

# Catoctin District Newsletter

May 2024

*The views contained herein reflect the views of the individual School Board member who is the publisher of this newsletter and may not reflect the views of the Loudoun County School Board and/or Loudoun County Public Schools.*

---



## Kari's Corner

"Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated." - Mark Twain

Why am I quoting Mark Twain? Well, like Twain at the time, I have not been in the best of health, having undergone major surgery in April. If you saw me when I was campaigning, you may have noticed me limping. If you were at the board installation January 2nd, you may have noticed that I was on crutches. By February, you might have had difficulty seeing me when I was sitting up on the

dais because I had progressed to a wheelchair. I missed the April 9th School Board meeting because I was undergoing surgery to replace my right hip. Since then, I have been attending meetings virtually, but rest assured, I am still here if you need to reach me, and I am working behind the scenes while I recover! I'm disappointed that I have not been able to visit schools or attend wonderful special events showcasing our students and teachers, but I look forward to doing so as soon as I'm able. The road back has been taking longer than I hoped, but I'm making progress and hope to be fully recovered soon!

**For weekly updates and news from our district and LCPS, follow me on Facebook using the button below.**

---

**Follow me on Facebook**

**Click here to contact me!**

### **School Board Meeting Updates**

We had several significant items to address on our agenda for April, including the FY24 third quarter financial review, the quarterly update from the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), upcoming years' calendar changes, and discussion about the early elementary school start times/bus transportation challenges.

LCPS Chief Financial Officer Sharon Willoughby briefed the School Board on the plan for returning approximately \$10 million of the projected \$20.6 million end-of-year budget surplus back to the County. This would leave approximately \$10.6 million for LCPS to spend, which must be spent on one-time purchases with no recurring costs. Administrative staff had a list of several recommended uses for the funds, some of which addressed concerns that had been brought forward by parents, staff, and board members. While I appreciate that the recommendations took these concerns into account, there were several other items that I would not support the funds being used on, most especially the several consulting service studies totaling over \$1 million. As School Board representatives, we are tasked with responsibly making decisions on the use of allotted taxpayer dollars for the betterment of our school system. I feel that any surplus should either go back to the taxpayers or be allocated in a way that provides funding where it is most needed within LCPS to benefit students and families.

The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) presented its quarterly update to the School Board, which highlighted concerns regarding teacher vacancies, training for assistants and substitutes, and transition services. Many excellent recommendations were made to support staffing, equity, transitioning, and curriculum for the programs, and I look forward to working with the committee to help facilitate implementation. The SEAC presentation can be viewed [here](#).

All of the Board members have received countless messages and emails regarding the issue of the school calendars and early elementary school start times. Both of these items were on the agenda for April, and the Board was able to have discussions about possible solutions and steps moving forward. A calendar committee will be formed to address the feedback and concerns regarding the calendars, so please continue to share suggestions and voice concerns so that these can be considered by the committee. Following the transportation presentation that Ms. Shernoff requested to address the early start times for some of our elementary students, the Board talked through numerous alternatives that might make the situation more equitable. The discussion has been moved to the Finance and Operations Committee, and feedback will be gathered from the community.

---

## Committee Meeting Highlights

In our Student Services Committee meeting, I made a motion to reverse the previous directive from the Committee to hold focus groups in regards to policy 8040. When this directive was brought up at the February 15 Committee meeting, I was given the impression that this process could be done quickly and inexpensively. Over the last two Committee meetings, it has become clear that the focus groups could not only be costly but also a longer process, so I shared that I can no longer support this option. My motion was not supported by my fellow Committee members, but I will continue to push for open discussion and using our time to start working on a policy that considers and protects all of our students. The Committee also once again discussed the new Policy 6640, Emergency First Aid, CPR, and AED-certified Personnel, and reviewed feedback from the public. Policy development will be paused while regulations are drafted by staff regarding diabetes medical management plans, levels of staff training, and a process for support staff such as transportation and nutrition services.

Our information item for the Student Behavior and Accountability Committee was a review of the new Policy 8655, Student Personal Device Use. This policy covers the use of personal technology in schools, including phones, tablets, earbuds, smartwatches, and other technologies during the school day. Our hope is to lessen distractions and disruptions during the school day with these new guidelines on the use of personal devices. You can review the policy [here](#).

---

## Community News

### Teachers and Principals of the Year

Congratulations to our two teachers and two principals who were [selected](#) by Loudoun County Public Schools as Teachers of the Year and Principals of the Year! Kimberly Poole, a CTE teacher at J.L. Simpson Middle School, and Andrew Bango, physical education teacher at Arcola Elementary School, were selected for Teachers of the Year. Nikisha Diehl, Principal of Mercer Middle School, and Jeff Joseph, principal of Dominion Trail Elementary School in Ashburn, were selected as Principals of the Year. Principal Diehl and Mr. Bango are also the LCPS nominees for the Washington Post Principal of the Year and Teacher of the Year Award, respectively.

### Mathematics Educator of the Year Award

Round Hill Elementary School's gifted resource teacher Shirley Fortenbaugh has been [awarded](#) the 2024 William C. Lowry Mathematics Educator of the Year award from the Virginia Council of Teachers of Mathematics (VCTM) for her exceptional contributions to the mathematics field! Mrs. Fortenbaugh, who has been with LCPS for 16 years, teaches 4th and 5th-grade math through the LCPS Differentiated Classroom Instruction program, along with supporting and contributing to the mathematics education for K-3rd grade. Congratulations to Mrs. Fortenbaugh on this outstanding achievement!

### New Teachers of the Year

Congratulations to the three LCPS teachers who were [named](#) 2024 New Teachers of the Year!

Elementary School New Teacher of the Year: Alexandra Cooper

High School New Teacher of the Year: Aisha Ahmed

Middle School New Teacher of the Year: Shreyas Khera

### **Loudoun Valley Student Chosen as 2024 Cooke College Scholar**

Congratulations to Loudoun Valley High School senior Katelyn Miller, who was [selected](#) as a 2024 Cooke College Scholar. The Cooke College Scholarship Program is an undergraduate scholarship program for academically accomplished high school seniors with financial needs who are interested in attending the nation's top colleges and universities. Katelyn was one of 60 recipients selected from a record number of applicants all over the country, what an accomplishment!

### **Winter VHSL Champions**

It was truly an incredible year for LCPS athletics, and I am so impressed with the outstanding talent and fortitude of our student-athletes! The full list of 2023-24 high school champions can be found [here](#); congratulations to all of these hard-working, dedicated students!

### **Middle School Intramural Tournament Champions**

Congratulations to Smart's Mill McDonald's Elite for their Intramural Volleyball Tournament win, and Seneca Ridge's the Flying A's for their Intramural 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament win! Way to represent our middle schools!!

### **Class of 2024**

Our seniors have been busy preparing for their last month of school, Capstone projects, and post-secondary plans while enjoying fun senior events like Decision Day and prom. Graduation is just around the corner, click [here](#) for the full schedule of graduation ceremonies across the county.

---

## **Calendar**

The following are important events and holidays, and the dates and times for board meetings, as well as for the committees that I serve on. School Board meetings are every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month at the Administration Building, located at 21000 Education Ct. in Ashburn. All meetings are open to the public and are audio recorded. Meetings and events can be found on the LCPS calendar link below, and agenda and recordings can be found on [BoardDocs](#).

#### [2nd Tuesday School Board meeting](#)

May 14 at 4:30 PM

#### [Student Services Committee meeting](#)

May 16 at 5:30 PM

#### [Student Behavior and Accountability Committee meeting](#)

May 20 at 4:30 PM

#### **Holiday (Memorial Day)**

May 27

#### [4th Tuesday School Board meeting](#)

May 28 at 4:30 PM

#### [Specialized Programs and Centers Committee meeting](#)

June 4 at 3:30 PM

[2nd Tuesday School Board meeting](#)

June 11 at 4:30 PM

## LCPS Calendar



**Erin Dunbar**

Erin is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters