

Column Recurring Title: **Rooted and Growing: The Southampton Story**

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Dr. Thompson with the Southampton High School Administrators and Staff

There is a moment on the first day of school when the building seems to come alive.

The hallways fill with voices. Classroom doors open. Teachers welcome students. Bus drivers deliver their precious cargo. Cafeteria workers prepare breakfast and lunch. And suddenly, after weeks of planning and preparation, the school year is no longer something on the calendar. It is here.

Monday was a wonderful day across Southampton County Public Schools.

I had the opportunity to visit every classroom at every school, greet our students, and welcome everyone back for a new school year. I also distributed “Team SCPS” sunglasses to our teachers and staff as a small reminder that, although we each have different roles, we are truly one team.

I visited classrooms filled with smiling students, excited teachers, and the energy that comes with a new beginning. My feet were definitely tired Monday night, but it was a great kind of tired!

Perhaps most encouraging has been hearing from our families and community throughout the week. We have received several positive calls and social media comments from people who described the opening of school as a smooth start. Those comments are a credit to our principals, teachers, transportation staff, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, office staff, and everyone who worked behind the scenes to prepare for Monday morning.

A successful first day does not happen by accident. It happens because hundreds of people work together with a shared purpose: to take care of our students.

And while I was excited to see students back in our classrooms, I was equally excited to see what is happening in our Career and Technical Education (CTE) or Votech programs at Southampton High School.

This week, our CTE students hit the ground running.

In Agriculture, students are already identifying local trees and plant species through hands-on learning. With the addition of Forestry Dual Enrollment, Floral Design, and Horticulture, our students have new opportunities to explore careers connected to agriculture, natural resources, and the environment. Our Future Farmers of America (FFA) students are also preparing for an upcoming community Color Fun Run.

Our Health Sciences students are preparing for careers in healthcare, and interest in Nurse Aide is so strong that the program is already operating at capacity with a waiting list.

In Cosmetology, students are back at their mannequin stations developing the skills they will need for the professional world. Early Childhood Education students are preparing for work-based learning through a partnership with the Children's Center in Courtland, while students in the new one-year pathway with Camp Community College and returning second-year students work toward career credentials.

Our Business, Marketing, and Multimedia students are learning about personal finance, entrepreneurship, marketing, yearbook production, digital media, and community outreach. And our skilled trades and technology programs are creating even more opportunities. Students are participating in Welding and Electrical Career Studies Certificate programs through Camp Community College, while Cybersecurity and Dual Enrollment IT courses are preparing students for an increasingly digital workforce.

This is what opportunity looks like.

It is students learning by doing. It is classrooms connected to careers. It is partnerships with higher education and local organizations. And it is our schools helping students see possibilities for their futures that may have once seemed out of reach.

That same spirit of collaboration extends beyond Southampton County. This week, I joined several Region 2 superintendents in Suffolk to meet with State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jenna Conway. These conversations give us an opportunity to learn from one another, advocate for our students, and work together on the challenges and opportunities facing public education across our region.

The first bell has rung, and our students are off and running.

There is a lot of work ahead. But after spending this first week visiting classrooms, talking with educators and students, and seeing the opportunities taking shape in our schools, I am more excited than ever about where we are headed.

We are rooted in a community that cares deeply about its children.

And we are growing – one classroom, one opportunity, one student, and one future at a time.

This is just the beginning.



Dr. Thompson and Southampton Middle School Staff Door Greeters Wearing Team SCPS Sunglasses