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It was another inspiring week across Southampton County Public Schools! From collaborating with educational leaders across Virginia to celebrating new playgrounds, engaging families, and enjoying a memorable Homecoming at Southampton High School, this week offered plenty of reminders of what makes our Southampton County family so special.

I had the opportunity to attend the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) Fall Conference in Richmond, where school leaders from across the Commonwealth gathered to inspire, inform, connect, and explore new ideas. The conference provided valuable opportunities to learn from colleagues and consider innovative approaches to the challenges and opportunities facing public education. Highlights included discussions about artificial intelligence in the classroom, practices that move student learning forward, regional partnerships for instructional excellence, and building systems that support student success. We also heard important updates from Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction Jenna Conway and Virginia Secretary of Education Dr. Jeffery Smith. I appreciated the opportunity to meet with Superintendent Conway and continue building connections that will benefit our division. Collaboration matters, and we are stronger when we learn from one another.

This week, I also had the opportunity to present updates on Southampton County Public Schools at the Southampton County Board of Supervisors meeting alongside our Director of Operations, Robbie Clements. We shared progress on facilities improvements, student safety, career pathways, and long-term planning. We discussed the HVAC and roof projects supported by the County's $605,000 appropriation, the relocation of Fresh Start, our Student Health Center, and our application for Rural Health Transformation Grant funding to develop Pharmacy Technician and EMS career pathways for students. We also provided updates on our divisionwide facilities work, school accountability results, and the transition of custodial and maintenance services back to SCPS.

One especially important part of our conversation centered on student safety. We presented a proposal to replace all 18 school-zone flashing beacons across our six schools. I am grateful that the Board of Supervisors gave its blessing to move forward with this important investment. Our students' safety is a shared responsibility, and we appreciate the County's continued partnership in making our school zones safer for students, families, and our community.

Our elementary schools have also been busy bringing families into the learning experience through Title I Reading Nights! This week, Capron Elementary and Meherrin Elementary hosted engaging Halloween-themed evenings filled with trick-or-treating, interactive stations, and

opportunities for students and families to enjoy reading together. Our school staff and community partners worked together to create fun, welcoming experiences that made literacy exciting. These events remind us that learning does not stop when the school bell rings. When families, schools, and communities work together, wonderful things happen!

We also had two exciting ribbon-cutting ceremonies this week! Both Meherrin Elementary and Capron Elementary celebrated new playgrounds designed especially for our pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. These grant-funded improvements give our youngest learners additional opportunities to play, explore, develop friendships, and grow. There is something special about watching little ones discover a new place to climb, run, imagine, and play. We are grateful for the grant support that made these playgrounds possible and look forward to seeing our students enjoy them for years to come.

Finally, Friday and Saturday were especially memorable at Southampton High School as we celebrated Homecoming 2026! The festivities brought together students, staff, alumni, families, and community members for a wonderful celebration of school spirit and tradition. Members of the Class of 2006 returned to celebrate their 20-year class reunion, and our Homecoming Tailgate and Pep Rally helped build excitement throughout the day.

We also enjoyed a lovely presentation of our 2026 Homecoming Court. Director of Special Education and Acting Southampton High School Principal Dr. Camilla Ferebee, Virtual Instruction Specialist and Acting SHS Administrator Alger Nichols, and I had the honor of presenting our Homecoming Prince William Holland and Princess Zoe Banks and Homecoming King Riland Aldrich and Queen Mia Warren with their sashes and flowers. It was a special opportunity to recognize these students and celebrate this longstanding school tradition.

Another meaningful moment of the evening was a special recognition of Theodore Haynes as the recipient of the SHS School Spirit Award. Athletic Director Deshon Jenkins and I were honored to present this recognition in grateful appreciation of Mr. Haynes's lifetime of unwavering dedication, loyalty, and commitment to Southampton High School. His passion, enthusiasm, and school spirit have inspired generations of students, athletes, and fans. His contributions have created lasting memories and a legacy that will forever be part of SHS. Mr. Haynes is a wonderful reminder that the spirit of a school is carried not only by the students who walk its halls today, but also by those whose dedication has helped shape its history. Once an Indian, Always an Indian!

Friday night brought an unforgettable finish as our Southampton County Indians took on the Windsor Dukes and earned an exciting 72–0 victory! The energy, enthusiasm, and Indian pride throughout the evening were wonderful to see. On Saturday night, students gathered for a beautiful Halloween-themed Homecoming Dance from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m., bringing our Homecoming celebration to a festive close.

As I reflect on this week, I am reminded that growing together means celebrating every part of our school community. It means learning from colleagues, working alongside our county partners, creating meaningful experiences for our students, investing in safe and welcoming schools, and honoring the traditions that bring generations of Southampton families together.

Every week, in big ways and small, we are planting seeds for the future of our students and our community. Thank you to everyone who continues to contribute to this work.