

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

Column Author: Dr. Julie Thompson, SCPS Superintendent

Specific Article Title: “Growing Together: Learning, Leading, and Celebrating Our SCPS Family”

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“First Friday at Meherrin Elementary School - PINK OUT for Breast Cancer Awareness”

One of the things I am learning very quickly about Southampton County Public Schools is that there is no shortage of people who care deeply about our children. You see it in classrooms, in meetings, on ball fields, and in the little moments that might not make the news but matter so much to a child.

This week was another great example. Across our division, we were learning, planning, celebrating, and, most importantly, growing together.

Growing Through Leverage Leadership

We continued our work to strengthen teaching and learning through Leverage Leadership 3.0, including a coaching visit at Southampton Middle School. Our team visited 14 classrooms across grade levels and subject areas, looking for opportunities to celebrate what is working and identify one meaningful next step for each teacher.

I was encouraged by the work around lesson planning. Professional Learning Community (PLC) teams are unpacking standards and thinking carefully about how standards, objectives, and daily instruction connect. Our coaches are also helping teachers develop weekly planning tools, with the goal of building teachers' capacity to eventually create and use these resources independently.

We also saw strong, orderly student arrival at SMS, reflecting the intentional planning and teamwork that went into creating the minute-by-minute arrival plan this summer. There is still work to do, but that is exactly what continuous improvement looks like: celebrate the progress, identify what can be better, and keep moving forward.

Leading and Learning Together

Our Leadership Meeting brought department leaders and principals together to share updates, problem-solve, and make sure our work remains connected across the division. We discussed school improvement, instructional quality, transportation, safety, technology, special education, and much more. One theme kept coming back: using data and communication to make decisions that ultimately improve outcomes for students.

At our principals' meeting, we continued those conversations while focusing on school improvement, dismissal and parent communication, instructional support, testing, gifted services, and Leverage Leadership. I am grateful for principals who are willing to ask hard questions, share ideas, and work together for the good of our students.

Stronger Together

I also enjoyed connecting this week with two important community partners, United Way and The Children's Center. I believe strongly that our schools cannot (and should not) do this work alone. When schools, families, businesses, and community organizations come together, our children have a stronger network of support and more opportunities to thrive.

Friday Night Pride

Thursday night, our Southampton High School Indians took the field against Sussex for our home varsity football game. While we certainly would have loved to see a different score, I was incredibly proud of our players and coaches.

They played hard until the very end and showed tremendous sportsmanship throughout the game. As I watched them, I was reminded that we are not only preparing students for the next test or the next grade level. We are helping prepare them to be good people, and our young men represented SCPS beautifully.

Ending the Week with Joy

And then there was Friday at Meherrin Elementary!

First Fridays at MES are clearly something special. I was so happy to join them for dancing, competition, laughter, and a Pink Out in support of Breast Cancer Awareness.

First grade won the gold trophy for best team pennant, fourth grade celebrated the highest attendance at an amazing 98%, and Ms. Geary's homeroom achieved 100% attendance!

I also loved hearing about MES's "surprise attendance days." Students never know when they will hear, "*The Eagle has landed!*" – but when they do, everyone who is present gets a special treat. And on National Smarties Day, Smarties were the perfect reward for showing up!

As I drove away from MES, I found myself smiling. This is what being rooted and growing looks like. It is high expectations and hard work, but it is also laughter, relationships, school spirit, community, and celebrating our children.

There is a lot of work ahead of us, but there is also so much to be proud of. And I am grateful every day that I get to do this work alongside the people who make Southampton County Public Schools so special.

Have a wonderful week, Southampton County family. Keep growing!