from SCSDB Hornet's Nest



The Special Olympics cheerleading squad proudly demonstrates their first-place formation.

Cheerleaders dance it out to 1st place!

The SCSDB Special Olympics cheerleading squad traveled to Gaffney High School on Feb. 10 for an Area 12 competition. They performed a cheer, a chant, and also a dance to the Kidz Bop song "HOT TO GO!"

Gaffney High School also had a traditional cheer team that competed in the same division with a very spirited routine. The Hornets snapped, clapped, touched their toes, and raised their hands to win first place!

Squad members, pictured above, are Lexi Lopez (junior), Tristan Bradley (10th grade), Ca'Mayra Boulware (senior), Sierra Stefani (senior), Jakai Coakley (9th grade), Mya Cornelius (junior), DJ Peake (junior), and Ja'Aleeyah Riley (10th grade). Coaches are Aly Davis and Rachel Moreno.

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Winter/Spring 2026

Table of Contents

3 ..... President's Message

4-5 ..... School for the Blind

6-7 ..... CSA (Cedar Springs Academy)

8-9 ..... School for the Deaf

10-11 ..... AAC (Applied Academic Center)

12-13 ..... Transition Services

14-15 ..... CLRC (Library)

16 ..... Fine Arts

17 ..... Residential Life

18-19 ..... Athletics

20-21 ..... Statewide Outreach Services

22-23 ..... SCSDB Foundation

Distributed to the parents of students currently enrolled at SCSDB, parents of students receiving outreach services, the SCSDB Board of Commissioners, and the SCSDB Foundation Board of Trustees.

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Special thanks to **seniors Kaylee Ellison, Evan Gimmaka, Yakera Martin, and Brian Starkey; juniors Cammie Lowe and Dayana Orellana; 10th graders Izzy Collins and Tazmin Hill;** and each school for photographs.

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South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind

Dear Friends,

For me, the winter months invite reflection. They call us to gather closer, to celebrate milestones, and to ready ourselves for the work still ahead. Springtime in the education field is especially busy, and reflection allows us to stay more grounded in our core principles. This year, that reflection centers on the themes of growth through connection and leaning into challenges.

In classrooms across our School for the Deaf, School for the Blind, Cedar Springs Academy, the Applied Academic Center, and our outreach programs, I have learned of students stretching themselves in remarkable ways. Whether facing academic frustrations, athletic challenges, or putting themselves outside of their comfort zones for a performance or activity, our students chose courage. And behind every lesson, event, or competition is a network of adults—teachers, associate teachers, interpreters, therapists/specialists, residential life staff, bus drivers, food service staff, maintenance teams, administrators, coaches, and volunteers — who model daily what it means to lean into challenges together.

This year's themes ask something of all of us. Growth through connection. It means asking for help. It means listening deeply across differences. It means choosing collaboration over isolation. Leaning into challenges requires courage. Each day, we see students and staff attempt what feels difficult, problem-solve when solutions are not obvious, and learn and grow through the process.

I see this lived out within our SCSDB community in so many ways! I see families partner with teachers to support communication goals. I see community partners invest in our programs and open doors for work-based learning opportunities. I see alumni return to celebrate our school and current students. I see staff across departments align around a shared mission to engage, empower, and equip every student for success.

Thank you for entrusting us with your children. Thank you for cheering from the sidelines, supporting performances, attending meetings, and sharing your insights. Thank you for being part of a community that does not shy away from challenges, but instead celebrates them for the learning opportunity they present. I hope you enjoy this edition of the Buzz as we celebrate accomplishments big and small!

With gratitude,

Jolene Madison

Jolene L. Madison
President, SCSDB



Reniece Vassell, junior, is a ready supporter and encourager of young builders in Kelly's Kids. Students like Reniece from Angela Collier's class for Child Development come to Kelly's Kids on Thursdays during 1st and 3rd periods to gain experience with the children and working in an early childhood education center.

SCSB School for the Blind



Dr. Yu's student, Shon, feels a tactile mural of a dragon in the school halls.

Teachers learn from Monarch experts

The School for the Blind has partnered with Dr. Paul Yu from Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, MI, to provide professional development in mathematics instruction.

As part of the training, teachers will be gaining a better understanding of how to use the Monarch, a revolutionary multi-line refreshable braille display device. The Monarch improves real-time, tactile access to graphs, coordinate planes, and even algebraic written problems.

The Monarch is designed to enhance education and accessibility for users who are blind or low vision by combining text and tactile graphics on a single device. The device can be connected to an iPad or a Promethean board to transmit what is on either of those devices to the Monarch. The Monarch instantly converts the display to something tactile, as well as brailles any written words accompanying the display.



Dr. Yu brought his student, Shon, from Grand Valley State to meet and talk with students about his experiences as a totally blind, international college student. Shon is also an expert at using the Monarch.

Math journal publishes article by teacher

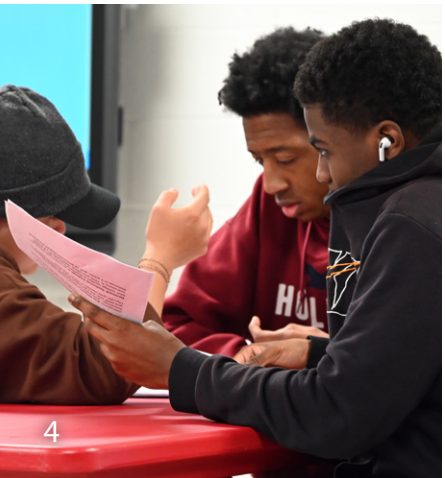
The MathMate, the journal distributed by the South Carolina Council of Teachers of Mathematics, published middle grades math and science teacher Sonya Duncan's article: "Literacy: The New Focus for Mathematics."

In the article, Sonya outlines the connection between literacy skills and the ability to build a solid foundation in mathematics. She accurately highlights the similarities between English teachers teaching students to dissect sentences and math teachers dissecting essential parts of problems and how these tasks promote a deeper understanding of the concepts being taught. She sums up her article by encouraging teachers to revitalize the use of older teaching strategies to couple with newer techniques in an effort to promote depth of knowledge and eventual mastery.



Sonya Duncan teaches her middle schoolers.

Sonya has 25 years of experience as a classroom teacher and is in her first year at SCSDB.



Celebration includes highlighting local or SC Black history

Projects highlighting local or South Carolina Black history have enriched Robertson Hall's three hallways – a new addition to the School for the Blind's annual celebration of Black History Month.

A continued tradition is that each day the school highlighted a Black American who is blind or helped people who are blind or low vision. The celebration culminated on Feb. 27 with some of the hallway projects presented and the annual Black History Quiz Bowl.

Tyrek Capers (junior) and Tomier Sanders (9th grade) prepare their answer for the quiz bowl.

Brian Starkey interviews Principal Peter Kosko Ocampo

Senior Brian Starkey wanted to interview his new principal because he thought people would like to hear what Peter had to say. Questions and answers are condensed due to space limitations.

How did you hear/learn of the School for the Blind/SCSDB as a whole?

Peter: I have always known about the SC School for the Deaf and the Blind, since I am a SC native. However, I did not know that this agency has several schools. Only when I saw the posting for the principal for the School for the Blind did I realize the agency splits the different schools up the way we are currently organized.

When did you decide or how did you decide to apply to be the SCSB principal?

Peter: I've been serving as a special education director for the past decade. In that particular job one does not work directly with students, and there is limited contact with teachers. … I really wanted to get back to working with students which is how I began my career. When I saw the posting for this position I immediately was interested since it combined my administrative experience and my experience working with students with disabilities. I immediately applied sometime after spring break of last school year.



Brian Starkey and Principal Kosko Ocampo take a photo together.

When did your career in the education system begin and what did you start off as?

Peter: I began my career in the 1999-2000 school year — the turn of the century. I started out as a self-contained special education teacher in a very rural school in the midlands of SC. I spent the majority of my time as a teacher working with students with mild intellectual disabilities.

What were you expecting in this position over a school of blind and low vision students and staff?

Peter: I have supervised many Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) over the years, and they have taught me many nuances about working with students who are blind or low vision. I also have taught a few students over the years who had low vision … However, I didn't expect the amazingly close sense of community we have at the school.

What do you honestly think of your staff and students?

Peter: I LOVE where I am. I truly feel I have the best students and staff that I could imagine having. I brag to my educator friends around the state of SC about working at what I call Disney World, because this truly is the happiest place on Earth. I feel truly blessed to be with the students and staff I get to work with every day. This was the best professional decision I have made to this point in my career.

If you left the education industry, what would you want to do?

I've not yet decided on my next life, but it will probably be something with the food and beverage or hospitality industry. I do enjoy being around people.

CSA
Cedar Springs Academy



Ke'Mareon Turner (senior), DJ Peake (11th grade), Ja'Aleeyah Riley (10th grade), and Ca'Mayra Boulware (senior) ride with their class on the back of a tractor on a Happy Cow Creamery tour.

Sampling farm-to-table treats produces 'happy' students

During their visit, CSA students enjoyed an hour-long tractor-pulled wagon ride with a guide around the 100-acre farm, Happy Cow Creamery in Pelzer, on Nov. 18.

Students learned the history of the creamery, the challenges the owners faced, and the journey that led to its success as a dairy farm. The dairy has been in operation since 1979 and is the last remaining dairy farm in Greenville and Pickens counties.

Watching the cows move from one field to another, students learned about the farm's commitment to caring for its animals. The cows are grass-fed, the pastures are free from chemicals, and the health of the herd is a top priority.

As a special treat, students sampled ice cream and milk produced directly from the farm's dairy cows. They also had the opportunity to practice important real-world skills, including money handling and budgeting, while visiting the on-site store.

Planetarium visit enhances Apollo mission study

A CSA class visited the new local planetarium for a meaningful and immersive learning experience as part of their ongoing study of the solar system and the Apollo space missions.

The field trip to the Planetarium Learning Center at the Spartanburg County Public Libraries' Headquarters Library in downtown Spartanburg provided students with information that directly supported their classroom learning. Through the planetarium's large domed screen and descriptive audio, students gained a deeper understanding of what astronauts experienced during the Apollo 11 mission. The presentation also provided valuable historical context by highlighting key moments in the timeline of space exploration in the United States.

The experience was both engaging and educational, allowing students to connect scientific concepts with important historical events in a memorable way. Overall, the visit offered an inspiring journey into the past and helped deepen students' appreciation for space exploration and scientific discovery.



CSA high school students are excited to be some of the first to experience downtown Spartanburg's new planetarium.

3D-printed models of bowling pins in a frame lead to strikes



Bowling pins crafted with cutting-edge 3D printing technology on display.

At CSA, staff members are always looking for meaningful ways to turn innovation, such as 3D printing technology, into opportunity for students who are blind or low vision.

Using 3D printing technology transforms abstract concepts into hands-on learning experiences. By creating tactile models, students gain access to information they cannot see, but can explore, understand, and use with confidence.

A favorite example occurs during students' bowling activities. Because students cannot visually see the pins from the lane, that gap is bridged with a 3D-printed model of the bowling pin setup. After each turn, students explore the model with their hands to feel exactly which pins were knocked down and which remain standing. This tactile feedback allows them to problem-solve, make adjustments, and better plan their next attempt, skills that are essential both in sports and in everyday life.

This approach has made a meaningful difference. Students gain independence, improve accuracy, and build confidence as they prepare for Special Olympics competitions and other community events. Programs like these reflect SCSDB's deep commitment to accessible learning, creativity, and student success. With the continued support of families and community members, SCSDB can continue expanding innovative opportunities that empower students to learn, compete, and thrive.





Susan Mitchell helps her 11th grade students to feel the 3D printed bowling pins. This hands-on experience helps them understand how to aim for the pins in their next round of bowling. Left: Alexiana Lopez; right: Mya Cornelius

SCSD
School for the Deaf



Kaylee Ellison (senior) is recognized as an All-Around All Star for her outstanding performance at the Academic Bowl.

Academic Bowl

The School for the Deaf team shined brightly at the Academic Bowl Southern Regional Competition held at the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind. Competing against 16 other schools, the SCSD team showcased exceptional skills, scoring over 350 points in eight matches and advancing past pool play for the first time in 25 years! A big round of applause goes to Kaylee Ellison, who was recognized as an All-Around All Star for her outstanding performance.

Congratulations to team members, pictured below: Ayden Johns (junior), Coach Cathi Holst, Kaylee Ellison (senior), Coach Alicia Blake, AJ Murillo (junior), and Seven Franklin (junior).





Left: The Academic Bowl team assembles on the steps near Memminger. Right: The team collaborates at a table to tackle an academic challenge at their competition in Florida.

Learning meets adventure

School for the Deaf middle schoolers recently dove into the "Friday Fun Labs," an initiative designed to blend fun, connection, and positivity, all aimed at fostering a vibrant school climate. These labs are becoming a cherished tradition that students eagerly anticipate each week.





Joshua Joseph teaches Bryce McRae (8th grade), Ivan Rivas Avila (8th grade), Kamari Worthington (7th grade), and Lucas Coates (8th grade) about car engines. Sheri Farrington supervises as Hannah Collins (8th grade) pours milk into a mixing bowl.

Celebrating McAlister Scholarship achievers

The McAlister Scholarship is a fantastic opportunity for students who are deaf or hard of hearing at SCSDB. It's really helping students like Dacorion Horton and Alan Gaona-Lopez shine as they chase their academic and career dreams. Thanks to their hard work and this full-ride scholarship, they're making impressive strides in their journeys.

Dacorion Horton is off to a strong start in his first year at Winthrop University. Originally enrolled in the Graphic Design program, he discovered a newfound passion for Fine Arts, prompting a shift in his academic focus. As a proud McAlister Scholar, he is embracing every opportunity, setting the stage for future accomplishments.

Alan Gaona-Lopez's journey began at Tri-County Technical College, where he laid an academic foundation as a McAlister Scholar. His time there was pivotal, shaping his career goals and equipping him with essential skills. Alan has since transitioned into the workforce, where he applies his knowledge and dedication to new professional challenges.

Supported by the McAlister Foundation, the SCSDB Foundation, and SCSDB, the McAlister Scholarship continues to open doors, supporting students like Dacorion and Alan so they can flourish in their chosen pursuits.





Left: Alan Gaona-Lopez is recognized at Awards Day in 2024 by President Jolene Madison. Right: Dacorion Horton receives his scholarship certificate in 2025 from former Director of Education Services Kristi Harding.

The Wildlife Geeks paid a special visit to the SCSDB campus, bringing along an array of fascinating animal friends. Students had the unique opportunity to get up close and personal with a prairie dog, guinea pigs, a boa constrictor, a tarantula, a chameleon, and a rabbit, among other critters. This interactive experience not only captivated the students but also enriched their understanding of the natural world.

Brantley Jones (4th grade) smiles as he stands next to a long-haired guinea pig held close to his head.



AAC
Applied Academic Center



Ava Raleigh (senior) and agriculture teacher Annette Bodie work together in the new greenhouse.

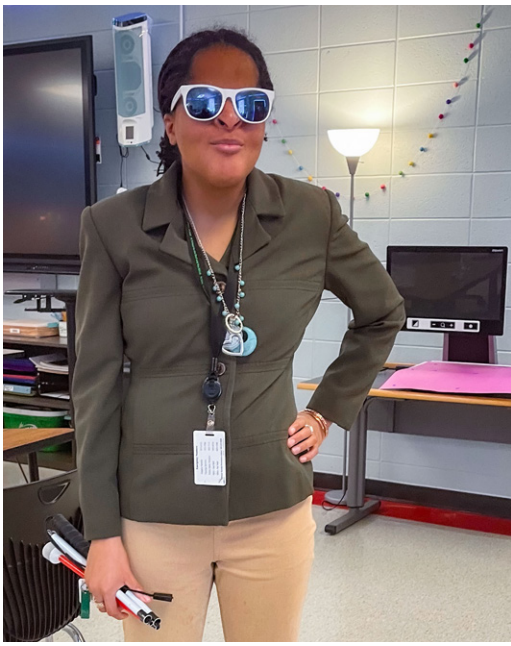
Mock Interview Day bridges classroom learning and career success

Mock Interview Day brought 17 business partners from the Upstate community to campus to interview AAC students and provide valuable real-world experience on Feb. 18.

Sophomores participated in one introductory interview, while juniors completed two interviews, and seniors tackled three interviews — giving each student multiple opportunities to showcase their skills and professionalism.

Students worked hard to prepare for this important day since returning from winter break. Under the guidance of dedicated job coaches and Career Technical Education (CTE) instructors, students created polished resumes and cover letters, researched common interview questions specific to their career fields, and practiced their responses to ensure they were ready to shine.

"This event is invaluable for our students," shared Dee Stark, director of CTE. "It gives them hands-on experience in a low-pressure environment where they can build confidence and receive constructive feedback from industry professionals. We're grateful to our community business partners for investing their time in our students' futures."



Kaitland Davis (senior) stands confidently wearing her business attire while waiting for her first interview.

Advisory Board brings industry expertise to campus

The spring Advisory Board meeting on March 6 brought business and industry leaders to campus for updates and celebrations of their previous collaborative efforts and brainstorming of new ones.

These representatives from all career clusters offered at AAC help shape AAC's programs and ensured students are prepared for success. The Advisory Board meetings have proven instrumental in developing key student opportunities, including the Mock Interview program, industry credential offerings, and student competitions. These dedicated professionals provide valuable insights into current industry trends, hiring needs, and the skills employers are seeking in today's workforce.

"Our Advisory Board members are true partners in education," noted Dee Stark, Career Technical Education director. "Their real-world perspective helps us keep our programs relevant and responsive to the needs of our community's employers."



Advisory board members enjoy breakfast while attending a presentation on AAC credentials currently offered and providing input on potential additions.

Earning safety certification adds to employability



Students at AAC gain valuable insights into essential safety practices in the carpentry workshop.

Earning Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)10-hour Safety Certification is on the State of South Carolina's Industry Recognized credential list. AAC students had the opportunity to acquire this certification.

OSHA is a U.S. federal agency under the Department of Labor that sets and enforces protective standards to ensure safe, healthy working conditions. The certification entails the students learning: Hazards of Falls, Struck by Objects or motorized vehicles, Caught in or between moving objects, and Electrocution. These are the causes of 60% of deaths in industry. AAC staff added Excavations to the learning outcomes due to the projects happening on the SCSDB campus. Students observed firsthand the safety concerns during excavations.





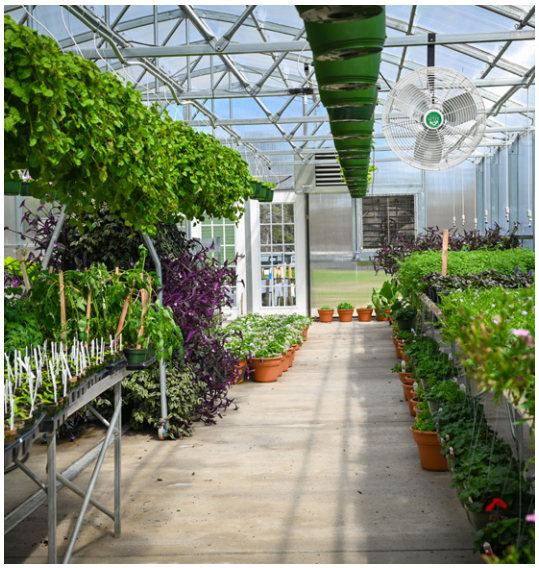


Sierra Stefani (senior) carefully listens to the presentation. Jonathan Perez-Gomez (senior) hones his skills with the electric saw. Manny Geronimo Marcos (junior) tries on a hard hat.

AAC Spring Plant Sale

Horticulture students have been carefully cultivating a wonderful selection of annuals and perennials, plus fresh vegetables and herbs perfect for your spring garden. The annual AAC Plant Sale will be March 30—April 2.

Students gain real-world experience in plant production, customer service, and business operations. Every purchase supports their education and helps fund future program activities.





Left: Plants in the greenhouse

Right: Ava Raleigh (senior) holds up a plant before potting it.

Transition Services



Cailynn-Ann Campos (9th grade) smiles while holding a pigeon.

Career Ready!

Transition Services have been buzzing with activity, showcasing the incredible achievements and opportunities students are experiencing as they prepare for their future careers.

In November, agriculture students embarked on a field trip to Roebuck Landscaping. They were given the hands-on task of following a landscape plan to plant trees, shrubbery, and flowers. This immersive experience was complemented by a delicious lunch from Bronco's, and the students are already looking forward to returning next year to see the fruits of their labor.





Above, left: On a sunny day, students, staff, job coaches, and Roebuck Landscaping team members gather outdoors, some holding gardening tools and plants, ready to embark on a day of planting. Right: Agriculture students work together, planting shrubs and small trees in a dirt area. Manny Marcos Geronimo (junior) is keen on ensuring the trees are planted in the perfect spot.



In December, juniors and seniors had the opportunity to engage with an admissions representative from Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), broadening their academic horizons.

Left: School for the Deaf high school students stand with the RIT admissions representative after a presentation on the university's programs.

Russell Hill, junior, at the School for the Deaf, has successfully transitioned from training to securing a true hire position at Walmart, where he fills online orders with the guidance of his job coach, Connor Miller.

Students also explored the veterinary field, with **Izzy Collins** (10th grade) and **Cailynn-Ann Campos** (9th grade) participating in a job shadow at the Spartanburg Animal Clinic. They observed a surgical procedure, providing them with invaluable insights into veterinary medicine. Additionally, Cailynn-Ann spent a day at Magnolia Fawn Rescue, further enhancing her understanding of animal care.



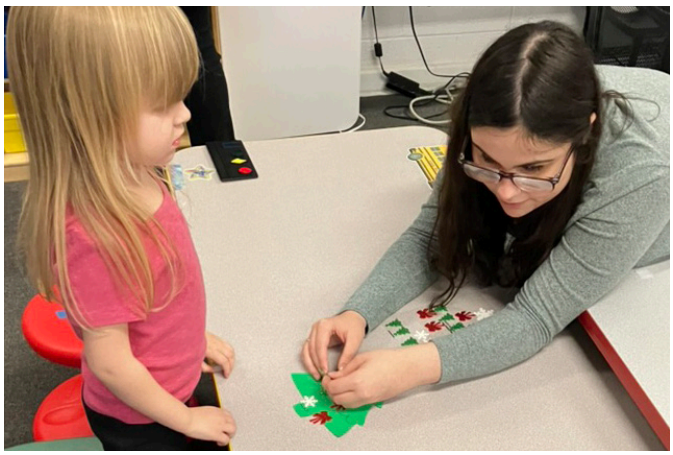
Russell Hill (junior) and Connor Miller, job coach, stand in a Walmart aisle beside a shopping cart filled with various items.





Above, left: Izzy Collins (10th grade) and Cailynn-Ann Campos (9th grade) are excited to work with animals at the Spartanburg Animal Clinic. Right: Cailynn-Ann Campos (9th grade) feeds a brown cow with curved horns in a wooded outdoor area.

Piper Graham, a senior at the School for the Blind with aspirations of becoming an elementary school teacher, is gaining practical experience working with young students, guided by her job coach, Sammie Gilreath. **Traveon "TJ" Jones** (junior) is thriving in his work-based learning placement at the Marriott hotel, contributing to the housekeeping team with diligence and enthusiasm.





Left: Piper Graham (senior) helps Makenzie Bartlett (PK4) feel the shape of a Christmas tree in the preschool classroom.

Right: TJ Jones (junior) folds and processes laundry at the Marriott.

These stories represent just a glimpse of the potential and dedication of SCSDB students. SCSDB is immensely proud of the strides these students are making.

Library

Cleveland Learning Resource Center



From left to right: Brian Starkey (senior), Langston Moore (author), Breanna Sharpe (10th grade), Izzy Collins (10th grade), Preston Thorne (author), and Director of Library Services for Curriculum & Assessment Mary Diones celebrate the #JustaChicken event.

Hop on the Polar Express!

The library transformed into a magical winter wonderland. Job coach Connor Miller read "The Polar Express" to the students, who were seated in a train-like arrangement, enjoying the warmth of hot cocoa and cookies.



Connor Miller, job coach, reads the story aloud to the students.



Mary Diones is magically transformed into a North Pole elf!



Damari Heyward (6th grade) finds himself transported into a winter wonderland.



Connor Miller stamps 3rd grader Stephen Caddell's train ticket.



School for the Blind 10th graders Austin Bishop and Cameron Stitt assist with serving cookies and hot cocoa.



Library staff recreates the front of the Polar Express train.

Just a chicken

The author presentation of "#JustaChicken" proved to be far more than just a typical book reading! This Gamecock themed children's book, written by former University of South Carolina football players Langston Moore and Preston Thorne, encourages readers with its vibrant illustrations and the heartwarming journey of Cocky, a young chicken in pursuit of a trophy. Through his adventures, Cocky discovers the power of self-acceptance and the realization that true greatness comes from within.

During their visit, Moore and Thorne imparted the book's uplifting message: "You are not confined by your circumstances!" They emphasized how reading and writing can unlock a world of opportunities for children.



Moore and Thorne lead a presentation in the library.



5th graders Knightlyn Greene and Aria Sue join in the book group exercises by making the ASL signs for bird and rooster.



Moore reveals the true meaning of being more than #JustaChicken.



Sara Burgan, special education services, engages with King Gadson (1st grade) using ASL animal signs.



Students decide they aren't just chickens and put their spurs up!



School for the Blind students Mia Moldthan (2nd grade) and Makenzie Bartlett (Pre-K) listen as the authors read the story.



Moore signs #JustaChicken autographs for students.



School for the Deaf elementary students make silly faces with the authors.

Fine Arts



Students and staff get on the school bus to return to campus after a day in downtown Columbia.

America, This Land I Love

The SCSDB Chorus recently had the prestigious honor of performing once again on the Statehouse floor for the South Carolina House of Representatives. The choir's first performance, "America, This Land I Love," beautifully honored America's upcoming 250th birthday, with the inspirational composition by Douglas E. Wagner, Katherine Lee Bates, and Samuel A. Ward. The choir then performed a stirring rendition of "Give Me Wings" by John Rutter.


Lauren Stanaland, CSA music teacher, guides Destinee Hall (senior), Ashton Jackson (7th grade), and Brock Potter (6th grade) through the Statehouse doors into the lobby.


Surrounded by representatives, the SCSDB Chorus performs on the Statehouse floor.


Choir members pause for a photo with their district representatives on the Statehouse steps.

Residential Life



Anyeli Ortiz Sabillon (5th grade) and Tyonna Walker (kindergarten) enjoy a kids meal at Chick-fil-A.

Fun meal out teaches independence to students

A few residential students worked on their independence by ordering their food and paying for it on their own at Chick-fil-A on Feb. 12. Staff were available to help.

The students enjoyed eating dinner and had a blast playing on the playground equipment. This outing allowed the students time to bond and socialize with each other off campus.







Sierra Stefani (senior), Tyonna Walker (kindergarten), and De'Naza Harrington (Pre-K) play on the indoor playground.

Robertson Annex Appreciation Party

In December, students residing in Robertson Annex threw an Appreciation Party, borrowing the kitchens and common areas in a TLC dorm to host their guests. Each student invited someone who they appreciated being in their lives. Students cooked and served food for them, including salad and spaghetti.



Ja'Aleeyah Riley (10th grade) serves a drink to Azael Cruz (9th grade) at the Appreciation Party.

Athletics

INTRODUCING OUR SPRING TEAMS...



Track & Field

Back row: Head Coach Michael Sims, Kamari Worthington, Carter Bryant, Didier Lorenzo, Tomier Sanders, and Assistant Coach KC Smith; *front row:* Levi Gonzalez, Zeaveon Washington, Azaria Chalk, Zoey Blackman, Kaden Corbin; *not pictured:* Assistant Coach LaTarsha Durrah, Sophie Chapman



Youth Basketball

Back row: Gage Brown, Kamari Worthington, Head Coach Antiwan Tate, Roger Shepherd-Dionne, and Damari Heyward; *front row:* Nykyta Landin, Justin Pena Bravo, Khalil Grate, and Anyeli Ortiz Sabillon; *not pictured:* Assistant Coach Michael Sims, Zoey Blackman, Brantley Jones, Neela Nilsson, Mateo Papadopoulos, Dekoata Smales, Kaison Smith, and Zarannah Womick



Girls Basketball

Back row: Team Manager Kendriyana Brown, Hannah Collins, Cammie Lowe, Coach Hillary Key, Lor'reyel McClinton, Azaria Chalk, Kenzie Childress, Assistant Coach Victoria Roa, Zoey Blackman, A'She-Rah Jeter, and Team Manager Dayana Orellana; *front row:* Ryleigh Rabon and Yakera Martin



Boys Basketball

Back row: Coach Carl Duke, Wyatt Harvell, Robert Wofford, Russell Hill, Manny Geronimo Marcos, Jeremiah McFadden, Jahmere Daniels, Assistant Coach KC Smith; *front row:* Team Manager Toby Allen, Carter Bryant, Kaden Corbin, Didier Lorenzo, and Bryce Mcrae; *not pictured:* Team Manager Zeaveon Washington

Senior Night





Seniors on the basketball and cheer teams are presented with gifts from their coaches on Senior Night. *Left:* Assistant Coach Jacqueline Booker, Piper Graham (senior), and Coach Shannon Wright; *right:* Coach Hillary Key, Yakera Martin, Ryleigh Rabon, Kendriyana Brown, and Assistant Coach Victoria Roa

Statewide Outreach Services



Andrea Martinez Johnson, ELAS, uses Visual Language as she engages Bowen Toto in creating images with Play-Doh.

Visual Language Services, ASL Services evaluate language growth

High-quality video allows Visual Language Services's Early Language Acquisition (ELAS) team specialists to pinpoint exactly where and how each child acquires language thanks to a Hearing Health Grant.

A professional-grade Video Production Backpack Kit was purchased in May 2025 with the grant funds. This kit was designed to provide the mobile technology needed to conduct high-fidelity assessments in the field. The equipment is now a primary tool for Visual Communication Sign Language (VCSL) assessments for SCSDB's Early Intervention family visit services, supporting children aged 0 - 5 and their families in achieving critical language goals.

This level of detail was previously unattainable and allows for highly customized intervention strategies for each family. The ELAS team now has tangible data showing significant language acquisition growth across their caseload, providing evidence of the program's success. With the equipment fully integrated into their workflow, the team expects to double their assessment capacity by the end of 2026.

The grant came from the national Sertoma organization, but the SCSDB Foundation's grant request was sponsored by the Uptown Sertoma Club of Spartanburg. Sertoma Clubs in South Carolina are community service organizations focused on "SERvice TO MAnkind," with a primary mission of supporting speech and hearing-impaired individuals and, often, children's charities.

ASL Services has seen unprecedented growth. Since Summer 2024, offerings have expanded from a foundational 2 ASL courses and 4 classes to a robust curriculum of over 10 classes.

This growth is powered by three dedicated ASL instructors, who bring a wealth of diverse skills and specialized experience to participants. To ensure statewide accessibility, a flexible learning model is provided: hosting onsite-classes at the SCSDB library and offering virtual sessions for parents of SCSDB children across the state.

Kelly's Kids staff receive specialized training

The Kelly's Kids staff received training from Tonya Hayes from Purposeful Play and Amy Shapley-Farrell, recruitment and outreach coordinator, BabyCoach and CRAwl programs, part of the SC Child Care Inclusion Collaborative.

The training was focused on strategies to support the varied developmental and learning needs of children in the Kelly's Kids program. The Child Care Ready for All (CRAwl) program is a partnership of the USC College of Nursing, the Department of Social Services, and the SC Child Care Inclusion Collaborative.



Camren Lowe, junior, assists Kyser Morgan to dip his fingertips in paint and make ornaments on a paper evergreen tree.

Angela Collier's class for Child Development in the Applied Academic Center comes to Kelly's Kids on Thursdays during 1st and 3rd periods to gain experience with the children and working in an early childhood education center. The students created and implemented a holiday activity, put on a puppet show, and read books with the Kelly's Kids students.

Bright lights, big smiles make magical night at Riverbanks Zoo

As the sun set on Jan. 8, the South Carolina DeafBlind Project (SCDBP) gathered for an evening of winter wonderland magic and connection at the Riverbanks Zoo's "Wild Lights."

Ten families from six counties across the state came together to make memories and build relationships as they enjoyed a walk through a display featuring dazzling, large-scale, handcrafted lanterns shaped like animals, plants, and mythical creatures. Joy filled the air as children and adults alike enjoyed sensory-rich festive activities including the glowing moonlight swings, the "snowfall", photo ops, and seasonal treats.

Because deafblindness is a rare disability, families often feel like they are navigating a complex world of medical and educational hurdles all on their own. SCDBP Family Engagement events are designed to break that isolation.

For a child with deafblindness, authentic connection is the very foundation for learning. By prioritizing fun, SCSDBP allows families to bond over shared joy rather than just the daily work of caregiving. When parents and siblings feel supported, they are empowered to create the secure, loving environment every child needs to thrive.



Three generations share the magic of a holiday lights display at Riverbanks Zoo in Columbia that includes a towering, glowing teal Christmas tree and large, intricate star lanterns in shades of purple, blue, and white. Asher Mellitz, seated in his wheelchair, is accompanied by his mother, Braeden L Noe-Mellitz, and grandmother, Heather Noe. The boy and his mother are wearing matching blue shirts with a snowman design, adding a festive touch to their evening.

Learning to bring joy to the classroom

DeafBlind Project staff provided a professional development workshop to the Charleston County School District (CCSD): "Designing Joyful Learning Experiences for Students with Complex Needs."

More than 30 professionals — including teachers, therapists, support staff, and pre-service teachers — focused on strategies for creating meaningful, engaging, and accessible learning experiences for students with complex needs.

The highlight of the workshop was the "Make-and-Take" session where participants created six different learning activities for their students and left with a renewed vision for bringing joy to their classrooms.



Workshop participants collaborate and use craft supplies to create accessible activities for their students.

Agencies connect to collaborate

Wanting to support families of children with DeafBlindness and complex needs, staff from Family Connection SC, South Carolina's Parent Training Information Center, and SC DeafBlind Project met for a time of discussion and training. Attendees participated in simulation activities that included finding items on a cluttered surface; listening to a story with limited access; waiting; and trust building. These simulations provided interventions, strategies, and resources that are helpful for families when navigating the world of DeafBlindness.



A group of people are wearing simulation goggles and ear plugs while searching for small, colored objects on pieces of brightly colored and patterned fabric on a table.

SCSDB Foundation



A vibrant array of winter coats in shades like black, blue, green, purple, and red hang on two coat racks, ready to warm their new student owners.

Coats of many vibrant colors warm students

Many people have heard Dolly Parton's autobiographical song,"Coat of Many Colors." Through the heart-warming lyrics, we learn that young Dolly was so poor that her mother could not afford to buy her a winter coat. Instead, her mother used assorted rags to sew together a coat of many different colors. Dolly was so proud of the coat that she could not understand why her classmates made fun of her when she wore it to school.

Fortunately, students do not have to experience the teasing that Dolly endured at school because of her homemade coat. For some years now, the Foundation has made sure that any student who needs a winter coat is given one. Before the 2025 Thanksgiving holidays, more than 60 students were gifted with warm winter coats. These coats come from one of the generous supporters of SCSDB.

Barbara Fay of residential life services worked with Rebecca Farr, SCSDB Foundation financial manager, to select and order coats in sizes, styles, and colors tailored to fit each student's preferences. Barbara knows the students well, so her expertise was very helpful. The joy on the students' faces when they received their colorful new coats was wonderful to observe. Not only do the coats keep students warm, but also they are a reminder to them that people in the community care about their well-being. The Foundation is grateful to the Spartanburg family that funds this program every year.



School for the Deaf elementary students are excited to wear their new, very warm winter coats.



In the back row, Kash Bradshaw (8th grade), Gideon Inman (10th grade), and Kaitland Davis (senior) join forces with the front row performers: Zoey Blackman (7th grade), Izzy Collins (10th grade), and Destinee Hall (senior), as they delight the club members with holiday melodies.

Holiday Luncheon marks nine decades of Lions Club tradition

On the morning of Dec. 8, staff members noticed a delicious smell of fried chicken wafting through Walker Hall. The SC School for the Deaf and the Blind Foundation was preparing to host the 91st annual Spartanburg Lion's Club Holiday Luncheon at SCSDB.

Members of the Spartanburg Lion's Club and Southside Lions Club were coming to campus to be honored for their service to SCSDB's blind/low vision students.

At noon, Sam Hook, SCSDB Foundation executive director, welcomed everyone and recognized special guests. Then, SCSDB Foundation Board Chairman William Littlejohn gave opening remarks. After the Pledge of Allegiance and an invocation, a delicious lunch of fried chicken, mashed potatoes with gravy, green beans, tossed salad, dinner rolls, assorted cake slices, iced tea, and lemonade was enjoyed by everyone. Sodexo staff did a great job of preparing the food. Southside Lions Club provided beautiful centerpieces for each table.

Next on the agenda was an Update about SCSDB given by Tiffany Hopkins, director of special education. Then, Kosta Kakouras, School for the Blind teacher, led the installation of officers for the students' LEO club. Afterwards, everyone enjoyed a holiday program of songs by the SCSDB choir, led by Dr. Josh Padgett, director of fine arts. At the end of the program, Weslie Higdon, president of the Spartanburg Lion's Club, presided over a club meeting. The Foundation is very grateful to the Spartanburg Lions Club for their continuing supporting of SCSDB's blind/low vision students.



Members of the Board of Commissioners, staff, and Lions Club gather to watch the SCSDB Chorus perform in the festively decorated Habisreutinger Reception Area.

School for the Deaf and the Blind

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We want to meet your family!

SCSDB campus programs are always accepting applications for new students. Our online application can be accessed at **www.scsdb.org/apply**. Please contact **Angela Fordyce** at **864-577-7506** or **admissions@scsdb.org** for more information about the application and enrollment process and/or to schedule a campus tour.

Come and see what SCSDB can do for you in your area of the state! The **SCSDB division of outreach services** provides a menu of options for parents, families, and the professionals who serve them that include and are not limited to, specialized early intervention services, school district educational services, sign language interpreting, and ASL classes! For more information on our statewide outreach services available in your area, please contact **Scott A. Falcone** at **sfalcone@scsdb.org** or **1-800-984-4357**.