

Column Recurring Title: Rooted and Growing: The Southampton Story

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Specific Article Title: “Six Schools, One SCPS”

Specific Article Due Date: September 21, 2026



Robbie Clements, Emily Jarratt, Bill Hatch, Dr. Julie Thompson, Karl Heck, Lorraine Green-Whitehead, and Trish Tsitsera at the Rotary Club of Franklin, Virginia on Sept. 18

One of the things I have enjoyed most during these first months as superintendent is seeing just how much is happening in our schools. Every building has its own personality, traditions, and opportunities, but when you step back and look across Southampton County Public Schools, a larger picture emerges.

Our schools are creating places where students belong, families connect, teachers inspire, and children discover new possibilities.

At Riverdale Elementary, school spirit is helping students build a sense of belonging, while fourth- and fifth-graders are being introduced to opportunities to participate in instrumental music.

At Meherrin Elementary, the theme “Team Eagles. One Team. One Mission. Every Eagle Soars!” is coming to life through traditions like Pizza on the Playground and the first Friday Pep Rally. Students cheered, danced, competed, and celebrated their Eagle pride—with Kindergarten taking home the first gold medal!

At Capron Elementary, students have been learning their colors through a schoolwide celebration that has brought joy to the school day. Across the division, students and staff also paused on September 11 to remember those whose lives were lost in 2001. These moments remind us that education is about more than academics; it is also about helping young people understand their world and their place in it.

At Nottoway Elementary, family engagement is taking center stage. With the first PTO meeting behind them and a Book Fair, Parent Lunch Week, and Title I Reading Night ahead, families have many opportunities to become active partners in their children's education.

At Southampton Middle School, the return of the JJV Girls Basketball Team gives students another opportunity to belong, develop their skills, build relationships, and experience the pride that comes from being part of a team.

At Southampton High School, we are focusing on something fundamental to student success: being present and ready to learn for every class, every day. Our message is simple: **Every Student. Every Class. Every Day. On Time.**

Students should be in their assigned classrooms and ready to learn at 7:30 a.m. Students arriving after 7:30 should report to the Tardy Center in The Commons, where their tardiness will be documented and they will receive a pass to class. Three tardies equal one absence.

Being on time shows respect, builds success, and keeps students on track. I encourage our parents and families to partner with us because every minute of learning matters.

SHS is also preparing students for what comes next. On September 29, SHS will partner with Camp Community College to host VACA/College Night, bringing more than 30 colleges together in one location. Our Gifted Arts students are also gaining real-world experiences through partnerships with Rawls Museum Arts and The Hubs Vine.

This week, I was reminded of the important role our community plays when I had the opportunity to serve as the guest speaker for the Rotary Club of Franklin, Virginia, on Friday, September 18. I was grateful for the invitation and honored to present with members of our SCPS leadership team: Emily Jarratt, Director of Secondary Curriculum and Instruction; Bill Hatch, Director of Technology; Robbie Clements, Director of Operations; and Lorraine Green-Whitehead, our Parent/Family Liaison.

My message to Rotary was simple: our schools cannot do this work alone. I shared our vision of being *Rooted in Excellence. Growing Together.* and the importance of seeing where we are, naming where we want to go, and doing the work necessary to get there. I also challenged our community to see our schools as an investment in Southampton County's future and to consider

ways to support students, from mentoring and internships to simply encouraging a child and helping them see what is possible.

I am grateful for organizations like Rotary that understand that when we invest in children, we invest in the future of our entire community.

Different schools. Different students. Different experiences.

But one school division.

That is what I love about Southampton County Public Schools. Our schools may each have their own traditions and personalities, but we are all working toward the same goal: ensuring that every student knows they belong, is challenged to grow, and has the opportunity to succeed.

We are rooted in what makes our schools special while continuing to grow toward what our students need for tomorrow.

And when I look at what is happening across SCPS, I am reminded that our greatest strength is not found in any one school, program, classroom, or activity.

It is found in all of us – growing together.