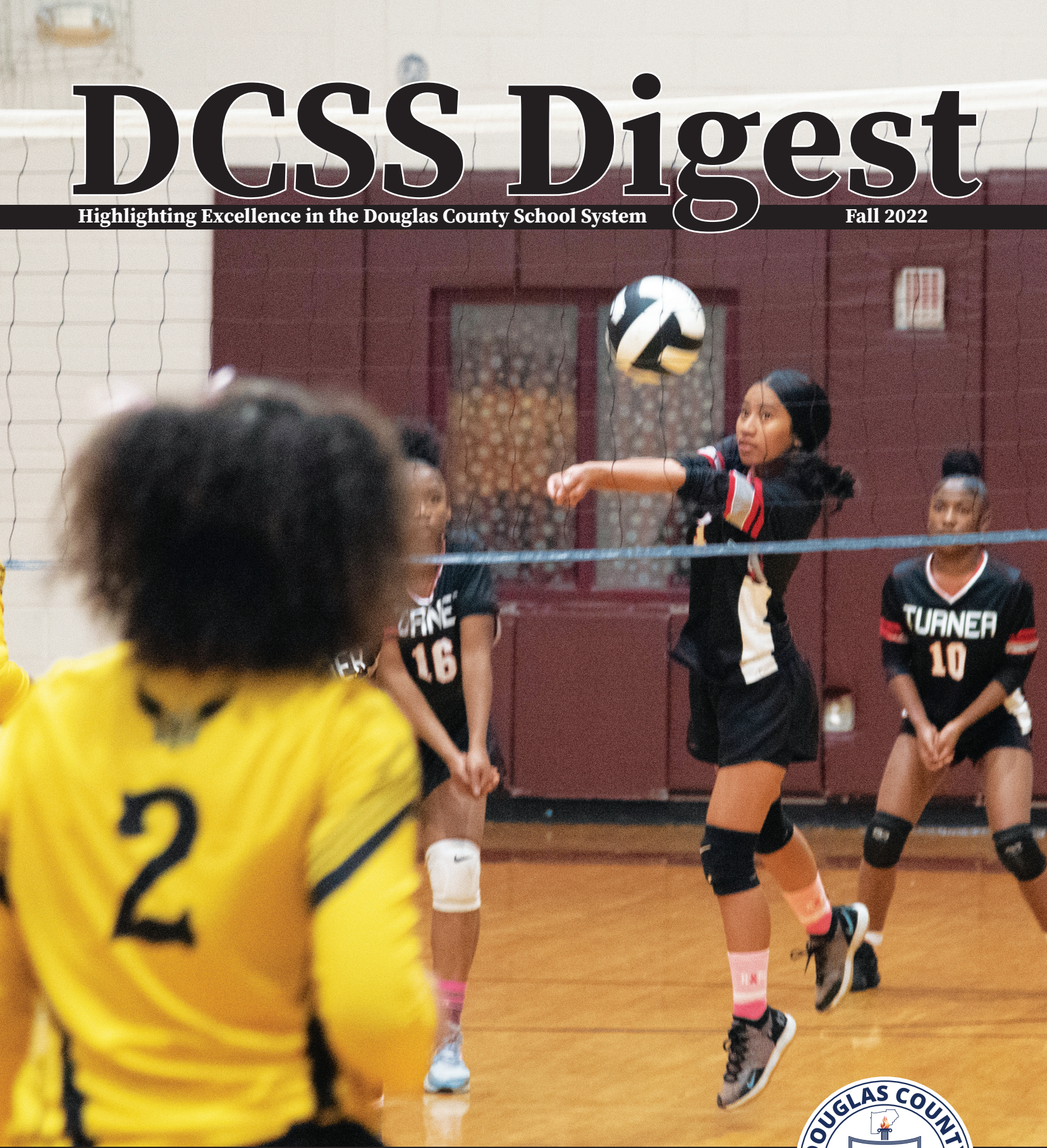
DCSS Digest

Highlighting Excellence in the Douglas County School System

Fall 2022



Middle School Volleyball? We've got that.

Cover story - page 5

DOUGLAS COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM · THE STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

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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

Our VISION is to build a community of lifelong learners who become responsible individuals, independent thinkers, and productive citizens in a global society.

The Mission of the Douglas County School System

We will serve our community with excellence by:

- *Helping our students reach their potential as we prepare them for college and career in a safe and supportive environment*
- *Recruiting, cultivating and retaining the best teachers, staff and administrators*
- *Providing a challenging curriculum and relevant learning opportunities*
- *Providing the highest quality instructional resources and tools*
- *Fostering a culture of continuous improvement*

The Beliefs of the Douglas County School System

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 neighbors,

I am excited to share the latest success stories from the Douglas County School System. Inside these pages, you will find a celebration of the students, educators and supporters who make our school system the best place to learn and grow.

One of these stories will inspire and motivate you to make a difference in your school or community. I'm talking about Lithia Springs High School student Sade Williams.

As an eighth grader, Williams' principal selected her as a Superintendent's Advisory Council member. During our regular meetings, she and other students always offer me feedback that is extremely helpful to the district. But during one session, she had one brave suggestion that will affect many future Douglas County student-athletes.

Williams proposed we offer volleyball at the middle school level. Her suggestion inspired the district to put her idea into action. This fall, DCSS middle school volleyball players took to the court for the first time, ready to compete with players from across the region. For players, team involvement inspires them to not only pursue the sport at the high school level but it will also be a factor in their overall student success.

When I heard Willam's proposal, I recognized her determination to make a difference in her school community. I share her same drive and determination to make our school system a better place. Each time I walk the halls of our schools, I feel uplifted and never alone in my desire to help our students soar to new heights.

You are an essential part of what helps our students soar to academic success. Throughout the years, you've proudly supported our district's investment in the next generation. Without your help, we could not ensure our students graduate ready to compete in the 21st-century global economy. Thank you for always being a big supporter, advocate and friend of our school system.

Your partner in education,

Trent North

Superintendent Trent North

North Finalist for State Superintendent of the Year

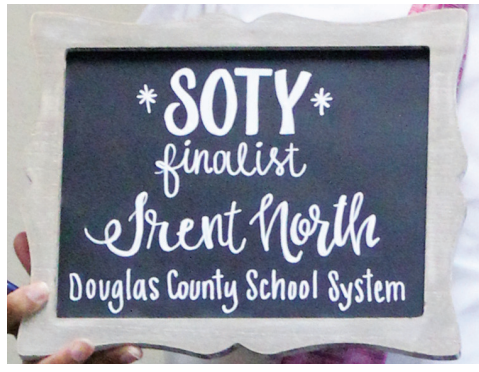
Douglas County School System Superintendent Trent North has been named a finalist for Georgia's Superintendent of the Year. North received the honor at the Georgia School Superintendents Association's fall conference in Athens.

The recognition program honors outstanding district leaders who exhibit exemplary and visionary leadership. Georgia School Superintendents Association selected four superintendents from across the state in a competitive process based on their visionary leadership, commitment to improving the quality of education, communication, and community involvement.

"Superintendent Trent North is a skillful leader who never fails to do what is best for Douglas County students," says Douglas County Board of Education Board Chair Tracy Rookard. "He leads our district with an unmatched commitment to educational excellence and student success."

Rookard adds that Superintendent North is passionate about preparing Douglas County students to enter the global workforce by integrating technology, real-world applications and rigorous instruction. "Superintendent North advocates for Douglas County students and educators and personifies what quality public education leadership means," Rookard continues.

Staff surprised North with a gift basket and a chalkboard plaque like the traditional TOTY plaques he presents to finalists in the annual district level teacher of the year recognition.



Superintendent North has led the Douglas County School System since 2017. He says he is honored and humbled by the recognition.

"My family taught me that education is the key to transforming lives. This passion and love for children drives every choice and every decision I make," Superintendent North says. "Every decision we make in our district is driven by how it impacts student success."

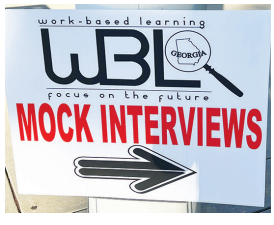
Before joining the Douglas County School System, Superintendent North gained broad educational experience as a paraprofessional, middle school teacher, elementary school principal, middle school principal, alternative school principal and human resources director.

Superintendent North holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in educational leadership from the University of West Georgia. He earned a specialist's degree in leadership and curriculum from Lincoln Memorial University. In addition to having broad experience in education and civic involvement, Superintendent North served as a commissioner in Carroll County for 25 years.

Georgia's next Superintendent of the Year will be named during the December Georgia School Boards Association/ GSSA Winter Conference. That winner will have the opportunity to advance to the 2023 AASA National Superintendent of the Year competition.

Community Partners Help Work-Based Learning Students Gain Valuable Experience

The Douglas County School System Work-Based Learning program recently hosted mock interviews for students at West Georgia Technical College. WBL students from all high schools in the county were interviewed by community members and business partners who provided feedback on the interview performance and resume. The WBL program is designed to provide experiences and activities that support a school to career transition. Mock interviews bring businesses, schools, and community organizations together to help students develop practical skills needed in today's workplace. Throughout the day, over 250 students were interviewed by 47 community partners.



Legacy Arena Progress Report

Drone photos taken in mid September capture the arena beginning to take shape on the corner of Hwy. 5 and Gurley Road in Douglasville. The multi-purpose arena will host a variety of DCSS annual events and be open for bookings as an entertainment venue for the west metro Atlanta market.

Congratulations District Level Teacher of the Year Finalists and Winner

Douglas County School System Teacher of the Year finalists **Bryant Hand**, Yeager MS, and **Tammy Odom**, Lithia Springs ES, (above center) congratulate **Stan Jordan**, New Manchester HS, as he is announced as winner on September 22 at the Douglasville Conference Center.

Jordan, special education teacher, was named Douglas County School System Teacher of the Year for 2022-23. He serves students in grades 9-12 as a co-teacher in algebra and world history classes. He is also the AU4 Autism Program teacher at NMHS. Jordan is married to NMHS history teacher **Melissa Jordan** (below). He credits Melissa for encouraging him to become an educator.

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New Manchester's Mighty Marching Jaguars Place 1st in Band Competitions Next Stop — Chicago for the Thanksgiving Parade

The NMHS Mighty Marching Jaguars have completed their marching band competition season with a Grand Champion win at the the Berkmar Invitational marching band competition on October 15. This win accompanies the first place win at the Jackson State University band competition that took place in September. The students and staff are excited and prepared to continue working towards a new standard of excellence. The band now prepares to finish the football season and get ready for their trip to Chicago to participate in the Thanksgiving parade.

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District Graduation Rate Surpasses State Average by over 4 Percentage Points

The Douglas County School System Class of 2022 four-year high school graduation rate of **88.7%** once again surpassed the graduation rate for Georgia. According to data released by the Georgia Department of Education on October 6, the graduation rate for the state was 84.1%. DCSS topped it's own score from the previous year by about one percentage point.

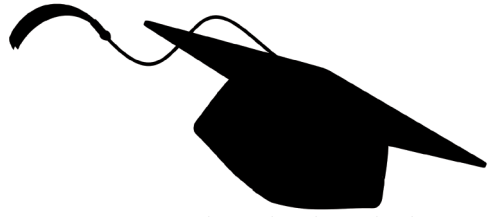
"Our goal in the Douglas County School System is for every student not only to graduate, but to graduate prepared for college or the military with the skills needed to succeed in the workforce," said Superintendent Trent North.

"Teachers, parents and our district work together to set high expectations for students. Teachers work tirelessly with students in and out of the classroom, where going the extra mile is the norm. They provide tutoring outside of normal work hours, and they encourage, sponsor, engage and champion our students. We want all of our students to graduate and be successful," North continued.

"Their education is the foundation and key to the world in which they will compete globally. Earning a high school diploma and having the skills to succeed at the next level are essential for having a successful career and becoming an engaged and productive citizen."
— Superintendent Trent North

Georgia calculates a four year adjusted cohort graduation rate as required by federal law. This rate is the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma, divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. Adjusted cohort rate is defined as, from the beginning of ninth grade, students who are entering that grade for the first time form a cohort that is subsequently adjusted by adding any students who transfer into the cohort during the next three years and subtracting any students who transfer out.

District schools with the highest graduation rates were Chapel Hill High School at 94.7% and Alexander High School at 91.9%.



For more information about graduation rates, please visit the Georgia Department of Education website, www.gadoe.org.

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New Middle School Volleyball Program to Feed Varsity Success — thanks to Student on Superintendent's Advisory Council

Successful high school coaches and athletes know that preparing to succeed as a varsity-level athlete cannot begin in ninth grade. The best athletic programs begin working with athletes during their middle school years, and sometimes before, to expose players to the game and teach fundamentals through feeder programs.

Already, middle schools in the Douglas County School System have strong feeder programs that provide top-level athletes in softball, basketball and football. Now, volleyball is the latest sport to be added with the hope of increasing student involvement and introducing more students to the game at a younger age.

"Our decision to offer volleyball to our middle school students was based on a couple of reasons," said DCSS Athletic Director Eric Collins. "First, a new activity for students provides another opportunity to get involved. And second, we would help introduce the game to younger students and start building their skills earlier."

Like many great ideas in the school system, the suggestion to offer volleyball on the middle school level came from a student during the 2021-2022 school year.

Sade Williams, a current freshman at Lithia Springs High School, was a member of the Superintendent's Advisory Council as an eighth grader. Council members meet periodically with DCSS' Superintendent, Trent North, to discuss improvements and new initiatives that they would like to see within their schools.

"I'm originally from California, and volleyball was very big for us. We always played. When I moved here, I realized that we didn't have it in our schools even though we played it a lot in the gym," said Williams. "I knew I had a connection to the superintendent, and I really wanted to bring it to his attention. We had a lot of people who played and some were really good."

Following Williams' request, North soon met with Collins to explore the opportunities. They decided that introducing volleyball this fall would be a great time to start.

DCSS isn't alone in building a school volleyball program. Nationally, volleyball was one of only two sports that saw an increase in the number of high school participants in the 2021-2022 school year.

Surrounding counties such as Cobb, Gwinnett and Fayette have followed this trend and each have strong youth programs that directly feed their high schools. This has led to great success on the state level. Since 2014, schools in these counties have combined for 13 state titles across all classifications.

For Collins, choosing the time of year the sport was offered was a critical decision. At the high school level, volleyball and softball happen simultaneously in the fall. But, since middle school teams have slightly shorter seasons, the decision was made to offer softball in the early fall and volleyball later so that the maximum number of girls could participate.

"We wanted to be sure not to offer volleyball and softball at the same time, because we didn't want to hurt our softball teams' numbers, but we also didn't want students saying they couldn't play volleyball because of softball," Collins said.

"Our goal was to have as many students involved as possible, so even though volleyball isn't the longest season, there's still plenty of time for players to come out, learn, have fun and show off their competitive spirit."

High school coaches are excited about the development opportunities that having a feeder program can bring.

"It's vital to have [feeder programs], because once players get to the varsity level, we really hit the ground running," said Alexander High School volleyball coach Elizabeth Gilliam. "Learning fundamentals at the middle school level instead of junior varsity is so important because we can focus on bigger concepts like rotations, offense and defense."

As the middle school season wraps, high school coaches like Gilliam are already excited for the offseason. They hope to come together and continue developing players with camps and other workouts.

Ultimately, Gilliam says that she hopes new middle school programs will help AHS and all DCSS high schools be more competitive in volleyball with surrounding counties and statewide.

National Hispanic Heritage Month 2022 Theme — Unidos: Inclusivity for a Stronger Nation

Americans observe National Hispanic Heritage Month each year from September 15 through October 15 by celebrating the histories, cultures, and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Students throughout DCSS took part in a multitude of learning activities.

Chapel Hill MS

Chapel Hill Middle School staff enjoyed a sampling of traditional Hispanic Latino dishes as part of the Hispanic Heritage month celebration. The lunch was courtesy of a wonderful group of Hispanic and Latino parents and coordinated by Señora Chong, Spanish World Language teacher. ***Delicioso!***

Holly Springs ES

Factory Shoals MS

Students at FSMS were chosen by the Spanish teacher, Ms. Nina Lewis, to share facts related to Hispanic culture on the daily morning announcements. Students learned how to pronounce words in Spanish and how Hispanics contributed to American culture. In addition, Media Specialist Mrs. Barnett created displays highlighting books in Spanish and/or by Hispanic authors. A presentation with cultural facts played for all to view while visiting the media center. Classes were invited to the media center for read alouds and hands-on activities.

South Douglas ES

Among the many activities that took place at South Douglas ES, Kindergarteners completed the project My favorite Hispanic American. Fourth graders learned so much about Hispanic Culture. Four students shared their families' traditions during the holiday Dia de los Muertos. It is a beautiful celebration of family members who have passed. Students created symmetrical sugar skulls and ate sugar skull candy provided by one of the families.

Alexander HS

The Alexander High School Library Media Center celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month with a display created by our Library Science students. They displayed books by Hispanic authors and/or books about Hispanic culture, traditions, and characters. Pictured left to right are Maggie Padgett, Cynthia Ramirez and Olivia Quinn.

Mason Creek ES

Mason Creek ES celebrated the culture and traditions of our Hispanic and Latina students. Many accomplishments of the Hispanic community were shared, including politics, entertainment, sports, and science. Shout-outs announced students' countries of origin, dress-up days, and weekly prizes for trivia winners.

Yeager MS

Yeager MS hosted a traveling display of Hispanic inventors. The social studies classes browsed the exhibit and had various related assignments. Students gathered information while touring the exhibit.

Arbor Station ES

Arbor Station hosted a Hispanic Inventors Museum in the Media Center. Students were able to walk through and see some of the amazing contributions of Hispanic Inventors. The kids enjoyed a chupa chups sucker, created by Spanish businessman Enric Bernat in 1958 upon leaving the exhibit!

Sweetwater ES

At Sweetwater, they culminated the celebration by traveling to many different Latin countries. The school had a Hispanic Heritage Artifact Museum where parents displayed cultural artifacts, the taste of Mexico, and many other fun activities! Assistant principal, Mrs. Scott, and an ILT acted as flight attendants preparing for take-off to El Salvador, and students participated in the Hispanic Parade.

National Hispanic Heritage Month (continued)

Mason Creek MS

MCMS celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month During lunch in the media center. Students who checked out the book Esperanza Rising by Pam Munoz Ryan were invited to eat chips, salsa and cheese dip with Media Specialist Mrs. Jennifer Baker. Students discussed the book and how the main character overcame difficult obstacles in her life. Many students said this was now their favorite book.

Lithia Springs HS

Sra. Haynes, Profesor Cortes and a student enjoy flag day and team shirt day 2022 at LSHS.

Dorsett Shoals ES

What a fun afternoon! DSES hosted a Hispanic Heritage Dance where students enjoyed traditional and modern music and spending time with teachers & friends. Thank you to our Diversity Committee for organizing and sponsoring such a great event! It's always a GREAT day to be a Panther!

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Mini Chef Academy Helping Students Form Healthy Habits

Eating habits that many people carry throughout their lives often form in early childhood. For this reason the Douglas County School System (DCSS) has partnered with The Rouse Foundation to help its elementary school students begin forming healthy habits by participating in the Mini Chef Academy.

"I've known Superintendent North for many years, and he knew that we were facilitating this type of program in other countries and asked that we consider bringing it to DCSS," said Dr. Charlie Rouse, founder of the foundation. "It has been a Godsend. The level of enthusiasm we've seen from students, teachers and administrators is absolutely incredible."

Rouse and foundation members recently attended a Factory Shoals Elementary School assembly to teach students about making healthy meal choices.

Rouse spoke about the importance of having a healthy heart and how diet and exercise can contribute to that over a lifetime. He brought visual aids to show how the heart works and how much salt and sugar can be in ordinary foods.

The Rouse Foundation, based in Carrollton, began with the mission of providing support and resources for healthy living to disadvantaged people and communities in the United States and across the world. The Foundation has been striving to achieve this through education, prevention and treatment for over 25 years.

As part of this mission, Mini Chef Academy was created to teach young children. They receive hands-on instruction for how to grow, nurture and prepare their own healthy meals. Rouse hopes to create positive behavioral change within elementary-aged students so they can share their knowledge with parents, friends and others within their community.

"We know heart disease is the top killer of adults in our society," Rouse continued. "But we also know this is not a disease of adults. It may manifest itself at that time, but if children can cut down on sugars, salts and other things, then they're less likely to develop cardiovascular problems."

This is the second year that Rouse has partnered with DCSS and he said he's excited to see the partnership grow. "I will say that I do have a bit of a hidden agenda. I would like to get students more interested in STEM," he said. "I also hope to get them thinking about becoming a doctor, specifically a cardiologist. And lastly, I hope to let them know at this young age they can take control of their lives and when they are old like me, they can be healthy, more productive, and, in some instances, disease free."

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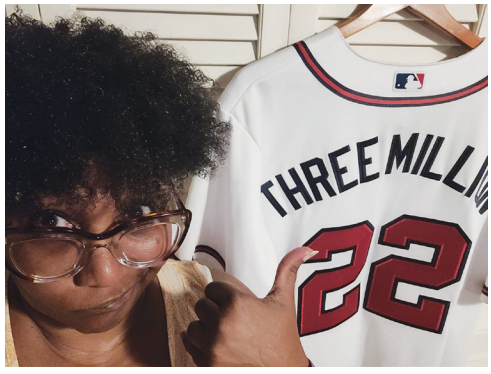
SWES Teacher 3 Millionth Braves Fan for 2022

Every morning when Anita Outlaw wakes up, she rolls over, turns on the light, and is greeted by the sight that she says is still too good to be true.

This part of Outlaw's wakeup routine involves seeing an Atlanta Braves jersey hanging in her room that she received on September 21. That day, Outlaw was honored as the Braves 3 millionth fan of the 2022 season.

For the Sweetwater Elementary School (SWES) teacher, the journey to receiving this milestone involved a unique journey. Earlier in the school year, SWES principal Albert Lindsey told Outlaw about the Braves Science Education Day for area schools and encouraged her to bring a group.

At the mention of this, Outlaw, a longtime Braves fan, jumped at the opportunity and made plans to attend with her school's fifth graders. And after dropping off her group's ticket money, Outlaw thought no more about the game until the day before when she received a call from the team's office asking if she would say, play ball," before the game's first pitch.



"That was a huge thing, in and of itself, so my class and I were super excited," Outlaw said. "And when I got there, a couple of Braves executives walked me to the field, and someone gave me a ticket and told me to scan it, but I still thought nothing of it until I got there, and that's when the magic happened."

From there, Outlaw ran into a member of the Braves staff who met her with a small party while informing her that everything was a part of her being the team's 3 millionth fan of the season.

"I think my brain sort of exploded when that happened. I was speechless then, and a week and a day later, I'm still speechless," Outlaw said. "I'm a Braves fan, but not a rabid fan because I'm a teacher and go to bed early every night. But the excitement of being in that place was ridiculously awesome."

For the Braves, who won the 2021 World Series Championship, seeing over 3 million fans come through their gates is a major milestone. The franchise has only welcomed 3 million fans six times in its franchise history, with this year being the first time the plateau was reached at Truist Park.

For reaching this attendance milestone for the team, Outlaw has already received many prizes, including a TV interview during the game, free Chick-fil-A for a year, a $500 shopping spree to the Braves team store, two seats to 2023 Opening Day, and the special jersey that still hangs in her room.

"Someone told me that I should

probably put [the jersey] in a frame, but I still have it on the hanger in my bedroom," said Outlaw. "When I turn over at night I still see the jersey with the 3 million on it and my mind immediately goes, 'Oh my goodness, that really happened,' because I see the evidence of it right there."

Despite being gifted with many different prizes, Outlaw says that her students being in attendance was what made the afternoon special. And even with the focus of the day being on baseball, she still found a teachable moment to share with her students at the end of the day.

"This really was an unbelievable opportunity, and a great life lesson for my kiddos," Outlaw said. "That is sometimes amazing things will happen to you, but you just have to be prepared. Walk through the world being kind and nice and the best person you can be, and you never know where that will take you."

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14 Middle School Students Awarded International Travel Opportunity

Part of the vision of the Douglas County School System is to graduate students who are independent thinkers and productive citizens in a global society, so teachers and administrators know that lessons cannot always be confined to the four walls of a classroom. For this reason, DCSS is giving 14 middle school students an opportunity to experience a new part of the world with a trip to Portugal and Spain in February 2023.

"Students now compete both nationally and globally. We believe that it is our duty to prepare them to succeed at that level, so we wanted to provide this travel and learning opportunity at no cost," said DCSS Superintendent Trent North. "The travel program is sponsored by an organization that allows these young people to learn the interconnectedness between countries while learning about and experiencing new cultures."

To qualify for the trip, students were required to write an essay that was read and scored by a panel of judges. Students with no major discipline referral, a good attendance record, and at least a "C" average were eligible. Teachers showed a video promoting the trip and encouraged participation. Overall, 142 middle schoolers submitted essays by the deadline, and winners were announced by Superintendent North on September 14.

"I was super excited when I found out that I'd been selected," said Reese Martin, a Chapel Hill Middle School student. "I started crying because I was just so overwhelmed,"

Superintendent North joins a group of the winners after the announcements

The student travelers will begin their eight-day trip in Lisbon, Portugal, where they will experience one of Europe's most unique cultures. Next, they will go to Barcelona, Spain and explore the country's southern region.

"I'm excited for them to see Portugal, but I'm most excited for them to see Barcelona because it's such a different city," said Mitch Springer, DCSS Executive Director of 6th-12th Grade Curriculum. "They'll be traveling the south of Spain and see how the architecture and culture are different because that region was under Ottoman control for so long." Students will also visit Gibraltar, which sits at Spain's southern border on the Iberian Peninsula.

Springer said the students will see things that directly connect to their current curriculum. He is also excited about the potential of helping them unlock new passions through their international experiences. "you never know how one thing a student sees or experiences can really shape their future."

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Homecoming for Ricky Dobbs

Football has almost always been a part of Ricky Dobbs' life. From his time as a prep star at Douglas County High School, to playing quarterback at the Naval Academy, to coaching and playing semi-pro football during his time in the Navy, Dobbs love of the game has always run deep.

Today, Dobbs is using this passion to impact the lives of Douglas County's youths as a coach. "When I left the military and joined the Reserves, my goal was always to come home and start making an impact in kids' lives," Dobbs said. "It's so great to be able to do that in my hometown where I get to be near my family."

Upon his return, Dobbs' hope was to coach at his alma mater. But after finding out that the Tigers staff was full, Dobbs' attention turned to Chapel Hill High School, where he initially planned to work as a JROTC teacher and work with all quarterbacks in the county in his spare time. However, after CHHS head coach Brad Stephens found out that Dobbs was considering a job at the school, he soon reached out about getting Dobbs on the Panthers staff for the 2022-2023 season.

"We're really excited about having Coach Dobbs join us," said Stephens at DCSS' football media day. "He's got a great background as a player and a coach, and we're grateful to have him."

The job at CHHS didn't pan out, but Dobbs ultimately decided to remain as CHHS' quarterback coach and use that position as his first step toward giving back to the community that poured into him.

"When the job didn't work out, my plan was to just work with athletes, particularly quarterbacks, from all five high schools," Dobbs said. "I still get to do that some, but after going out this summer with CHHS, I've really enjoyed being there every day."

Dobbs brings experience from many different walks of life. Following a stellar football career at the Naval Academy, which saw him break Tim Tebow's single-season rushing touchdown record for quarterbacks and win MVP of the 2009 Texas Bowl, the former DCHS standout coached at the Naval Academy Prep School before beginning his first assignment aboard the USS Oscar Austin in 2012.

Dobbs transferred to Bahrain in 2014 before returning to the states in 2016. He returned to Bahrain in 2018, and was stationed there until 2020 before returning stateside for good.

Despite serving abroad, Dobbs still remained close to the game of football. He coached in Virginia and Maryland between deployments to the Middle East and played in a semi-professional league.

With all this experience, Dobbs hopes to impart wisdom to local student-athletes and help them thrive both on and off the gridiron.

"I'm glad to have this opportunity. I have a footprint in the community by getting to coach some of the kids of friends I went to school with. This is definitely one of the highlights, and I hope it only gets better from here." **Ricky Dobbs**

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