

## Filled with the Christmas Spirit

I have always been taught to appreciate the things I have, especially the friends, family, and colleagues surrounding me. This holiday season is no different, and I am genuinely grateful for a few things.

First and foremost, family. Family comes in all shapes and sizes and includes immediate, extended, and workplace relationships. This year, it is our school family that continues to shine. Out of student need, this year's staff have been asked to do more than ever in the areas of social-emotional health, student safety/discipline, and collaboration, all the while helping students rebound academically from what was lost during a national pandemic. Although the tasks sometimes seem unrealistic, our staff has remained professional and steadfast. It takes a unique and dedicated team of individuals who are highly focused on student success to make a difference in our kids' lives. We have these individuals at Halifax County Schools (HCS). For these efforts and genuine caring about students, I would like to say "Thank You."

Secondly, where would we be without our students? Students at HCS, in many ways, are an extension of our own families. Like our own, they sometimes have differing views on the path we steer them toward or respond well to the tasks presented to them, but they stay the course. Students continue to find their passions and hone their skills as they benefit from collaboration and real-world experiences. To our students, thank you for allowing us to be a small part of your world, and please know that we care more than you will ever know.

Thirdly, to our parents and community. Many things about public schools have changed over the years, yet many things have remained the same. We thank you for your continued patience and support as we navigate this experience together. It is not always easy, and there remain challenges ahead, but please know that we cannot do this without your partnership, and we will continue to include you every step of the way. Thank you parents!

Fourthly, for a new K-8 School on the former Eastman school site. As part of our commitment to ensuring a high-quality experience for the children in Halifax County Schools, our Board has engaged in rebuilding Eastman. On December 5, 2022, a groundbreaking ceremony for the new K-8 school occurred. The work we are doing will impact generations of students in Halifax County. We will work in phases to bring the community a state-of-the-art facility for our children over the coming months. We are excited about the possibilities for our children through this work. In addition to the opportunities for our students, this work will also provide the district with significant operational savings in the years to come showing a great deal of fiscal prudence on the part of our Board. As we move through the various construction phases, we want to ensure that our community is updated. To that end, we welcome you to visit our district site and follow our Facebook page. We encourage you to contact us via email or telephone or attend my Superintendent's Community Forums if you have questions. We look forward to sharing along the way and celebrating our final product. Our mission to empower all students to be successful and competitive global residents is at the heart of all we do!

Lastly, the ruling of Leandro. The State Supreme Court upheld the original trial court order to fund years two and three of the Leandro Comprehensive Remedial Plan. This is excellent news for HCS and a generational win! Leandro will provide the resources necessary to support the effective instructional program in every school so that the educational needs of all children, including at-risk children, have an equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education. With the

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additional resources provided by the Leandro Plan, more schools can offer elective courses, career and technical programs, advanced coursework, after-school and enrichment programs. These funds will support expanding pre-k programs, removing caps on support for children with disabilities, expanding support for first-year teachers, and adding more teaching assistants for the early grades to decrease literacy deficits. Leandro will provide qualified teachers in every classroom with continuing professional development so they can be effective instructors in their field.

At the heart of every accomplishment of this current school year are the people of this special school district. That includes every state and local elected official and adult involved with making our schools and our entire district shine in some of the most challenging times. Most importantly, every child shows us the importance of childhood and how much each one needs and deserves a quality education as well as a safe place to learn. Through the pandemic and other events, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to radically transforming their school experience. I am so proud to serve as the Superintendent of Halifax County Schools. Seeing how bright the future will be for Halifax County Schools, I am filled with joy and happiness. Happy Holidays to you all, as I wish you and your family the best of 2023.