

# THE PRAIRIE

A PUBLICATION BY AIKEN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## PURPLE STAR SCHOOL DISTRICT

South Carolina State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman announced a new district and school recognition program celebrating military-friendly schools and districts at a press conference and reception held at North Augusta High School. The State Department's newly-created Purple Star Recognition Program was established to encourage and celebrate schools and school districts making a significant commitment to support military-connected students and families. Aiken County Public School District and North Augusta High School were celebrated as the state's first district and school to receive the honor.

Among the extensive criteria for Purple Star designation are requirements for a dedicated liaison to serve as a single point of contact, student ambassadors to offer peer-to-peer support, a military-friendly website, military-student exceptions to enrollment periods for sports and other extracurricular activities, and school staff training.

*"We want every school to have a network of support in place that these students and their families can lean on to help them throughout the process."*

*Molly Spearman  
South Carolina  
State Superintendent*



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## DAY OF CARING

On Saturday, September 21, 2019, Aiken County Public Schools' ONE TEAM rolled up their sleeves for a day of service devoted to helping our community.

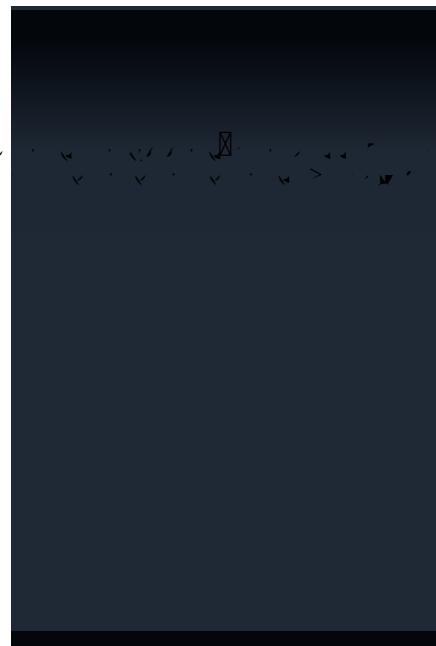
From washing police cars and assisting with community events, to creating care packages and building blessing boxes, this year's ONE K-12 COMMUNITY DAY OF CARING was an opportunity for the District's students, parents and staff to give back and provide helping hands for a day of service to the community.

"We were excited to switch the format for this year's 'Day of Caring,'" commented Merry Glene Piccolino, Aiken County Public Schools' Director of Communications and Community Partnerships. "Community groups, volunteers and individuals have given thousands of hours over the last three years during this annual day of service, a community volunteer event that has traditionally been devoted to improvements to our community's K-12 facilities. This year, we wanted to demonstrate our collective appreciation by going out into the community just as the community has come into our schools for a little sprucing up and support."



## Experienced Administrator Chosen as District's Interim Superintendent

WEL is pleased to announce the selection of [Name] as the interim superintendent of the district. [Name] has a wealth of experience in educational leadership and is well-qualified to lead the district through this transition. [Name] has served in various roles, including [Role], and has a proven track record of success in improving student outcomes and leading teams. [Name] will be reporting to the board of trustees and will be working closely with the board and the community to ensure a smooth transition and continued excellence in education for all students.



**Michelle Padgett**  
GRANITEVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

"I grew up in the rural, small town of Wagener. I actually became an educator with the intent to come back to Aiken County after graduation so that I could positively impact students and families from communities like mine. As a former Oakwood-Windsor teacher, the opportunity to once again serve this community was very appealing. The students and families of Oakwood-Windsor have always had a piece of my heart and I'm greatly looking forward to getting started."

**Davina Truitt**  
OAKWOOD-WINDSOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

"We will have a great opportunity to have an impact on all students in the city of Aiken and usher them into their middle school years with a positive experience. With my background at the elementary level and experience at the middle school level, I understand what students and parents are going through during this transition."

**Denise McCray**  
AIKEN INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

"Building positive relationships with students has always been an important part of my educational approach, and will continue to be a focus at Kennedy Middle School. Those positive relationships are especially important when it comes to students. If you are able to develop that trust and they know you support them and care about them by attending their athletic events, robotics matches, chorus and band performances, or whatever they are interested in, that goes a long way toward establishing those relationships and I feel that's really been a strength of mine during my career."

**Dr. Ryan Ashley**  
KENNEDY MIDDLE SCHOOL

"I came back home to Aiken County to serve in my own community because education is about building character and meeting your fullest potential. I want teachers, along with students, to map out their career goals and then help get them there. As they grow, I want to help them strive for more and achieve their professional goals. Giving back to the community is really important to me. I was a military kid and we moved around a lot. I never really felt like I was part of those communities or that I belonged. When my dad retired here in Aiken, for the first time I felt welcomed and part of a community."

**Dr. Tiffany Hall**  
LEAVELLE MCCAMPBELL MIDDLE SCHOOL



"I am personally vested in the success of this community and am so excited about being part of a successful team focused on and passionate about supporting students. With the science and technology focus at Paul Knox, I'm looking forward to facilitating challenging learning opportunities which will make our students ready participants in our future workforce."

**Paige Day**  
PAUL KNOX MIDDLE SCHOOL

"I am really excited about leading Schofield Middle and potential implementation of elements of the Cambridge Program curriculum at the middle school level. I am also excited to be able to continue the relationships already developed with the sixth and seventh grade students and their families at Aiken Middle, while developing new...





### Aiken Intermediate School Ribbon Cutting

The ribbon is cut and the proclamation read. Aiken Intermediate School (AIS), which opened this fall, has been branded the "Home of the Explorers." The new logo features Explorer, the school's mascot, facing outward to a world ready for exploration and discovery.

AIS is the first and only school in the district to focus solely on meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of sixth graders to help them make the transition from elementary to middle school.

"We just want to thank you for giving us this opportunity to make this happen," AIS' Principal Denise McCray commented at the ceremony. "We will make history and make this the best sixth-grade experience any kid could ever dream to have."



AIS' PRINCIPAL DENISE MCCRAY (CENTER), ASST PRINCIPALS ADAM KELLEY (LEFT) AND JAMIE BYRNE (RIGHT)

### Graniteville Elementary Opens Doors

Graniteville Elementary School Principal Michelle Padgett had the honor of cutting the ribbon during the school's dedication ceremony on August 10, 2019. The community showed great support for the school whose mascot, Gregg the Gator, is named after William Gregg, who supervised the construction of the power canal in Graniteville as part of creating one of the first textile company towns in the South.

Rich in tradition, the school's seal honors the historic Graniteville Company mill brand. The color blue in the seal is representative of the "blue granite" in Graniteville, and the reeds in the seal are a nod to the wildlife growing along the Graniteville canal.

The repurposed building, located at 1 Willis Circle in Graniteville, was built in the 1950s as the original Byrd Elementary School.



*"We want our students to dream and be inspired and challenged to greatness," Michelle Padgett, GVES' Principal, told The Aiken Standard at the event. "We want to give them the tools they need to be and do whatever they dream to be and do."*



### JOINING SCHOOLS: Keep Pounding Day

When the Carolina Panthers contacted Merry Glenne Piccolino, the District's Director of Communications and Community Partnerships, about their interest in hosting a field day event at an Aiken County Public School, Piccolino knew just where to take them-Schofield Middle School-to assist in the transition of 6th and 7th graders from Aiken Middle School, which would be closing, to their new school home at Schofield.

The Panthers sponsored "Keep Pounding Day" as a way to celebrate the team's 25th anniversary. The event in Aiken was part of their 25-city event sponsorship tour throughout the Carolinas. The event provided an opportunity for students at both schools to have fun playing games, jumping in bounce houses, eating snow cones, and just get to know one another.

*"Unity. Today is about the unity of two student bodies coming together under one roof or, today, on one field."*

*-Scott Floyd, former principal of Aiken Middle School who moved with his students and a number of faculty to lead Schofield Middle School*



#WHYTEACHACPSD

### Educators A ect the Culture

The #WhyITeachACPSD campaign, which kicked off in August of 2018, encourages teachers to share via social media what sparked their interest in education and keeps them coming back to the classroom year after year.

A ect the Culture and its founder Darius Robinson were introduced to our District earlier last year when the non-profit led a social media campaign in Aiken County's high schools and challenged students to conduct and share five random acts of kindness.

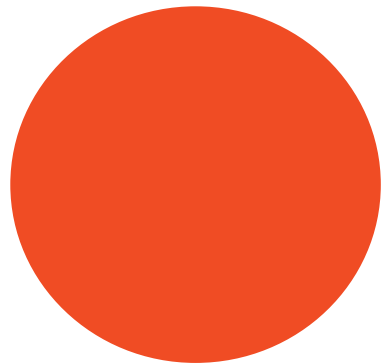
Following the success of the student campaign, a similar effort was planned for educators. May 1 through May 29, 2019, teachers from each of Aiken's more than 40 campuses challenged one another to #A ectTheCulture by posting inspirational moments with #WhyITeachACPSD. During the campaign period, Aiken County's teachers and staff posted 37,642 times, sharing their passion for education and the students they serve. As a reward for the teachers and staff with the most posts, District leaders partnered with Panera Bread to take over lunch duty at the winning school and treat employees to a catered lunch. With a total of 10,835 posts, Millbrook Elementary School came out on top.



Pictured: Jeanie Glover, Chief Officer of Instruction, and Cassie Cagle, Director of Special Programs, at Millbrook's lunch takeover.







# ATHLETICS





## World Language

From world language, advanced learning and leadership to STEM and STEAM-powered education, unique themed schools have piqued the interest of parents, guardians and educators alike. Beginning in the 2019-20 school year, Aiken County Public Schools expanded its school choice options to 20 thematic educational opportunities to the community, including the unique opportunity for World Language Immersion at three elementary schools-Mandarin Chinese at Belvedere, Spanish at Clearwater, and German at Millbrook. ACPSD is the only district within a 50-mile radius of Fort Gordon to offer elementary language immersion.

*For information on these and other thematic programs throughout the county, visit [acpsd.net](http://acpsd.net) > Schools > School Choice.*

## The Class of 2019 & Senior Scholars

Aiken County Public Schools' Class of 2019, totaling 1,432 students, was quite an impressive bunch! Total scholarship earnings for last year's graduates totaled \$79 million dollars and 88.4% were accepted to a two- or four-year college or university.

The Class of 2019 had the first Early College graduates, twelve seniors from Midland Valley who earned both a high school diploma and Associate's Degree from Aiken Technical College, without cost to the student or family.

Last year's graduates also included the first three Aiken County students connected with the Governor's School Accelerate Program, an opportunity which provides an intensive engineering track, allowing students to advance their academic pursuits while remaining at their high school and earning up to 52 credit hours from Clemson University.

The now-annual Senior Scholars Banquet celebrated our most academically determined students and their families a few weeks before graduation and honored our scholars for consistent academic achievement.



### Rena Humes: Spelling Bee Star

Correctly spelling the word "boutique" in the tenth round of competition, Kennedy Middle School sixth-grader Rena Humes was named the 2019 Aiken County Scripps Spelling Bee Champion February 4, 2019.

"I definitely studied more this time and my mom helped me to get through it," Rena stated. "Last year I was so close and this year I finally got it so that was a good feeling."

Humes represented Aiken County during the 2019 Scripps National Spelling Bee held in Washington, D.C., in May, where she advanced to the second round of the prestigious competition.

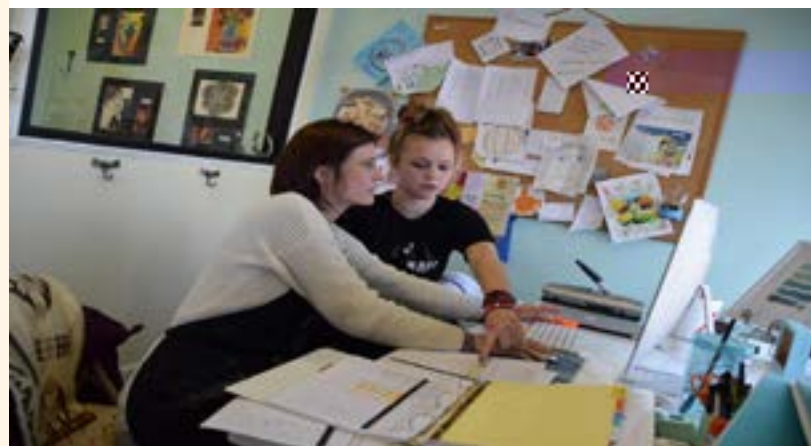
"This was my first time going to the national competition in Washington, D.C., and I want to go back! I am already studying for the next county spelling bee."

### Job Shadowing Day

AIKEN WORKS, the Aiken County community's workforce development collaborative, joined in the excitement of National "Groundhog" Job Shadow Day, providing ACPSD students with an inside perspective on possible career choices in businesses in and around Aiken County and throughout the CSRA. In total, 319 companies and organizations hosted District students, including Cindra McCoy, owner of Art Nook, pictured below.

The initiative connects high school students with area professionals, allowing businesses and organizations to give them the opportunity to experience a typical day working in a field of the student's choosing, and spanning a variety of industries.

"Job shadowing is a useful way for students to learn about a particular job of interest, and more importantly, shadowing can allow them to identify potential mentors and start building networks of contacts in their field," commented AIKEN WORKS Lead Larry Millstead.





## Record Success

The academic gains of school report card ratings by the South Carolina Department of Education show Aiken County Public Schools are succeeding at record levels as all three instructional levels saw marked improvement.

This level of growth in the Aiken County Public School District (ACPSD) is made all the more impressive by its timing.

The gains come at a moment when the state has revised performance criteria to more rigorous levels as part of the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This means the difficulty of exceeding year-to-year school performance has increased in an effort to better prepare South Carolina students for the 21st-Century workplace, the college classroom and a global economy.

“Obviously, we’re thrilled with the significant increases in overall performance ratings,” Interim Superintendent King Laurence commented. “It’s clear evidence that we’re delivering on the promise that in Aiken County there will be no ‘have and have not’ schools. Performance has increased at every single level – elementary, middle and high school – and for the first time in a very long time, we have no schools rated as ‘Unsatisfactory’ in Aiken County.”

State report card ratings from 2018 showed there were seven Aiken County schools rated in the bottom two categories of “Below Average” and “Unsatisfactory.” This year, there are no “Unsatisfactory” schools in the District, and only one school is rated at “Below Average,” missing the “Average” cut point score by just three points. The