

End-of-year Edition

DCSS Digest

Highlighting Excellence in the Douglas County School System

Summer 2022

DOUGLAS COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM
THE STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
LEGACY ARENA

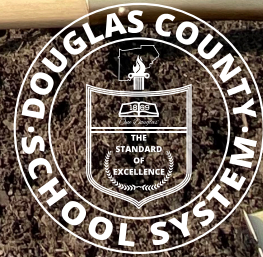
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*Congratulations
Graduates*

Class of 2022

Photos inside



ON THE COVER:
A groundbreaking ceremony for the Legacy Arena took place on May 4 — read more on page 9.



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*The DCSS Digest is published by the
Douglas County School System
11490 Veterans Memorial Hwy
Douglasville, GA 30134
in partnership with the
Douglas County Sentinel advertising department.*

*The vision of the Douglas County School System
is to build a community of lifelong learners who
become responsible individuals, independent
thinkers and productive citizens in a global society.*

Beliefs

We BELIEVE that we must ...

- *Understand how children and adults learn and continue learning*
- *Build communities of lifelong learners*
- *Cultivate the leadership potential of every employee, student and parent in our school system*
- *Be creative, energetic visionaries who respond quickly to diverse and evolving issues*
- *Meet the diverse needs of all stakeholders (students, parents, employees and community)*
- *Maintain efficient and effective administrative processes for instruction, operations, human resources and sound fiscal management*

Dear Douglas County community,

The end of the school year means an end to the hustle and bustle on many of our campuses. But for DCSS administrators, the work of serving students never stops.



While many students enjoy summer vacation or take advantage of enrichment opportunities, we have transitioned into planning for the school year ahead. All year round, this strategic planning preps students for continued success in the 2022-2023 school year.

These summer months ensure that we continue fulfilling our educational mission. Our Board of Education members are passionate about our mission and have committed themselves to providing a high-quality education for every student. Together, we are working to build a community of lifelong learners that become responsible individuals, independent thinkers, and productive citizens.

However, we could not achieve success without our family of committed educators. Each educator shares our vision and remains committed to student success and seeing each student graduate.

The Douglas County School System Class of 2022 earned 1,965 diplomas and received over \$53 million in scholarships. With each commencement, we celebrated the end of one educational journey. We also rejoiced and acknowledged their pathway to further studies or career success. We rejoice because we have all worked to equip each student with the academic preparation, critical thinking skills, and technological knowledge necessary to succeed in the Information Age.

With the help of engaged parents and strong community advocates like you, our students continue to soar academically. More than 150 years since our district's founding, we continue to offer the best opportunity for students to grow academically and developmentally. Because of you, our students remain fully supported in all our district's educational endeavors. We are grateful for your continued support of the Douglas County School System and the integral part you play in student success.

I hope you will be as inspired as I have been by this special edition of the DCSS Digest. Inside, you will find stories of the extraordinary students and the educators that make our district a fantastic place to learn.

Please continue to have a safe and wonderful summer. I hope you will celebrate the upcoming school year with us as we continue helping students grow and succeed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Trent North".

Superintendent Trent North

MLES' Murray Receives National Teaching Award

When **Natalie Murray** was first approached about beginning a school garden at Mirror Lake Elementary, it took her a while to warm up to the project. As a music teacher, maintaining a garden was far outside of her content area and gardening wasn't something that she'd ever done before.

"At first, I did it kind of begrudgingly," said Murray. "But I believe that for everything that happens in life, there's a reason. There was a reason this was handed to me, so I told myself to stop bellyaching and run with it, and that's what I did."

Today, MLES' garden consists of eight raised beds, a greenhouse and a hydroponic garden. And each week, students in Murray's music classes get to spend time working in the garden and learning about agriculture. While helping to build her school's garden, Murray has become one of the biggest supporters of using agriculture in classrooms throughout Douglas County.

For her work in the classroom and her dedication to helping other teachers incorporate agriculture into their lessons, Murray received the **National Agriculture Teacher of the Year Award** in April. Last year she was named the **2021 Georgia Agriculture in the Classroom Teacher of the Year**.

"When I won the state award, I was blown away. But when they told me I won the national award, I was really shocked. I couldn't even talk," said Murray. "There are so many great educators that do this across the nation, and it didn't occur to me that I would be one of them. That was really good confirmation for me that I'm doing the right thing with this program. For many years I doubted myself with it."

Although Murray was initially tasked with getting the garden going, she says that she owes much of her success to the MLES community and other community partners for helping her learn about gardening.

From the beginning, Murray said that two organizations - Douglas County Master Gardeners and Douglas County Farm Bureau - have been willing helpers and instrumental in building the garden.

"Douglas County Master Gardeners and the Farm Bureau were both willing to help with whatever we needed," Murray said. "And because I built this relationship with the Farm Bureau, they eventually said that they had a place on their board for an educational outreach person, and I accepted."

As a board member responsible for educational outreach, Murray has sought to create partnerships between Farm Bureau and other schools throughout the county. To do this, she helped to begin the Douglas County Farm Bureau School Grant. The \$500 grants assist schools looking to start gardening programs.

"I think the thing that was a paradigm shift for me thinking about agriculture was seeing that one thing we all have in common is food," Murray said. "Music is important, but everybody loves food, and it's a non-negotiable. We have to have it to survive."

With this in mind, Murray instituted Garden Day Friday at MLES. Each Friday, she and the school's art teacher combine their classes and spend time in the garden. Students learn about real-world issues like the importance of environmental protection, conservation and food insecurity in addition to nutrition and gardening.

"We do everything from taste tests to having special guests come in," Murray said. "I've studied the standards of a lot of our subjects so that we can incorporate them."



Outside of her school, Murray helped to begin the Ag in the Classroom Rockstar Teacher Award. This year, the program was a competition between teachers at two schools to see who could create and incorporate the most lessons featuring agriculture.

The top teachers at each school received a \$100 prize courtesy of Farm Bureau, and the winner received a sponsorship to attend the 2022 Agriculture in the Classroom Conference in New York this summer.

Murray piloted the award program last year as an incentive for teachers to adopt an agricultural focus. "The Douglas County Farm Bureau really is here to support educators who want to use agriculture as a teaching tool."

Evans wins DCSS Rockstar Ag Teacher

Mason Creek Elementary's Crystal Evans (center) was named winner of the 2022 Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) Rockstar Teacher Award presented by the Farm Bureau.



"Incorporating agriculture in the classroom really opens a lot of our students' minds to things they don't get to see. Some of our students have made gardens at home," said Evans.

In many of her lessons, Evans was able to use MAES' chicken farm, which taught students more about their food and the life cycle of chickens. Students also got to sell eggs at a local farmers market.

STAR Students and Teachers Honored by Rotary

Congratulations to the amazing 2022 STAR Students and Teachers in Douglas County! The Rotary Club of Douglas County recognized the honorees at its meeting on February 7.

Luke Nguyen of Alexander High School was named STAR Student for the county, meaning his SAT score was the top score for all students in Douglas County. Luke plans to attend Brown University (Major-Computational Biology) in the fall.

STAR Students must be enrolled seniors in an accredited Georgia public or private high school. The program is designed to recognize high school seniors who have the highest SAT score in their graduating class. STAR Students select a teacher who has meant the most to them in their educational journey as their STAR Teacher.

Last year's STAR Student for Douglas County was Jennifer Liu.



(Above) - Alexander High School and 2022 District STAR Student: Luke Nguyen with STAR Teacher: Karen Thornton and Principal Dr. Chris Small



(Top left) - Lithia Springs High School STAR Student: Prince Tufon attending virtually, and STAR Teacher: Tanya Dwellingham with Principal Travis Joshua (Left)

(Bottom left) - Douglas County High School STAR Student: Richard Hermanto with STAR Teacher Jeff Foley

(Bottom center) - Chapel Hill High School STAR Student: Addison Vakiener with STAR Teacher: Reed Durbin

(Bottom right) - New Manchester High School STAR Student: Shari Mane De La Pena with STAR Teacher: Whitney Swift



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Annette Winn Elementary had a Grand Slam of a time

The Third Annual Wildcat Tennis Tournament took place on May 12 at AWES. For the fourth year in a row the STAR Program, sponsored by the 21st CCLC, has held weekly tennis clinics to expose students to tennis and teach academic and life lessons. By the end of each school year, the top 4th and 5th grade hitters have an opportunity to vie for a spot in the tennis draw. Although the students only play a 7-point tiebreaker, the matches tend to be nail-biting.

The students learn the rules of tennis and other important roles in the sport such as line judge, scorekeeper, ball girl or ball boy. This year's draw was narrowed down to two 5th graders.

Congratulations to Loren Harris (Finalist) and Benjamin Sanchez-Montes (Champion)! These students received prize bags that included tennis rackets, balls, a water bottle and a few other goodies. We are hoping to see these and more of our Wildcats playing high school tennis!



Chapel Hill Elementary has some savvy investors

A group of Chapel Hill Elementary fourth graders took top spot in the spring Stock Market Game, a ten-week, online simulation of real-world stock trading sponsored by the Georgia Council on Economic Education. The 1st place team members Shaun Hurley, Bailee January, Elycia Manuel, and Kendall Moore beat out 57 other Douglas County elementary teams by turning their \$100,000 initial investment into \$111,291.36!

Prior to the competition, students learned about all things economics: supply and demand, profit and loss, competition, risk, how to read a stock table, and how to research investments. It is safe to say these winning students know how a market economy functions in today's society. We are proud of their tremendous success!

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Student Author takes the Spotlight

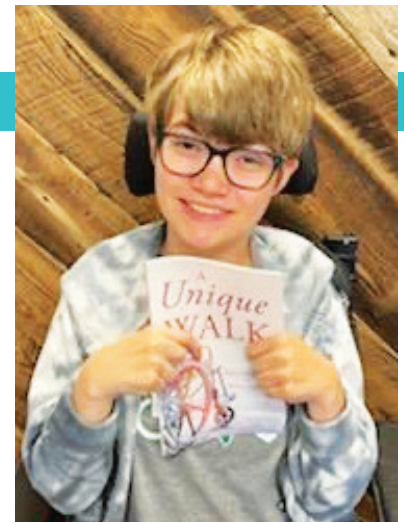
15-year-old **Kaylee Hildebrandt** just finished her 8th grade year at Mason Creek Middle School and just published her own book. With the help of her grandmother, Shirley Hildebrandt, Kaylee spent four years writing and typing every letter of *A Unique Walk*, in which she shares her perspective on life with a disability. Kaylee was born with Spastic Quadriplegia Cerebral Palsy, a brain injury that compromises muscle development, physical abilities, speech, and fine motor skills. She uses a wheelchair for mobility and an iPad to speak.

In the preface of *A Unique Walk*, Kaylee explains, “the reason I am writing this book is so that you will enjoy your life and learn to be happy. I am learning

how to be happy by following Jesus’ example. I love my life, but at times, it is very hard for me. Even though it is hard, following Jesus helps me to be strong. This book is the story of my life and how I am learning to live with cerebral palsy. It is a story about my unique walk.”

“To know Kaylee, is to love her” said MCMS teacher Dana Bolton. “She has a bright personality and positively impacts everyone she meets. She loves her Lord and wants to share that love with others.”

“Even through all of her exceptional difficulties, Kaylee has big goals,” says Bethany Hilderbrandt, Kaylee’s mother. “She has designed a Cerebral Palsy Awareness Tshirt this year and



hopes to continue her campaign of advocacy.”

Described as “A truly brilliant read for all, an expository of inclusion and understanding for the disability community,” *A Unique Walk* is available for check-out at the MCMS media center and for purchase on Amazon.

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Firsts in Flag Football



Douglas County High School Tigers #10 **Samari McKinney** started playing flag football in the 11th grade and instantly fell in love with the game. Her first season was not the best, but senior year made up for it. She led the team in receiving yards(263), rushing yards(301), flag pulls/tackles(55), and touchdowns(9). Her hard work drew the attention of college coaches and she received scholarship offers. Upon signing with Kansas Wesleyan University in May, she became the first female athlete from Douglas County to receive a scholarship to play flag football at the next level.

Prowling with Pride



Lithia Springs High School students and staff were prowling with pride when they welcomed hometown hero and Olympic Champion **Elana Meyers Taylor** -- also a Lithia Lion.

NMHS Mighty Marching Jaguars

The **Mighty Marching Jaguars** from **New Manchester High School** marched in the Magic City Classic Parade in Birmingham, AL last October. The annual parade is a kickoff to the rivalry game between the Alabama State University Hornets and the Alabama A&M Bulldogs, two premier Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in both football and band. The 85-member NMHS band made the trip after going through an extensive application process and receiving an invitation to the prestigious event.



DCSS School Nutrition Worker Places 3rd for State Employee of the Year Award



Jeremy Hector takes a break in the CHHS Panther's Cafe.

Jeremy Hector, School Nutrition worker at Chapel Hill High, was chosen as 3rd place winner of Georgia School Nutrition Association (GSNA) 2022 EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR/HEART OF THE PROGRAM Award presented at the GSNA Annual Conference in April at the Savannah Convention Center in Savannah, GA. Jeremy has been in his position at CHHS since 2006 and has had nearly perfect attendance. He models an excellent work ethic and provides great customer service. He always arrives at work with a smile on his face and a happy greeting for all.

"Jeremy Hector has always been an inspiration to our department," says Danielle Freeman, Executive Director

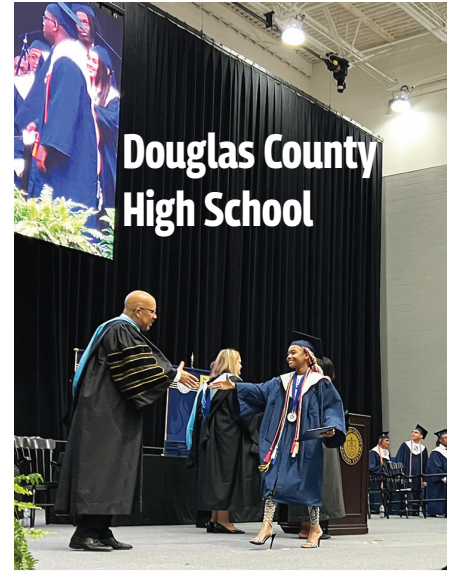
of DCSS School Nutrition. "He comes to work faithfully, he greets everyone with a smile, he has worked on the serving lines greeting our students at CHHS for many years. He is able to complete production in the kitchen, serve our students, and help keep the kitchen at a 100 health school. Jeremy is a team player and treats everyone with care. We celebrate him and the entire school nutrition staff at CHHS." All CHHS school nutrition team members were recently recognized as employees of the month on the school level.

We are so proud to have Jeremy represent Douglas County and to be recognized at the State Level by the Georgia School Nutrition Association!



Class of 2022





Class of 2022



Class of 2022



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On the Cover: Breaking Ground

May 4 signified a step toward the future for the Douglas County School System and its community, as district and community leaders gathered for a groundbreaking ceremony for the DCSS Legacy Arena.

The new 151,000 square-foot venue will hold seating for around 6,000 people, and will host graduations and other school system events once completed.

The Legacy Arena, which will be located on Highway 5 at the site of the old DCSS Central Office, is set to open in December 2023. It will be the largest venue of its kind in West Georgia, with a seating capacity that tops Atlanta's Fox Theater.

The idea for a venue like this one has been in the works for some time now, said DCSS Board of Education Chair Tracy Rookard. At a lunch nearly five years ago with Superintendent Trent North, the two discussed a want to bring something meaningful to DCSS students and the Douglas County community.

"We wanted to be able to be self contained in Douglas County. The community was growing and it's something that our students deserved," Rookard said. "That conversation led to many discussions, which led to many partnerships between the board and the school district. Eventually we settled on a proposal and a design that stands behind us that is absolutely amazing and that we are so proud of."

Along with hosting school events like graduations, Superintendent North added that the venue would also be available to outside events. Bringing in these events, he said, will also help support the county's service-based economy.

"Our main focus, of course, is our students and employees," said



Superintendent Trent North addresses the crowd prior to breaking ground at the site of the Legacy Arena on May 4.

Superintendent North. "In being a good steward of taxpayer dollars, our second main priority is what can we do to continue to support economic growth. Most people don't realize that the No. 1 job employer in Douglas County is tourism. So this supports the No. 1 thing we do well in Douglas County. We're strategic in what we do and how we do things. It's to be supportive of our local economy."

North also noted that this project wouldn't be possible without the support of local county and city leaders, as he thanked officials from the Water and Sewer Authority, Chamber of Commerce and others for their help in making the project become a reality.

"The thing that will make this a legacy is how the community has partnered and will continue to partner to make sure that we all participate in a manner that makes everyone in Douglas County proud," North said. "In this day in time, when we can have local governments partnering the way that we are, that is a legacy as well."

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DCSS Accreditation Review: Follow-up from the Full Report

Cognia highlights multiple strengths of the school system, all accreditation standards met

This information is provided as a follow-up to the 2022 Accreditation Review story in the last edition of this publication, Spring 2022. At that time, only preliminary comments from Cognia were available.

The Douglas County School System was recently reviewed by Cognia, an organization that determines accreditation of educational institutions, through a process that occurs every five years. Cognia's Continuous Improvement System provides a solution to drive education quality and improved student outcomes.

In the same way that a teacher is expected to understand the individual needs of every student and tailor learning experiences to drive student success, leaders of educational institutions are expected to map the institution's unique improvement journey.

Cognia's i3 Rubric

The review process used Cognia's i3 Rubric to rate 31 categories, or standards, within the three domains of

- leadership
- learning, and
- resources.

For each standard, five elements of the rubric are rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with

4 indicating high performance.

Ratings

The Engagement Review Summary shows that all 31 standards were rated as either a 3 (improving), or a 4 (impacting).

15 standards (48%) were rated as a 4 impacting (*noteworthy practices producing clear results that positively impact the institution*).

16 standards (52%) were rated as a 3 improving (*quality practices that are improving and meet the Standards*).

The district Index of Education Quality (IEQ), or overall rating from the review is:

333.4

The 5-year average range of all institution review ratings for the IEQ is: **278.34 to 283.33**

In summary, the many notable strengths of the district include:

- ***the district has created a culture of collaboration and empowerment among stakeholders;***

- ***board governance is a strength of the system;***
- ***the system leadership's focus on successful outcomes;***
- ***stakeholders are united through the system's shared vision;***
- ***the system emphasizes data-driven decision-making and uses multiple sources of data to support its continuous improvement journey; and***
- ***the system uses effective strategies to guide its purpose and direction.***

Opportunities for growth cited by the review are to:

continue to instill practices to ensure curriculum and instruction and use of data to support teaching and learning are consistently and effectively monitored throughout the system.

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Alexander High School Girls Track Team won big at State Championship



Alexander High School's girls track team brought home the GHSA Class 6A State Championship on May 14, outscoring the closest competition by 50 points.

The team was led by sophomore Adejah Hodge, who took first place in the long jump and 100, 200 and 400 meter dashes. Freshman Cortney Adams also claimed an individual state title, taking first place in the 800 meter run.

AHS' success continued in the relay races with the 4x200 and 4x800 meter relay teams taking first place at the championship meet.

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Douglas County School System again Voted Best Employer in Douglas County
The district last received the honor in 2020

DCSS Teachers sweep the teacher categories in Sentinel Readers' Choice Awards

Congratulations

to the winners and finalists!

Best Elementary School Teacher

Lynn Sims, South Douglas ES

Finalists:

Michelle Lawrence, Chapel Hill ES

Tyler Hubbard, Beulah ES

Best Middle School Teacher **Jennifer Baker, Mason Creek MS**

Finalists:

Jennifer Cheatwood, Mason Creek MS

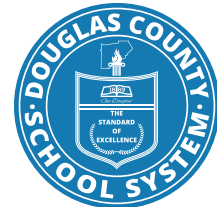
Edward Pittman, Fairplay MS

Best High School Teacher **Brooke Morris, Alexander HS**

Finalists:

Anson Wilson, Alexander HS

Leah Mathis, Alexander HS



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