

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

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There is something special about the beginning of a new school year. Hallways are filled with energy, classrooms are filled with learning, and schools are alive with the sounds of students and educators beginning another journey together.

As I reflect on these first weeks of this school year, I am reminded that our schools do not stand alone. They are rooted in a community that cares deeply about our children, our families, and our future.

One of the greatest blessings of serving Southampton County Public Schools is witnessing that support in action.

We are incredibly grateful to the Southampton County Board of Supervisors and County Manager Lynette Lowe for their continued partnership and for the recent allocation of \$605,000 for HVAC repairs and replacements and district roof repairs. These investments are important not only for the immediate needs of our schools but also for the long-term health of our facilities and the learning environments we provide for our students and staff.

We are especially thankful for the assistance of Buildings and Grounds Director Lynn Parker and his staff, who have worked alongside our team to help us address concerns behind Courtland Elementary School. Their willingness to respond, problem-solve, and work collaboratively is a wonderful example of what can happen when county and school division teams work together toward a common goal.

We are grateful for the support of Southampton County and look forward to continuing to strengthen this partnership. When we work together, our students are the ones who benefit most.

Our gratitude extends throughout the broader Southampton community.

The Franklin-Southampton Area Chamber of Commerce warmly welcomed our new educators with welcome packets filled with thoughtful goodies and, most importantly, a great deal of love for the people who have chosen to serve our students. What a wonderful way to say, “We are glad you are here.”

Our schools have also been blessed by generous community partners. We appreciate Deerfield Correctional Center, Alexandra Pacheco, the Wyche/Sturdifan Family, and Sycamore Baptist Church for their generous donations to Capron Elementary.

We thank Al Briggs and the Courtland Masonic Lodge, Barnes United Methodist Church, and Solenis for their generous donations to Meherrin Elementary. We are equally thankful to our faith-based community partners who joined us for our annual Prayer by the Pole at Meherrin before school opened on August 31.

At Nottoway Elementary, we were grateful for members of our local churches who joined us for the community prayer breakfast on August 27. We also appreciate Ivor Masonic Lodge #291 and Millfield Baptist Church for their generous donations of school supplies.

Riverdale Elementary has also experienced the generosity of our community. We extend our sincere thanks to Hunterdale Christian Church, Unexpected Grace, Sycamore Baptist Church, We Are All One Home Health Care, Legacy 54, and TaylorMade Fitness for their donations of school supplies.

At Southampton Middle and High, we are grateful to Boykins Baptist Church for their donations of school supplies and Parker Oil & Propane and Exxon Mobil for their support through a \$500 Educational Alliance Program grant.

We are grateful for our growing partnership with Family 4 Eternity, which continues to invest in the health, wellness, and future of our students. Most recently, their generous donation of 15,000 pounds of fresh apples provided nutritious food for our students, staff, and families, while their donation of 30 Stanley cups supports hydration and wellness across our schools. Through the Seed to Succeed program, Family 4 Eternity has also established seed libraries at Southampton High, Southampton Middle, and Capron Elementary, creating opportunities for students to learn about sustainability, nutrition, environmental stewardship, and growing their own food. Their partnership is expanding even further this fall, with plans to provide a healthy pre-game meal each month for our football team.

Each of these acts of generosity, whether a significant investment in our facilities, a welcome packet for a new teacher, school supplies for a child, a financial grant, or simply the gift of gathering together in prayer, sends the same powerful message:

Our community cares about our schools.

As we continue this school year, I hope we will remember that being “Rooted in Excellence, Growing Together” is not simply a theme for our schools. It is a reflection of who we are as a community.

Our roots run deep because generations of families, educators, community leaders, businesses, churches, organizations, and neighbors have invested in Southampton County and its children.

Thank you for continuing to invest in us.

Thank you for believing in our schools.

And most of all, thank you for helping us grow together.