2025–26 Year In Review



cms
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

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MESSAGE
FROM THE BOARD OF EDUCATION



Dear Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community,

Public education is built on a simple but powerful promise: every child, regardless of background or circumstance, deserves access to an exceptional education. What happens inside our schools reaches far beyond the classroom. It shapes families, strengthens communities, builds our workforce, and impacts generations.

We began the 2025–26 school year with much to celebrate. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools achieved record academic progress, with more schools meeting or exceeding growth than ever before. Across more than 180 schools and nearly 140,000 students, CMS continues to demonstrate what is possible when we remain focused, committed and unwilling to compromise on excellence.

We are not simply working to meet expectations. We are working to set the standard.

That progress is made possible by our exceptional educators, dedicated staff, engaged families, students, and community partners who continue to show up and stand in the gap. Their hard work, heart, and commitment bring our mission to life each day.

Our responsibility is to ensure that every student graduates from CMS prepared for what comes next: enrolled in higher education, enlisted in the armed services, or employed in a meaningful and sustainable career. That is not just a district goal. It is a promise to our students, our families, and this entire community.

Yet, achieving this vision requires continuous investment and active advocacy. As Charlotte-Mecklenburg grows, we remain committed to expanding specialized academic pathways, modernizing facility infrastructure, and deepening literacy and support across all grade levels. Sustaining record-setting growth demands that we remove barriers to achievement and guarantee resource equity in every neighborhood. Through strong policy, active legislative engagement, and responsible public stewardship, we will ensure every child has the resources and support necessary to fulfill that promise.

The progress we are seeing belongs to all of us. Thank you for continuing to support our schools, believe in our students and partner with us as we build a stronger future for Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

Sincerely,

Gregory "Dee" Rankin
Chair, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education

MESSAGE
FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Dear Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Families, Staff, Partners and Friends,

The 2025–26 school year will be remembered as a landmark year for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Together, we achieved historic academic gains that demonstrate what is possible when students are supported by dedicated educators, engaged families and a community united around their success.

Students across CMS made remarkable progress, resulting in some of the strongest academic outcomes in district history. These gains earned national recognition and positioned us as a leading example of educational excellence. The Education Recovery Scorecard recognized CMS as one of the nation's fastest-improving large school districts for academic recovery and student achievement. The Center for Public Research and Leadership also featured CMS in its national study, *All Systems Go: How Shared, High-Quality Curriculums Are Helping School Districts Reach Higher, Together*, highlighting our commitment to instructional excellence and high-quality curriculum implementation.

Success extended beyond the classroom. Our students excelled in athletics, arts, career and technical education, leadership and community service. The class of 2026 earned more than $90 million in scholarships and graduated prepared for college, careers or military service. We also strengthened partnerships, expanded innovative learning opportunities and continued investing in the success and well-being of every student.

These accomplishments reflect the dedication of our educators and staff and the support of families, community partners and our Board of Education, who share our belief that every student deserves an excellent education.

This ***Year in Review*** highlights many of the successes that defined the year, but it represents only a snapshot of the extraordinary work happening across our district every day.

As we celebrate these achievements, we remain focused on the future. We will continue pursuing ***Excellence Without Exception,*** building on this momentum to expand opportunities, strengthen outcomes and create a future filled with ***Endless Possibilities*** for every student.

Thank you for your partnership, trust and commitment to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. We are honored to do this most important work with you.

In partnership,

Dr. Melissa W. Balknight

Acting Superintendent

AT A GLANCE

Our Mission

To create an innovative, inclusive, student-centered environment that supports the development of independent learners.

Our Vision

To lead the community in educational excellence, inspiring intellectual curiosity, creativity and achievement so that all students reach their full potential.

2024–29 Goals

Early Literacy

Percent of kindergarten through second grade students scoring at or above benchmark in early literacy as measured by DIBELS will increase from **67%** in June 2023 to **91%** by June 2029.

Grades 3–8 Literacy

Percent of students scoring college and career ready (CCR) on reading end of grade assessments in grades 3–8 will increase from **30.5%** in September 2023 to **50%** by June 2029.

Math I

Percent of students scoring college and career ready (CCR) on Math I assessments will increase from **27.4%** in September 2023 to **57%** by June 2029.

Postsecondary Readiness

Percent of high school students graduating with their graduation cohort on track to be enrolled, enlisted or employed, as demonstrated by achieving at least one indicator, will increase from **72%** in June 2023 to **85%** in June 2029.

CORE BELIEFS

Public education is essential to democracy and necessary for economic opportunity, mobility and the broader public good.

We are responsible for building and maintaining a high-performing school district.

Each student is uniquely capable and deserves an engaging, relevant and challenging educational experience.

Our principals and teachers make the critical difference in student achievement and building a positive school community.

The school system, families and communities are necessary partners in ensuring the academic, social, emotional and behavioral success of students.

2024–29 Guardrails



Equity over Equality: Equitable Distribution of Outcomes (Closing Gaps)

While ensuring schools have the resources needed to meet student needs, the Superintendent shall not neglect strategies or resources for significantly reducing achievement gaps.



Safety

The Superintendent shall not allow an unsafe environment in schools, at school-related events or on transportation.



Attend to the Whole Child: Student Well-Being & Engagement

The Superintendent shall not neglect social-emotional support, character development support, attendance support or access to enrichment activities that successfully engage students.



Staffing: Teacher Recruitment, Retention & Engagement

While ensuring all schools have teachers equipped to deliver high-quality instruction, the Superintendent shall neither neglect targeted nor comprehensive strategies for teacher recruitment, retention and engagement.

AT A GLANCE

Scan for more information about the Strategic Plan

Pillars of Excellence/Strategic Plan

Our strategic plan enables excellence without exception.
Our vision and mission have driven our Goals and Guardrails, which collectively enable four Pillars of Excellence across our school system—academic excellence, people excellence, operational excellence and engagement excellence.

Academic Excellence

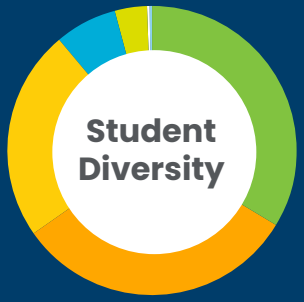
People Excellence

Operational Excellence

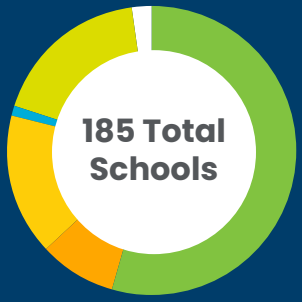
Engagement Excellence



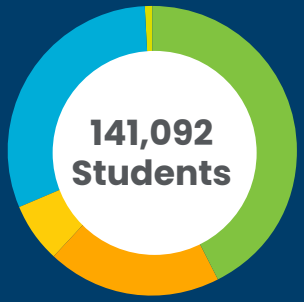
We employ more than **19,000 teachers, support staff and administrators**, making CMS one of the largest employers in Mecklenburg County (49.4% of the workforce are teachers and 37.5% of them have advanced degrees).



33.8% Black
31.5% Hispanic
23.6% White
7.0% Asian
3.8% Multicultural
<.1% American Indian
<.1% Pacific Islander



101 Elementary Schools
16 K–8 Schools
29 Middle Schools
2 Middle/High Schools
33 High Schools
4 Alternative Schools



60,144 Elementary Students
27,423 Middle Students
9,481 K–8 Students
43,338 High Students
706 Special Program Students



Approximately 140,000 students

We proudly serve a richly diverse population of students and families. Our students represent **174 countries** and speak **177 native languages and dialects**. Our top 10 languages spoken by students other than English are Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Portuguese, French, Telugu, Egyptian Arabic, Hindi/Indian/Urdu, Tamil and Burmese/Myanmar bhasa.

AT A GLANCE

CMS students make significant academic gains in 2025–26

CMS achieved across-the-board academic growth, marking a significant leap in proficiency and performance for the 2025–26 school year. The results were released in September 2026 as part of North Carolina's annual school accountability reporting and reflect continued progress across CMS schools and student groups. Among the district's year-over-year gains:

- **CMS increased in overall grade proficiency in every content area** with significant increases in:
  - Reading (grades 3–8), +4.0%
  - Math (grades 3–8) , +3.5%
  - Math I, +7.1%
- **76.9% of third grade students demonstrated proficiency** through the state's Read to Achieve measure. Third grade reading proficiency on the state assessment increased 11 percentage points, from 46.3% to 57.3%.
- **Nearly 79% (136) of CMS schools earned an A, B or C school performance grade,** an increase of approximately 8 percentage points from the 2024-25 school year and 26 percentage points since 2021–22.
- **The district's four-year cohort graduation rate** increased to 87.9%, up 3.3 percentage points from the previous year.
- The majority of CMS schools continued to **demonstrate strong student growth,** with 83.3% meeting or exceeding growth.

Scan for more Student Achievement Results

"This progress belongs to our students, teachers, school leaders, staff and families. These results show what is possible when we remain focused on strong instruction, high expectations and providing every student with the support they need to succeed. These results represent thousands of individual stories of students learning, growing and reaching important milestones. Our responsibility now is to continue accelerating that progress so that every student, in every school and every community, has access to an excellent education."

—Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill

2025–26 Operating Budget

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools $1.9 billion 2025–26 operating budget was prepared with the urgent needs of our students in mind. The budget aligns with the district's resources and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education's priorities outlined in the Goals and Guardrails.

Sources of Funding



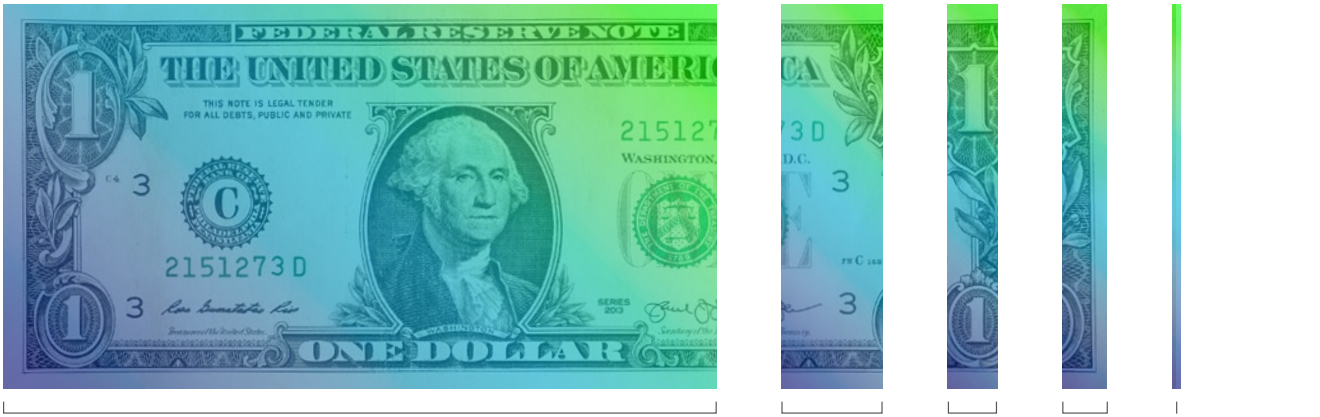
55.8%
State

34.4%
County

6.1%
Federal

3.7%
Other Special Revenue

Uses of Funding



78.2%
Salaries and Benefits

11.1%
Purchased Services

5.4%
Supplies and Materials

4.9%
Charter School Pass Through

0.4%
Furniture and Equipment

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Jayla Spikes, Cochrane Collegiate/ iMeck Academy

Passion drives this CMS graduate to top design school for an animation career.

Jayla Spikes has a passion for animation, including cartoon styles ranging from "Hilda," a British-Canadian series, to "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" and the Spider-Verse series. As a student at Cochrane Collegiate/iMeck Academy, she developed her creative skills with an eye toward a career in animation, an expanding but highly competitive field.

"Even before I was in this school, I think I always knew I wanted to do animation," Spikes said. "I think graphic design has really pushed me even more toward that goal because it's a very 'art' thing. There's a lot of typography and a lot of creativity involved."

Spikes, a Charlotte native, graduated on June 10 from iMeck, part of Cochrane Collegiate Academy (a 6-12 school). Students in iMeck (grades 9-12) learn the digital marketing, multimedia, graphic design, editorial and communications skills needed to produce powerful content. Spikes is majoring in animation at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), known nationally and internationally as a premier art and design institution.

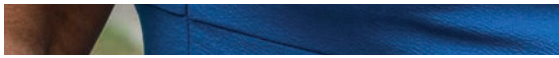
"I came to iMeck because of the artsy side of the school," Spikes said. "I really like how this school is smaller, and that's what makes it so nice. I have such a personal interaction with the teachers, and I think that really helped with my education and has given me a lot of opportunities."

Spikes is a strong self-advocate who championed equity as an Exceptional Children student while excelling in the Adobe Career and Technical Education pathway. She said she had a lot of choices at iMeck and always had help if she needed it. She gained hands-on experience through a paid internship, dual enrollment and college-level coursework, demonstrating her determination, talent and persistence.

During her time at iMeck, Spikes completed her general freshman classes online so she could begin her foundational classes as soon as she got to SCAD. In addition to saving money, she said that gave her







I am enrolled.



a head start on her teacher and peer relationships, and she can now concentrate on her art.

"Those foundation classes are a lot of work," she said. "I'll have classes that show me different forms of animation, like stop-motion, and then you choose what you really want to focus on."

Simon Howard has been at iMeck for 10 years and teaches Adobe Visual and Adobe Video Design. Spikes was his student all four years, and he "can't sing her praises enough."

"When I first met her, she was drawing Ninja Turtles in her sketchbook–she is always drawing–and she talked about passion a lot," Howard said. "I think she might be the first person here to speak about animation or actually pursue it, and I was excited because I've seen her work, and I know her work ethic. I just want her to keep her passion."

Spikes said she always wanted to attend SCAD but knows it can be exceptionally hard, "harder than I even think," she said, "but that's where my passion comes in. If you really are into something, you'll find a way to get into that thing. I'm going to make it happen."

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

I am employed.

Gabrielle Powell, Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology

Powell's love for drawing has turned into a passion for owning her own business.



Gabrielle Powell's time in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in her words has been a "rollercoaster." She attended several elementary schools, experienced the COVID-19 shutdown while in middle school and explored different career paths, from forensic detective to a pediatrician to being an art/movie director, while in high school.

But the one thing that has remained constant is her love for drawing.

As a child, Powell said she would go to the Family Dollar store and pick up a lot of coloring books and markers and be entertained by their many pages. Or, Powell would draw things she found interesting or held meaning to her like felines, one of her favorite animals.

"Drawing is genuinely just another way for me to express myself other than writing, because I also enjoy writing," said Powell. "But drawing, I feel like, brings a different version of my interests out."

While Powell's preferred tools include paper, pens and pencils, art classes in school have expanded her creative repertoire. In the third grade, she made a cat mug—that she still has to this day—and high school projects have allowed Powell to connect more with her creative style.

But it was back in 2020, home during quarantine, when Powell was given the idea that she should look into tattooing.

"We were stuck in the house and I would draw on people with markers," said Powell. "Based on that, a lot of people told me that I should do tattoos."

After graduating from Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology, Powell began her tattoo apprenticeship at a local tattoo shop, learning the ins and outs of the industry and building the foundational skills needed to be a successful tattoo artist.

In the fall, Powell said she will attend Central Piedmont Community College and take classes in entrepreneurship, small business and accounting. Powell dreams of owning her own tattoo shop or lounge. In addition to art, Powell loves music and wants to create a Tiny Desk-inspired space for small artists to perform.



"I just have to take my time with both of them so both businesses can flourish on their own," said Powell.

Looking back at her time in CMS, while she says it was like a "rollercoaster," Powell said it wasn't in a bad way. She has seen a lot of growth in herself and has become more adaptable to different environments. During her freshman year, Powell said she would keep to herself, and by her sophomore year, she was more social and comfortable putting herself out there. Now she's ready to take on her next adventure.

"I will do what I can to add my own dent in the world," said Powell.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

I am enlisted.

Mykyta Balaniuk, Myers Park High School

Balaniuk said he's ready to be a part of something meaningful.

Although senior Mykyta Balaniuk was only at Myers Park High School for a year and a half, he made it a priority to get involved in programs like JROTC to connect with his peers and immerse himself in the school's culture and traditions.

In 2022, Balaniuk and his family immigrated to the U.S. from Ukraine. He attended schools in Maine and New York before moving to North Carolina.

"I never experienced people who are so happy and never experienced so much support and love from everyone around," said Balaniuk of his transition from the Ukraine to the U.S. "That's a really big thing here in the U.S. I absolutely love the accessibility of some things."

Enlistment wasn't originally top of mind for Balaniuk when he moved to the states, but after a few years living in the country, he knew it was the path for him. JROTC wasn't offered at his previous school, so after conversations with other students and staff, he signed up for the program at Myers Park.

"I just thought that this country is so great that it's worth standing for," said Balaniuk. "It was a thought I came up with, and it's proven me right so far."

Dana Hedgepeth, a social studies teacher at Myers Park, describes Balaniuk (who she'd call Maxwell in class) as "one of a kind." She first met Balaniuk in her Civic Literacy class where she was able to learn more about his upbringing, his mastery of three languages and his vision for his future.

"Maxwell consistently spoke about joining the Army and the opportunities the military provides," said Hedgepeth. "As an active member of JROTC, he wore his uniform with pride on designated days and carried himself with a level of maturity and commitment that made the military path not only admirable, but compelling to others. He was, in many ways, already an outstanding representative of the U.S. military before even officially joining."

Balaniuk said he's learned a lot about himself being in JROTC, especially discipline. During an awards ceremony at Myers Park, Balaniuk was awarded the First Sergeant John D. Hickman, Ret., scholarship for his excellence in service and leadership in the program and his future service in the Army. He was also recognized for perfect attendance and for being part of the Raiders—a program that focuses on building physical endurance, mental resilience and leadership skills.

Balaniuk will attend basic training over the summer. Balaniuk said he's looking forward to coming together with people of different backgrounds and to be part of something big, something meaningful. His ultimate goal is to be a combat medic.

"Even when I was small, it brought me joy to help other people, you know?" said Balaniuk. "CMS was really the best school experience I had, and I had a couple of them. You have really good teachers, great support and no matter what happens, people will be there to assist you."

Hedgepeth said she's proud of Balaniuk and how he has represented his family, Myers Park and soon, the U.S.

"I have been truly honored to be your teacher not once, but twice," said Hedgepeth of Balaniuk. "I have been continually impressed by who you are—your integrity, your humble confidence and your clear sense of purpose as you pursue your future goals. We are all rooting for you and praying for your safety as you serve this country."





ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHTS

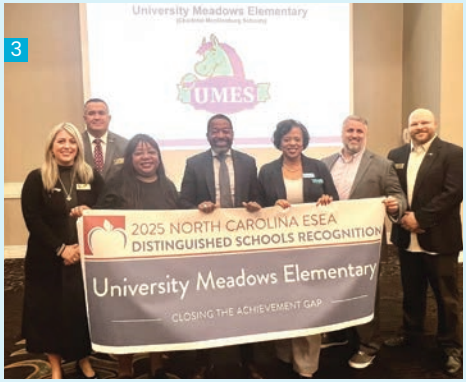

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North Carolina Superintendent Maurice "Mo" Green visited CMS as part of his regional tour across the state. Green's visit was an opportunity to showcase academic excellence in CMS as well as hear more about the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education's 2025-30 strategic plan, Achieving Educational Excellence. 1

North Carolina Gov. Josh Stein made two visits to CMS and toured East Mecklenburg High School and Davidson Elementary School. In addition to his tours, Stein spoke with staff at East Mecklenburg about the state's cell phone policy that went into effect in January 2026, and spoke with staff at Davidson Elementary about K-2 literacy. 2

Paw Creek and University Meadows elementary schools were recognized by the National ESEA Distinguished Schools Program which recognizes Title I schools for outstanding academic achievement. Their recognition was earned in two categories for school performance achievement and growth. Data provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Office of Accountability and Testing ranked these schools in the top 10 of North Carolina's Title I schools in two categories: closing the achievement gap between subgroups and excellence in serving special populations of students - students with disabilities. 3

For the fourth year in a row, North Carolina students increased their scores and participation in Advanced Placement (AP) exams, outpacing the national average and setting a new record in the state. **In CMS, 11,289 students took 21,799 AP exams in the 2024–25 school year—the highest in district history.**

The 2024-25 Education Value-Added System data results show that **CMS students "exceeded" growth expectations** in every tested area within every grade level and "met" growth in eighth grade math. Most notably, students in CMS achieved a historic growth index of 26.60 in grades 3-7 reading and 17.32 in grades 4-7 math, far surpassing the state's threshold of 2.0 for exceeding growth.

Southwest Middle School student Victoria Alvear Rodríguez was named National Ambassador of Mecklenburg County at the annual "Do the Write Thing"—a writing program for middle school students—Awards Ceremony. In July, Rodríguez represented her peers in Washington, D.C., during the National Campaign to Stop Violence Recognition Week where she was able to see her work

placed in the Library of Congress, visit national landmarks, learn more about the nation's capital and the federal government, and attend the national "Do the Write Thing" recognition dinner. 4

Beverly Woods Elementary and Francis Bradley Middle schools each earned **Special Olympics National Banner recognitions**. The Special Olympics National Banner Award is the highest honor given to a Unified Champion School, recognizing 10 strict national standards of excellence in inclusion. Unified Champion Schools foster social inclusion by uniting students with and without disabilities, and shift school culture towards acceptance and respect. Francis Bradley Middle was also named to the ESPN Honor Roll, which includes the top Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools in each participating state. 5

Five CMS schools were named Magnet Schools of Distinction by Magnet Schools of America, the national association for magnet and theme-based schools. The awards are given to schools that demonstrate outstanding dedication to academic standards, curricular innovation and diversity. The schools include: Billingsville Cotswold Elementary School (International Baccalaureate), North Mecklenburg High School (International Baccalaureate), Piedmont Middle School (International Baccalaureate), Rea Farms STEAM Academy (STEAM) and South Academy of International Languages (Language Immersion). 6

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ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHTS


7

CMS Arts Education launched the Mentorship and Apprenticeship for Creative Careers pilot program, a program designed to connect high school dance, music, theater and visual arts students with leading professionals across Charlotte's creative sector. Supported by a grant from the City of Charlotte and the Arts & Science Council, the initiative brings together four key community partners—Charlotte Ballet, Do Greater Charlotte, Arts+ and McColl Center—to provide real-world, career-aligned experiences that extend learning beyond the classroom.

More than 600 CMS students submitted artwork to **The Crown Collection: A Board of Education Districtwide K-12 Art Competition**. Forty students and their winning pieces were recognized at a Board of Education meeting, and their artwork will be displayed on the fifth floor of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center. 7

More than 700 high school students visited the Bank of America Stadium for the annual **CTE Futures Fair** to meet and connect with various businesses and organizations to further solidify or explore their post-secondary plans. 8


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CMS hosted its third annual **"What's Your E?"** event at the Spectrum Center for seniors to be recognized in front of their families, peers, CMS staff and community partners for declaring their post-secondary "E"—enrolled, enlisted or employed. "What's Your E?"—which aligns with Goal 4 of the district's 2024-29 Strategic Plan—is a celebration of students' plans as they prepare for their next chapter after graduating high school. 9

CMS was named a **national leader** in academic recovery and growth by Education Scorecard, a prestigious research collaboration between Harvard and Stanford universities and Dartmouth College. CMS was also included in a national case study conducted by the Center for Public Research and Leadership at Columbia University, recognizing the district's "all in" approach to instructional excellence, aligned systems and continuous improvement.

Thirteen CMS high schools earned AP Honor Roll recognitions for having AP programs that deliver results for students while broadening participation. Schools can earn this recognition annually based on criteria that reflect a commitment to increasing college-going culture, providing opportunities for students to earn college credit and maximizing college readiness.



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Finn Boggs, East Mecklenburg High School, was selected into **ArtPop's 2026 Artist Cohort**. Boggs' artwork, "Sun-Steeped Memories," will be displayed on a billboard on Tyvola Road as well as on digital platforms, including Times Square. ArtPop's Artist Cohort program transforms the community by showcasing Charlotte-region artists on billboards and displays throughout the region and beyond. Boggs is one of five first-ever high school seniors to be selected for ArtPop's Artist Cohort and received several benefits including a $2,500 scholarship. 10

Three CMS students made the final round of winners for the **71st annual National Merit Scholarship Program**. Lawrence He, Providence High School, Thomas Morrow, Myers Park High School and John Michael Roeder, William Amos Hough High, are among the more than 750 additional winners of college- and university-sponsored awards between $500 and $2,000 annually for up to four years of undergraduate study.

Four students from the NAF Academy of Hospitality and Tourism Culinary Pathway at West Mecklenburg High School represented their school at the red-carpet premiere of Bravo's "Top Chef: Carolinas" at the historic Carolina Theater in Charlotte. Students attended an industry networking reception, a live panel discussion and a private screening of the premiere episode of the new season. 11

Six CMS students were recognized as national medalists for the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers' **2026 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards**. The Scholastic Art and Writing Awards is the nation's longest-running, most prestigious recognition program for creative teams. Two students earned gold medals, three students earned silver medals and one student earned an honorable mention.

The 21st annual JROTC Superintendent's Cup Awards recognized outstanding performance by the 22 CMS JROTC programs, the largest JROTC district in North Carolina with 14 Army, five Air Force, two Navy and one Marine Corps. Cadet commanders and principals from David W. Butler, East Mecklenburg, Independence, Mallard Creek and Providence high schools were presented the gold Superintendent's Cup trophies.

Artwork from two CMS students are on display in the U.S. Capital as part of the Congressional Art Competition. Morgan Wade, West Charlotte High School, earned first place for North Carolina's 12th District with the self-portrait "African Basquiat." Tammy Nguyen, Mallard Creek High School, was awarded third place for "Drifter." Ahriel Steadman, West Charlotte High School received an honorable mention for "Birthday Dinner." Steadman's piece will be displayed for a year in Rep. Alma Adams' Washington D.C. Office.

ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHTS

Nyla Martin, Northwest School of the Arts, secured a golden ticket to Hollywood after singing "Ain't No Way" during her audition on "American Idol." 12

Alexis Agurs, Independence High School, was awarded the 2026 Johnston Ziegler Safrit Youth Leadership Scholarship for $10,000 by Teen Connection, a provider of integrated medical and behavioral health services for adolescents and young adults in the Charlotte area. The scholarship recognizes Agurs' leadership, advocacy and service to underserved communities and supports her pursuit of higher education.

Dallas Brannon, Independence High School, was announced as the winner of the Jimmie Lee Kirkpatrick Award during the 24th annual Duke's Mayo Bowl at the Bank of America Stadium. The award—presented by the Charlotte Sports Foundation, CMS and Dr Pepper—is named after Jimmie Lee Kirkpatrick of Myers Park High School and celebrates a senior football player from CMS who excels both on the field and in the community.

Three Northwest School of the Arts students won **Blumey Awards** for high school theater: Wiley Seago, Best Supporting Actor; Andie Jones, Best Supporting Actress; and Spencer Angel, Best Student Stage Manager. Carmella Stack of Hopewell High School was the recipient of the Mary Doctor Fine Arts Scholarship, a renewable scholarship awarded to graduating seniors pursuing degrees in performing arts and related fields. 13

Berewick Elementary School, Governors' Village STEM Academy, Harper Middle College High School, Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology, Ridge Road Middle School, Turning Point Academy High School and Villa Heights Elementary School were recipients of **2025 Jimmie Johnson Foundation Champions Grants**. Since 2009, Champions Grants have been awarded in the following areas: Science and Technology, Language and Literacy, Health and Wellness, and the Arts.

David W. Butler High School raised $10,000 to sponsor a wish through Make-A-Wish and send 9-year-old Sara Grace Stevens and her family to Super Nintendo World at Universal Studios Hollywood in California. 14

12



Photo credit: AGNYC Productions for the Apollo

13



14



The CMS After School Enrichment Program (ASEP) celebrated its 40th year. Across 81 school sites, ASEP comes to life each day through the work of 250 dedicated staff members who create safe, engaging and enriching spaces beyond the school day.







Seventh graders across CMS participated in the Amazing Shake, a global, high-impact leadership competition created by the Ron Clark Academy. The Amazing Shake builds career-ready soft skills, strengthens student confidence and aligns academics with real-world expectations.

Over the course of three months, students participated in five rounds starting with school-level competitions, and then against their peers across their performance areas in the semi-finals and finally at the district finals at the Junior Achievement of Central Carolinas location at Camp North End.

"The competition allows students to use different parts of their brains, think outside the box and use their critical-thinking skills," said Eric Summerour, executive director of Career and Technical Education.

In March 2026, nine students—dubbed the "CMS 9"—advanced to the Amazing Shake Global Finals in Georgia, competing against more than 500 students from around the world.

Arianna Arnette, Albemarle Road Middle School

Avery Brown, Jay M. Robinson Middle School

Elijah Corbett, McClintock Middle School

Noah David, Jay M. Robinson Middle School

Bianca Enriquez, McClintock Middle School

Harper Kuehnle, First Ward Creative Arts Middle School

Adeline Reilly, Bailey Middle School

Serena Samara, Jay M. Robinson Middle School

Abhinav Sandeep, Rea Farms STEAM Academy

David and Corbett placed in the Top 12 with Corbett finishing ninth overall.

"Every one of our students represented Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools with excellence," said Summerour. "The Ron Clark team shared tremendous praise for our district's regional program.

"The Amazing Shake is a great supplement overall in CMS to help our students be career ready," said Summerour. "At its core, the Amazing Shake prepares students with those professional-ready skills to help them with real-world scenarios and challenges. So no matter how far a student gets in this competition, the memories, the skills, the knowledge, the relationship that they might form with different people, the mentorships that they get are invaluable. And that's what we want students to take from this competition." 15

ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHTS

Athletic Excellence on Display

Girls Flag Football named a sanctioned varsity sport
Five years ago, CMS and the Carolina Panthers piloted the first girls flag football league in North Carolina. Now, girls flag football is officially a sanctioned varsity sport through the North Carolina High School Athletic Association. 15

Drake Maye superbowl appearance
Myers Park High School alum Drake Maye made his appearance at the Super Bowl LX in February as the quarterback for the New England Patriots.

Garinger track star ZaNovia Davis breaks 41-year-old school record
ZaNovia Davis of Garinger HIgh School made history by breaking a 41-year-old school record in the 400-meter dash with a time of 56.1 seconds. The previous record was held by coach Tanya Filmore-Scott who set her record time of 56.4 seconds in 1985. 16

All Star Gala
The annual CMS All Star Gala is a celebration of the top student athletes across all CMS-sanctioned sports. Organized by the CMS Student-Athlete Advisory Council, in collaboration with CMS Athletics, the All Star Gala shines a light on students and their accomplishments both on and off the field. "Athlete Of the Year" awards were presented for fall, winter and spring sports as well as "Coaches and Admin of the Year" recognitions.

2025-26 State Champions

Individual State Champions

Fall

- Juliana Andrea Castellanos, Ballantyne Ridge High School, 2025 7A Singles, Tennis
- Teagan Reilly and Lila Cheatwood, Myers Park High School, 2025 8A Doubles, Tennis
- Devin Gilroy, William Amos Hough High School, 2025 8A Singles, Tennis

Winter

- Ardrey Kell, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Women's 4x200 Indoor, Indoor Track and Field
- Eiliza Wallace, Ardrey Kell High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's Breaststroke
- Aaliyah Paige, East Mecklenburg High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Women's Wrestling
- Sophia Pero, Hopewell High School, 2026 NCHSAA 7A Free Swim, Swim and Dive
- Nate Robinson, Myers Park High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's, Swim and Dive
- James Freeman, Myers Park High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's 1600M, Indoor Track and Field
- Calla Lanik, Myers Park High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Women's 300M, Indoor Track and Field
- Analise Smartt, Myers Park High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Women's Long Jump, Indoor Track and Field
- Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology, 2026 NCHSAA 7A Men's 4x400 Relay Team
- Nana Mensah, Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology, NCHSAA 7A Men's High Jump, Indoor Track and Field
- Vincent Womack, Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology, 2026 NCHSAA Men's 55M Hurdles, Indoor Track and Field
- Carter Medlin, Providence High School, 2026 NCHSAA 7A Men's, Swim and Dive
- Colton Bogan, Providence High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's Wresting
- Jasmine Laing, Providence High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Women's Wrestling
- Liam Kinken, South Mecklenburg High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's 500M, Indoor Track and Field

- William Amos Hough High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's Dual Wrestling

Spring

- ZaNovia Davis, Garinger High School, 2026 NCHSAA 7A Women's 400M, Track and Field
- Asia Artis, Garinger High School, 2026 NCHSAA 7A Women's High Jump, Track and Field
- Myers Park High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Women's 4x400 Relay
- Justin Stevenson, Palisades High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A 100M, Track and Field
- Justin Stevenson, Palisades High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A 200M, Track and Field
- Vincent Womack, Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology, 2026 NCHSAA 7A Men's 110M Hurdles, Track and Field
- Tyson Williams, Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology, 2026 NCHSAA 7A Men's Triple Jump, Track and Field
- Liam Kinken, South Mecklenburg High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's 400M, Track and Field
- William Amos Hough High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A 4x400 Relay, Track and Field

Team State Champions

Fall

- Myers Park High School, Tennis, 2025 8A Dual Team 17
- William Amos Hough High School, Football, 2025 NCHSAA 8A

Winter

- Ardrey Kell High School, Indoor Track and Field, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's 4x200 Indoor Track
- Mallard Creek High School, Indoor Track and Field, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Women's
- Mallard Creek High School, Indoor Track and Field, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's
- Mallard Creek High School, Basketball, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Women's
- Myers Park High School, Swim and Dive, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's and Women's
- North Mecklenburg High School, Basketball, 2026 NCHSAA 7A Women's
- West Charlotte High School, Basketball, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's 18
- William Amos Hough High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Men's Wrestling

Spring

- Ardrey Kell High School, 2026 Men's Lacrosse
- Mallard Creek High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Women's Track and Field
- Mallard Creek High School, 2026 8A Men's Track and Field Co-Champions
- Myers Park High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Women's Soccer
- Providence High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Softball
- Providence High School, 2026 NCHSAA 8A Baseball

15



16



17



18



PEOPLE
EXCELLENCE

Rebeckah Hauss, Teacher of the Year, Metro School

From a young age, Hauss knew she wanted to be a teacher.

At 3 years old, Rebeckah Hauss knew she wanted to be a teacher.

Her mom worked at a cognitive development facility, and Hauss would go with her mom to work and make friends with the students who were there. In the fifth grade, she had a teacher who helped her with her academics, further solidifying her decision to teach.

"She found ways for me to access it and make it real to me," said Hauss. "I want to help others be able to feel accomplishments that make them feel proud of themselves. She showed me the love of teaching."

As a student at Northwest School of the Arts, Hauss remembered how the students in the self-contained classrooms were right across the hall from the dance department and how their classes would sometimes mix. Those interactions supported her undergraduate studies as a student at East Carolina University where



she earned her bachelor's degree in dance education with concentrations in adaptive and general curriculum for special education and a master's degree in school counseling.

"I just saw their joy for music and movement, and I was like, 'that's pretty awesome,' and 'I want to learn how to do that to better help students with special needs learn and access their curriculum,'" said Hauss. "They always had my heart. For me, they're the same. We just have to find ways to accommodate."

Hauss is in her 10th year as a transitions teacher at Metro School, working with students ages 18–22 on their functional communication skills. In her classroom, she wants her students to feel comfortable with trying and making mistakes, because that's when they learn.

And like her students, Hauss is continually learning—researching and understanding new methods and tools that can best support the needs of her students and staff. Hauss also comes up with a theme every year for her classroom to keep students engaged like the beach, superheroes and, most recently, Disney.

"I think having themes helps them engage more and gets them excited about coming into the room," said Hauss. "That's what helps education be more impactful—having fun and enjoying your environment. And if I enjoy my space, they enjoy their space."

Hauss was recognized as the 2025-26 Teacher of the Year for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in May. Metro School Principal Fermandi Dyson said Hauss leads with "heart, builds strong relationships and always puts students first."

"Rebeckah Hauss is an outstanding educator who consistently goes

2025–26
TEACHER
OF THE YEAR

Winner

Scan to hear from Hauss in her own words.

above and beyond for our students, families and staff," said Dyson. "She is the definition of a team player, always willing to support colleagues, share her expertise and help build the capacity of others across our school. Her impact extends far beyond her classroom as she works alongside staff to ensure success for all students. We are incredibly proud to have her represent Metro School and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools as Teacher of the Year."

Hauss said the recognition means a lot, and that it was nice to know of her impact not only at Metro, but that it was seen across the district. But to Hauss, she's just doing what she loves to do.

"My students are my reason for getting up every morning," said Hauss. "They are my 'why.' My calling right now is that hands-on learning. I just enjoy being with the kids and helping them."



PEOPLE
EXCELLENCE

Clarice Surles, Teacher Assistant of the Year, Berryhill School

Surles lives a life of service at school, around the country and the world.

Clarice Surles has been a kindergarten teacher at Berryhill School for the past two years but, this year, took the role of teacher assistant, reaching students from kindergarten through eighth grade. The move, which to some might be considered a step down, was a strategic decision for Surles, whose focus is always on how best she can serve.

"I don't say I went down to a TA – I actually upgraded because look at where I am now," said Surles, the 2025-26 CMS Teacher Assistant of the Year. "I believe that I went down to go up, to excel, to push past every barrier and every struggle that my students have."

Surles was named Teacher Assistant of the Year at the Gem Awards on May 5. A native of Garner, N.C., she has been working with children since she was in high school 26 years ago. She earned an associate degree in early childhood education from



Johnston Community College, a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke and is working toward a master's degree in birth through kindergarten. Surles also taught for 21 years with the MECK Pre-K and NC Pre-K programs before joining Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. "One of the things I saw is that being a TA, I'm able to go across the board and help more students that need more small-group time," Surles said. "Also, I'm able to tutor in the afternoon, and I'm able to still work with my BA (autistic) students, which is amazing. You're working with them on every skill, every goal, and you see so much growth in a short period of time. I love it."

Surles said she's blessed to be able to reach more kids at her school, and she will be tutoring over the summer to stem summer learning loss and bridge the gap for students during the break. Service is also a family affair for her – she and her husband started a faith-driven, humanitarian nonprofit organization, Hearts of One International Inc., two years ago after 12 years of mission work locally, nationally and internationally. Her son is an airman in the U.S. Air Force, and Surles is a life coach and author, with several books available on Amazon.com.

Surles is proud to represent Berryhill as Teacher Assistant of the Year, where she said teachers are enthusiastic and work with character and integrity. Everything is a team effort, including the relationships they have forged with their families, who volunteer and support the school. They were all in her thoughts when she was named the TA winner.

"My first thought was, 'God, you're so good,' and then I started thinking about my family, my husband, my support system, my team here at the school," she said. "I started thinking about everybody that played a part, every student that I've taught, every

2025–26
TEACHER ASSISTANT
OF THE YEAR

Winner



family that I worked with – I did it for us. I did it for every child that didn't think that they had a voice. I did it for every student that doesn't know their identity. I did it for every teacher assistant that doesn't believe that what we do matters. So this was amazing!"

Scan to hear from Surles in her own words.

PEOPLE
EXCELLENCE

Reese Finnie, Beginning Teacher of the Year, Bruns Avenue Elementary School

Finding simplicity in teaching has made Finnie's first year in the classroom a success.

A moment that might not feel like a big deal to an adult can be the end of the world for a first grader. Or a curious thought can lead to a very interesting classroom discussion.

No pancakes for breakfast? Devastating. How much does a cloud weigh? Let's discuss.

Reese Finnie, a first grade teacher at Bruns Avenue Elementary School, said it's those interactions or questions that make building relationships with his students simple.

"If you talk to the kids like you do any other person, then it makes them super comfortable and willing to come up to you with small things that they think are a huge deal," said Finnie. "Because in all honesty, they're 6 and 7 years old. So it is a big deal to them. So it's a big deal to me."



Beginning Teacher of the Year for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in May, a recognition that he considers the "tip of the iceberg" in his career.

"I'm still in shock," said Finnie. "It's amazing. If I could go back in time, I would thank everybody in this school. It would be a very long speech."

Finnie said the best word to describe his first year in the classroom is "interesting," but he said he fell into a groove pretty early. Every morning, he gets to the school parking lot early. And while he sets his classroom up for the day, he puts on music and gets what he needs ready before the students arrive.

"It was nerve-wracking the first week," Finnie recalled. "But I think being super prepared is key. Just knowing what I'm doing that day is probably the best way to get over me being so nervous."

Finnie said the support from staff at Bruns has also been instrumental in his first year.

"Any questions I have are answered like that and with complete honesty," said Finnie.

"Throughout his first year, I have had the privilege of mentoring Mr. Finnie and observing his professional growth," said Krystal Rambert, a first grade and an expanded impact 2 teacher at Bruns. "He consistently demonstrates a strong commitment to meeting the diverse needs of his students and fosters an environment that supports their academic, social and emotional development."

"Mr. Finnie has done an amazing job as a first-year teacher," said Principal Nicki Dudley. "He has taken a vested interest in each of his students and has a strong belief in their ability to succeed as young learners!"



2025–26
BEGINNING TEACHER
OF THE YEAR
Winner

As Finnie reflects on the year and what he's looking forward to next school year, he's been able to boil teaching down into two parts: Do what he's told and care about the kids.

"There's nothing left. It covers everything," said Finnie. "I want my students to feel like they have somebody that they not only learn from but that they can also talk to. Being consistent with them and being here every day and showing them that it doesn't matter what's going on at home. When you're in my classroom, you have somebody who you can genuinely talk to—at recess, lunch or whenever. You can come talk to me."

Scan to hear from Finnie in his own words.

PEOPLE
EXCELLENCE

2026
PRINCIPAL
OF THE YEAR

LaTresha Wilson, Principal of the Year, Tuckaseegee Elementary School

Wilson's belief in every student yields high success in her three years as principal.

LaTresha Wilson landed her first principalship at Tuckaseegee Elementary School three years ago, and in those three years, Wilson has led the school from the low-performing list to a B in the 2024-25 school year.

These accomplishments were further recognized when Wilson was named the 2026 Principal of the Year for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in October, the 2026 Southwest Region Principal of the Year by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in December and, most recently, the 2026 Elementary Principal of the Year by the N.C. Principals and Assistant Principals' Association.

"(The recognition) means a lot to me because when you get a chance to do something you love, you're doing it because it's the right thing to do," said Wilson. "I think that it's amazing,



it's a little mind blowing, but I'm just grateful that people are seeing the good work that is happening at Tuckaseegee and that we're being a beacon of light in the community."

Wilson comes from a family of educators and grew up in the Tuckaseegee neighborhood. Wilson wasn't sure if she wanted to become a principal until she served as an assistant principal at Paw Creek Elementary School and saw how lives were impacted there. She said good principals must love people, have passion for the work, be the inspiration when times get hard and the motivator who can push through things that don't look possible.

"Principal Wilson is just an amazing principal," said CMS Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill. "She is all in for every single student and she believes that every student is beautifully brilliant. She has instilled the belief that every student is deserving of an amazing life, and that first starts with a strong education, and Wilson has ensured that that happens here at Tuckaseegee Elementary."

Wilson's family is embedded in the community, and the school benefits from having strong community support and long-time staff members, some of whom attended Tuckaseegee and are now back as teachers. The Tuckaseegee neighborhood is home for Wilson, and she believes that Tuckaseegee is a wonderful neighborhood school.

"When (students and staff) become confident, they become inspired, and that's where I'm able to push them beyond limits that they knew were possible," said Wilson. "That is what brings me joy. When I come to school, I look at this as my family because this work is hard, and I know that it won't always be perfect, but you bounce back and do things because you love them so much.



Scan to hear from Wilson in her own words.



"Our families, the community, the teachers—there's just a buzz that goes around Tuckaseegee that when people come in, they say, 'I just feel a buzz. I can't describe it,'" she said. "It's because we're doing great things for kids and we all just believe in that one common goal."

PEOPLE
HIGHLIGHTS

Lori Zeman, media coordinator at Albemarle Road Middle School, received the Mission Champion Award, a program that provides national recognition to outstanding educators in partnership with Reading is Fundamental, the National Alliance on Mental Illness and Macy's. This award honors educators who go above and beyond in supporting students' academic and emotional well-being.

Amanda Turner, orchestra director for East Mecklenburg and Ardrey Kell high schools, was named the recipient of the North Carolina Music Educators Association's Lifetime Achievement Award for excellence in orchestra education. This recognition is a testament to Turner's unwavering dedication, talent and impact she has had on her students and music programs.

North Mecklenburg High School's women's basketball coach Jennifer Baker was named the **2025–26 Female Coach of the Year** by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association after leading the Vikings to the 2026 7A Women's Basketball State Championship. It was North Mecklenburg's first state championship in 40 years and the second in school history. 1

Khadija Mosely, 3-5 math and science teacher at Hornets Nest Elementary School, won a $50,000 furniture makeover from KI's fourth annual K–12 Classroom Furniture Giveaway. KI manufactures innovative furniture and architectural wall system solutions for education, healthcare, government and corporate markets. Four grand prize winners out of 12 finalists were selected by a panel of architects and designers, identifying thoughtful classroom layouts and compelling design stories. 2

SHAPE America recognized McAlpine Elementary School physical education teacher Mandy Davis as a District Teacher of the Year for the Southern District. The SHAPE America Teacher of the Year program recognizes outstanding educators in several categories including Adapted Physical Education, Elementary Physical Education, Middle School Physical Education, High School Physical Education and School Health Education. 3

Charlotte Franzen, an honors and Cambridge English teacher at Hopewell High School, was selected to participate in her second **National Endowment for the Humanities summer institute.** 4

University Park Creative Arts School teacher **Arjge Brothers** was one of 27 finalists for the 2026 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Beginning Teacher of the Year for the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT). The NCCAT Beginning Teacher of the Year selection process was developed to recognize the unique challenges and achievements new teachers experience during their first year in the classroom. 5

Matthew Wykoff, a career and technical education (CTE) Project Lead the Way Engineering instructor at Ballantyne Ridge High School, was named one of 24 finalists for the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching 2027 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina CTE Teacher of the Year. Educators are recognized for their excellence in CTE pathways and their commitment to fostering student success. 6

One hundred and twenty-one CMS educators achieved National Board Certification. The new NBCTs represent a 64% increase over last year and mark the highest number of new NBCTs reported since 2010. This also represents the sixth highest total of new NBCTs in the program's 27-year history. Eighty-two NBCTs CMS Public Records Officer Joel

successfully renewed their National Board Certification. 7

Eleven CMS educators were announced as **Morehead-Cain Foundation 2026 Impact Educators**. The 2026 Impact Educators were nominated by semifinalists for the Morehead-Cain Class of 2030. The initiative recognizes K-12 educators worldwide who are shaping tomorrow's change-makers. 8

Director of Athletics Steve Robinson received the **2026 National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association's State Award of Merit** at the North Carolina Athletic Directors Association state conference. The annual award is given to a deserving NIAAA member in each state for meritorious dedication to high school and middle school athletics. 8

















PEOPLE
HIGHLIGHTS

Ferdon and Records Analyst Samantha Rivenbark received the **Sunshine Award for Public Services** at the fifth annual NC News and Information Summit. Ferdon and Rivenbark were recognized for their outstanding public records management for CMS. 9

Principals Patrice McCauley of Wilson STEM Academy and Tammillye Ward of Whitewater Middle School were selected for the **2026 National Aspiring District Leaders Fellowship** by the Women of Color Education Collaborative, in partnership with the National Center for the Elimination of Educational Disparities at Morgan State University. Each fellow brings a record of instructional leadership, community-centered practice and a demonstrated commitment to advancing educational equity at scale. 10

The North Carolina School Public Relations Association awarded CMS Communications 10 Blue Ribbon Awards for outstanding and effective communication in categories including excellence in writing, electronic media and digital media engagement. CMS Communications also received recognition through the National School Public Relations Association and was awarded an Award of Excellence for the 2024-25 Year in Review, and videos "Partners in Progress," "Inside Connection" and "Creative Vibes | Empowering Minds." An Award of Excellence is the highest award in the category. 11

Former Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill was named the **2027 Southwest Education Alliance Superintendent of the Year**. This prestigious recognition honors outstanding district leaders who demonstrate excellence in leadership, communication, professionalism and community involvement.

CMS school psychologists received the **Excellence in School Psychological Services (Proficient) award from the National Association of School Psychologists** for the second time. The Proficient ESPS is awarded to districts that provide evidence of a solid foundation and significant progress toward implementation of a systemwide and sustainable infrastructure that enables school psychologists to provide a comprehensive range of services through implementation of all six organizational principles in the NASP Practice Model. 12

Arts educators from Northwest School of the Arts—Margaret Maurice and Bryan Wilson—were selected to be part of the **Arts & Science Council's Creative Renewal Fellowship**. The Creative Renewal Fellowship is intended to reinvigorate experienced artists by offering the time, resources and freedom to explore new directions, deepen their practice and sustain their long-term creative vitality in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Fellowship is designed to help established creatives combat creative burnout and integrate new mediums/ideas into their practice.

9















The second annual **CMS Arts Educators Awards** celebrated CMS art educators in the performing and visual arts and shined a light on their impact within the district. 13

- K-5 Performing Arts Educator of the Year, Christopher Pringle, Mint Hill Elementary School
- K-5 Visual Arts Educator of the Year, Tracey Wilson, Winget Park Elementary School
- K-5 Up and Coming Arts Educator, Ayden Lowe, University Park Creative Arts School
- 6-8 Performing Arts Educator of the Year, Beth Coldiron, Bailey Middle School
- 6-8 Visual Arts Educator of the Year, Kelly Caracci, Kennedy Middle School
- 6-8 Up and Coming Arts Educator, Natalie Luengas, Collinswood Language Academy
- 9-12 Performing Arts Educator of the Year, Jacqueline Altmeyer, Providence High School
- 9-12 Visual Arts Educator of the Year, Kate Allen, Ballantyne Ridge High School
- 9-12 Up and Coming Arts Educator, Amanda Vergara, Palisades High School
- Veteran Arts Educator Award, Stacey Boone, Jay M. Robinson Middle School

PEOPLE
HIGHLIGHTS



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Amanda Jones, an AP government teacher at Ardrey Kell High School, was one of 60 teachers selected to attend the prestigious week-long Supreme Court Summer Institute in Washington D.C. over the summer. The Institute, which is in its 31st year, is open to teachers in the fields of law-related and civic education and is co-sponsored by Street Law, Inc. and the Supreme Court. The Institute offers teachers the opportunity to study recent Supreme Court casesin detail and learn innovative teaching methods for conveying this information to students.

Mallard Creek High School social studies teacher Janna Holder was one of 30 history teachers selected across the country to be a fellow for the Alexander Initiative at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College.The Alexander Initiative provides high school history and civics educators with a fully funded professional development experience that bolsters their capacity to teach American history in ways that strengthen students' faith in democratic value and institutions.

Barnette Elementary received the Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) designation from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). RAMP-designated schools are committed to delivering a comprehensive, data-driven school counseling program and an exemplary educational environment.

CMS celebrated the 2026 cohort of the CMS Teaching Residency, an alternative educator preparation program that brings second-career professionals into CMS classrooms. CMS recognized its largest cohort to date: 222 residents completed the program in May, an increase of 180 from last year. 14

The North Carolina School Counselor Association named Lauren Mena, school counselor at Winding Springs Elementary School, the 2025 North Carolina School Counselor of the Year. Mena represented North Carolina as a finalist for the American School Counselor Association's School Counselor of the Year. 15



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16



17

Chief Academic Performance Officer Dr. Kimberly Vaught was selected as one of 11 senior-level education administrators to participate in the fourth cohort of the Council of Great City Schools' Michael Casserly Urban Executive Leadership Institute for Superintendents. 16

Mara Cobe, retired K-12 World Languages curriculum instructional specialist, received the **2025 National Association of District Supervisors for Languages Supervisor of the Year award**. This annual award recognizes an outstanding leader of district or county World Language programs whose work and guidance has had a significant impact at the school, district, regional, state level and beyond. 17

The Hopewell High School Theater Arts department won a Classroom Resources Grant through the Andrew Lloyd Webber Initiative. As a grant winner, theater teacher Lillian Allemond was selected in a lottery to be a seat filler at the **79th annual Tony Awards at Radio City Music Hall in New York**. A photo of her students was also featured in the show's Playbill magazine, leading an article about the Andrew Lloyd Webber Initiative. 18



18

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools hosts inaugural Safety Summit

Summit highlights the district and community's commitment to safety.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools held its inaugural Safety Summit at Elbert Edwin Waddell High School in October during School Safety Week 2025. The Summit showcased the district's commitment to safety and included a resource fair that featured several community partners and CMS departments, a panel discussion and breakout sessions.

"Our Safety Summit marks an important moment for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools," said Chief Operations Officer Tim Ivey. "We're launching our new 24Safe, Stronger Together campaign which focuses on three main points — sharing the safety measures we have in place at CMS, rallying support from families and helping our community understand the role we all play in keeping kids safe. Safety isn't just the school's responsibility. It's a team effort."

Panel discussion highlights school and community safety measures

Sonja Gantt, CMS Foundation executive director, moderated a panel discussion that covered a range of topics including School Resource Officers (SROs), Title IX, the district's prevention methods, community resources and school safety enhancements.

CMS Chief of Police Jonathan Thomas highlighted the important role SROs play in the school. The CMS Police Department is made up of 25 sworn officers and 200 civilian staff, and works hand-in-hand with local first responder agencies.

"Our SROs have to be a jack of all trades," said Thomas. "They're looked at to be that compassionate police officer many students first encounter in a positive way and can be trusted for students and staff to reach out to. Our SROs really do build some strong partnerships. They're the same ones in the schools for years and a lot of them have seen these kids grow up. They're lifelong friends."



Breakout sessions dive deeper into district protocols and community resources

Safety Summit attendees had the opportunity to attend breakout sessions around topics including the ABCs of Active Survival, NC S.A.F.E. and the Standard Response Protocol (SRP) that was adopted at the beginning of the 2025-26 school year.

The SRP was developed by the national non-profit "I Love U Guys" Foundation and creates a predictable and unified response to any school-based incident by using simple, clear, common language for all students, staff and first responders. The SRP is based on five simple actions— hold, secure, lockdown, evacuate and shelter.





"With the Standard Response Protocol, we have consistency across all of our schools," said Ivey. "There are five terms that we utilize and each of those terms have actionable steps that go along with them so that even if you're not trained in the SRP, based on the posters and information that's throughout the school, you will know what to do and where to go for each type of situation. Based on that, it allows us to create a more, I think, calming environment for our students."

Ivey looks forward to future summits and conversations ahead, and shared that if the community wants to see improvements, "we have to rally together."

"The safety of our students is, of course, our top priority and when students come to school, we want them and our staff to feel safe and secure," said Ivey. "CMS has really invested in the fact that we've got a very differentiated, layered approach to safety for our students and staff. By talking about safety and making it a topic that's open for people, we're given the opportunity to find out if there are areas we need to improve on and keep the conversation alive so it stays at the forefront of what we do."





OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

AI Data Privacy Summit

CMS held its third annual AI Data Privacy Summit at the Charlotte Marriott City Center, bringing together members of the district—from board members and students to central office leadership and principals of the year—with community partners and members of the Superintendent's AI Advisory Council. The summit featured Dr. Michael Sulmeyer, a professor of the practice and director of cyber programs within the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, who served as the keynote speaker. Sulmeyer facilitated participants through tabletop exercises designed to challenge participants' thinking around cybersecurity decision-making. 1

Superintendent's Parent-Family Advisory Council

The Superintendent's Parent-Family Advisory Council serves as a vital feedback loop for district initiatives, providing families the opportunity to share ideas, offer input and strengthen communication between the community and CMS. At a meeting at Elbert Edwin Waddell High School, attendees had an opportunity to participate in breakout sessions on key topics including Family and Community Engagement and Strategic Partnerships, School Safety and Recruitment and Retention of High-Quality Staff. 2

AI in CMS

Through a tiered training model, guided by the ocean metaphor, all CMS staff must develop AI literacy before gaining access to district-approved tools. In Tier 1, "Snorkeling," all staff must complete a self-paced foundational course covering AI concepts, safety and data privacy. In Tier 2, "Deep Dive," staff can begin integrating AI into their workflows through district-approved tools like Microsoft Copilot, Gemini and NotebookLM, tested by AI Champions. In Tier 3, "Navigating the Currents," experienced staff and AI champions can take on mentorship roles and spread proven strategies across the district. 3

Marketplace Expo

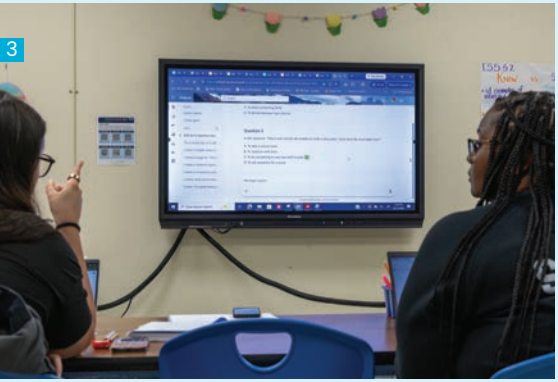
CMS hosted a first-ever Marketplace Expo at Winding Springs Elementary School, connecting schools with trusted vendors and resources.The CMS Marketplace Expo served as a platform for businesses, school fundraisers, food trucks and service providers to present their offerings directly to parent-led organizations including PTAs, PTOs, Booster Clubs and other school-based groups. The CMS Marketplace Expo strengthened community ties by supporting educational initiatives and promoting partnerships that benefit students and families. 4

At Home in CMS Spring Housing Fair

CMS welcomed approximately 200 employees to the At Home in CMS Spring Housing Fair in May, connecting staff with valuable resources and industry experts in one convenient setting. The Spring Housing Fair is part of the district's At Home in CMS initiative which is focused on supporting employees in securing safe, stable and affordable housing. By connecting staff directly with trusted partners, the initiative helps remove barriers and expand access to housing solutions across the Charlotte community.









Operations By The Numbers

71,769
Students Transported

25,500
Bus Stops Daily

99,500
Daily Miles

17,611,500
Annual Miles

115,000
Meals Served Daily

284,748
Meals Served During Summer





ENGAGEMENT
EXCELLENCE

Davidson College graduates thrive at CMS

Fellowship employees support strategy, research while learning about the district.



Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is in its second year of working with the Davidson Impact Fellowship program, which connects graduating students from Davidson College with one-year, post-graduate, experience-based fellowships at organizations that contribute to the community.

While Davidson funds one fellowship position each year, CMS was able to add a second fellow this year through a partnership between Davidson College, the CMS Foundation and the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (CELC). The positions are in the Office of Strategy and Innovation, and support monitoring of the Strategic Plan, the Annual Plan, project planning and research, said Danielle Miller, executive director of Strategy Management.

The first Davidson Impact Fellow was Bernice Saladin, who is now in law school at Rutgers University. The fellows are full-time employees, Miller said, with the same amount of work and exposure as permanent employees. They attend leadership meetings, give presentations, conduct trainings and produce reports.

"They're full-time employees, and we don't treat them differently," Miller said. "With last year being the first year of the program, we customized it to also address their learning needs and career development needs. Bernice, in particular, is going into child welfare law, so for the last two and a half months of her tenure, she shadowed different principals, assistant principals and counselors around the district to see what it's like in a school to grow her knowledge base."

This year, Kayla Klurman joined CMS as the Davidson fellow, and Hugh Perry joined as the CMS Foundation Fellow. Klurman works with strategy, and Perry works with research and analytics.

Klurman said she is a lifelong public education advocate and a product of

the public school system. She said it was important for her to join CMS to contribute her perspective and make a difference for students who share her background.

"There is a sense of purpose in serving as an advocate for those who have not yet found their footing or are still discovering how to use their voices," said Klurman, who will attend Elon University School of Law with an interest in family law. "To me, working at CMS wasn't just a job; it was an opportunity to give back to the system that shaped me and to ensure the next generation has the same, if not better, opportunities to succeed."

Klurman said this experience has taught her about collaborative problem-solving and blending diverse ideas to reach a common goal. She was struck by the massive infrastructure required to support a district and is now looking at her future "through a wider lens" on how she eventually could serve education from a legal or administrative position.

Perry said he was surprised at the range of responsibilities each department has and by the close alignment of all department goals. He said working on the Research and Evaluation team has shown him the research capacity and partnerships needed for a thriving department, and that his work has a big impact and leads to actionable policy decisions.

"This position has given me many skills and experiences that will be helpful in my future," said Perry, who has been accepted into the Ph.D. program in Policy, Leadership and School Improvement at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "The data analysts here gave me a basic understanding of SQL software. SQL is a data analysis tool that was unfamiliar to me, and the team here patiently assisted me and grew my skills. I have also learned the scope of initiatives that a school district has ongoing at any given time and how important it is to have data to fuel decisions. I have learned communication skills to effectively work as a team, department, division and district."

Earlier this year, Davidson College held its first Davidson Impact Fellow Fair for its senior class, and Miller was there to meet candidates interested in working for CMS next year.

"I would've loved to have been able to see all of the different companies that were there, but from the minute the fair opened until probably 30 or 40 minutes after it closed, we had a line of people that was just constant," Miller said. "There's a big interest in being at CMS."

Henry Wilcox was recently accepted as the district's next Davidson Impact Fellow, supporting Strategy Management. CMS was also able to secure another CMS Foundation Fellow for Research and Evaluation, which will be filled by Aidan Rose Devlin.

"We're incredibly grateful for this partnership with Davidson, the CMS Foundation and the CELC," Miller said. "These are brilliant kids, and the candidate pool is always very strong. They're integral to the team."

ENGAGEMENT EXCELLENCE

Partner Impact Awards

The inaugural event celebrated the strength of CMS partnerships.

The CMS Strategic Partnerships team hosted the inaugural Partner Impact Awards on May 21 at Central Piedmont Parr Center. The event recognized an exceptional community of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools partners that uplift, support and enrich the educational experience of CMS students and families.

"This inaugural awards ceremony was designed to honor excellence in collaboration by spotlighting organizations, schools and individuals who embody the spirit of service and partnership," said Chiquitha Lloyd, executive director of Engagement, Access and Supplier Development. "We proudly recognize and honor our partners who make a transformative difference in the lives of CMS students while strengthening connections across the broader Charlotte community."

The partners' work reflects innovation, responsiveness and strong alignment with CMS vision and values.

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS
Partner Impact Awards

Awards were given to the following:



Community Catalyst Award
Despierta

Pathways to Promise Award
UNC Charlotte Mebane Early Literacy Center

Faith in Action Award
Myers Park Presbyterian Church

Partners with a Purpose Award
Novant Health Bridges to Healthcare Internship Program

Heart of Service Award
Tijua Robinson

Rising Impact Award
Open Studio Club at West Charlotte High School

Power in Partnership Award
Bank of America & Atrium Health Foundation
Meaningful Medicine

Engagement Excellence Award
West Charlotte High School

The ceremony was emceed by broadcast journalist Colleen Odegaard, and the keynote speaker was Seth Bennett, senior executive advisor & external affairs for Hornets Sports & Entertainment. Northwest School of the Arts students Nyla Martin, James Pace and Elijah Lisbon-Shabazz provided musical performances.


bon-Shabazz


ENGAGEMENT EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNER
West Charlotte
High School


Despierta


Open Studio Clu






UNC Charlotte
Early Literacy
Awards

ENGAGEMENT
HIGHLIGHTS

cms foundation

CMS Foundation expands opportunity

Philanthropy is key to seeding innovative ideas.

The CMS Foundation invests in innovation to help CMS address big challenges and expand opportunities for our students and educators. As the nonprofit fundraising partner for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the foundation harnesses the power of philanthropy to seed innovative ideas and accelerate systemwide transformation. During the 2025-26 school year, the foundation continued its focus in four big areas:

- **Strengthening the teacher pipeline:** The CMS Teaching Residency provides an alternative route to teaching licensure for qualified candidates who are ready to make a difference in the classroom. In 2025-26, the foundation supported 207 teaching residents, providing tuition assistance, state portfolio support and/or retention bonuses to qualifying teachers. The foundation has invested nearly $1.6 million in the program since 2019-20.
- **Elevating teacher voice:** The foundation hosted its eighth annual Teacher Talks experience. At the Teacher Talks 2026 live event, four CMS educators took the stage to deliver powerful and inspiring talks based on their ideas and experiences in the classroom.
- **Transforming the school experience:** The CMS Foundation Innovation Center empowers schools to bring their big ideas to life. With dedicated coaching, community learning experiences and project funding support, four schools implemented projects to transform the learning experience for their students during 2025-26. To date, 17 schools across three Innovation Center cohorts have completed the program experience.
- **Redefining engagement with our business community:** Through a unique partnership with the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (CELC), the foundation manages an innovative public-private partnership to leverage the talent, resources and commitment of the county's corporate community and higher education partners to strengthen our public school district. During the fourth year of the partnership (2025-26), the foundation facilitated executive residencies, college fellowships, student experiences and financial investments in CMS with CELC member organizations.



CMS hosted a **Multi-Faith Summit,** bringing together faith partners and schools to learn more about how they can best engage with one another. The Multi-Faith Summit featured select schools that have a heavy focus on reading and need intentional connections with faith-based partners who can assist with providing tutors, mentors and financial and basic needs. The event was the first of its kind in eight years and was designed to reach more partners and strengthen relationships. 1

Juniors and seniors from Hawthorne Academy of Health Sciences, part of the Bloomberg Philanthropies Early College Healthcare Initiative, partnered with The Pearl, Atrium Health, The DoGooders, LSAdaptive and Carolinas Rehabilitation to design and adapt clothing items for students at Metro School as part of the **Beyond the Label Fashion Show** at the Metro Gala at the Pearl. 2

CMS announced a new partnership with **Kingdom Development Partners and Ascension CDC,** expanding homeownership opportunities for CMS educators. This partnership was designed to help address two of the most common barriers CMS educators face when pursuing homeownership: mortgage and financial readiness, as well as limited access to affordable homes. This partnership falls under the broader At Home in CMS initiative which offers teachers and staff opportunities to live in the communities they serve through rental discounts, pathways to homeownership and financial literacy resources.

Seventy educators across Anson County Schools, CMS and Union County Public Schools were awarded a year-long professional development experience through **The Huntington National Bank's Ignite the Classroom initiative.** Ignite the Classroom supports educators across the bank's footprint with exceptional professional development training designed to transform and enrich student learning. Throughout the PD, educators will engage as a cohort and receive training and support throughout the school year. The experience also included a visit to the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta.

The **Carolina Panthers and the Kendra Scott Foundation** hosted a high-energy reading pep rally and Yellow Library bookshelf dedication at Montclaire Elementary School. The foundation's Yellow Library Program provides access to new multicultural, bilingual and diverse books through its partnership with First Book, and the event was part of the Panthers' Third and Goal Literacy Program. 3

In partnership with Novant Health, CMS hosted its inaugural **Health and Wellness Fair** at the Goodwill Opportunity Campus, giving families and staff an opportunity to connect with more than 30 vendors that offered health assessments, immunizations, dental screenings, mammograms, financial literacy presentations, CPR classes, yoga demonstrations and more. 4

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ENGAGEMENT
HIGHLIGHTS

In December 2024, CMS launched **Onflo,** formerly known as Let's Talk!, an enhanced platform for communication and community engagement online on CMS department pages. In August 2025, Onflo was expanded to include every CMS school, creating a unified communication experience districtwide. Onflo strengthens the district's commitment to delivering the C.R.O.W.N. Experience by providing clear communication, responsive service and meaningful engagement with every interaction. Visitors can simply open a form and either choose a topic or type a question, comment or suggestion to be routed to the appropriate school or department. As of Aug. 14, 2026, more than 60,000 inquiries have been received, with engagement continuing to grow. Also in August 2026, an AI-powered chatbot was introduced, providing faster answers and support. Onflo has become the district's central two-way communication platform for customer service and communication, helping families, staff and community members get answers faster, stay informed and connect with the right schools and departments when they need support.

The CMS Exceptional Children department hosted an Exceptional Children Resource Fair, offering students with disabilities and their families an opportunity to connect with community resources and the EC department. The EC Resource Fair was designed to support individuals with disabilities in many areas including advocacy, post-secondary transition, community and daily living, social/recreation and summer programs. 5

U.S. Soccer and Bank of America selected Pinewood Elementary School as one of the signatory schools to participate in a Soccer at Schools celebration ahead of the FIFA World Cup™. The program introduces key elements of the game to students of all ages and seeks to expand access in local schools, ensuring every student has a chance to participate in the sport in a meaningful way.

On May 20, more than 500 pre-K through fifth grade Pinewood students experienced fun activities on the field and in school. The Soccer at Schools event provided soccer balls and T-shirts to every student, plus an equipment donation to the school.

"It was an honor for Pinewood Elementary to be selected and for our students to help launch this initiative in Charlotte. Our students had a


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momentous day meeting legendary soccer athletes Crystal Dunn, former U.S. Women's National Soccer Team Defender, and Clint Dempsey, former U.S. Men's National Soccer Team Forward," said Pinewood Elementary Principal Natashia Pegram. "We appreciate all the athletes, the soccer coaches and support teams that helped make this event happen. We scored the best goal ever—helping students excel and learn teamwork through sports activities. Thank you U.S. Soccer, Soccer Forward and Bank of America for bringing Soccer at Schools to Pinewood Elementary."

Soccer at Schools, a national initiative led by U.S. Soccer's community impact group—Soccer Forward, is designed to expand access to soccer by equipping teachers and educators with tools and resources to bring the game directly into local schools and creating more opportunities for students nationwide to play, learn and connect through the sport by 2030.

This initiative is in partnership with Bank of America, and the event programming was led by local U.S. Soccer member organizations, including American Youth Soccer Organization and Charlotte Independence Soccer Club, demonstrating how local soccer leaders are helping bring Soccer at Schools to life in communities nationwide. 6





Engagement by the Numbers

461
Partners

42.9K
Registered and Active Volunteers

88.5K
Volunteer Hours

$3.2M
Value from Volunteer Hours





Scan here for more CMS accomplishments.

cms

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

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