



# AUGUSTA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## PRESS RELEASE

Augusta County Public Schools proudly announces the 2023 Teachers of the Year.  
We are pleased to recognize Elizabeth Benbow as the 2023 ACPS Teacher of the Year!

**Buffalo Gap High School**  
**Elizabeth Ashby**  
**(Business and Information**  
**Technology, Grades 9-11)**





Elizabeth Ashby holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Education Comprehensive from Fairmont State College. Since 1993, she has taught Business in Augusta County Public Schools. She taught at Stuarts Draft Middle School for five years before becoming a part of the Buffalo Gap High School community. Elizabeth coached volleyball for 15 years, earning the honor of the Shenandoah District Coach of the Year and The News Leader Volleyball Coach of the Year in 2017. Elizabeth is co-sponsor of the National Honor Society, prom sponsor/chair, creator, and lead sponsor of The Herd Club (student spirit group), and The Bison Business (school store). Elizabeth describes her work with students as helping them with practical, engaging activities that offer opportunities to be creative. Students' originality is on display when they get to show their skills with activities in her classroom. Elizabeth encourages positivity in the classroom and throughout the BGHS community.

**Fort Defiance High School**  
**Brock Barnes**  
**Social Studies, Grades 9 & 12**



Born and raised in Augusta County, Brock developed a passion for history at a young age. His interest in the subject was cultivated by family and the social studies teachers he had in school. By his senior year of high school, Brock had committed to becoming a public educator. First in his family to attend college, Brock graduated magna cum laude from Radford University with a Bachelor of Arts in History, a Bachelor of Science in Social Sciences, and a minor in Political Science. During his undergraduate studies, Brock worked extensively with the university archival department and the 116th Infantry Division Museum to develop a digital curation of artifacts. This collaboration taught Brock the three key components of studying history: preservation, interpretation, and education. These tenets a prominent influence on Brock's classroom instruction. Brock serves as the debate coach, AP Government teacher, and a Coordinator and Social Studies Instructor for the Alternate School Program. As a former student of FDHS, Brock takes great pride in working with his former teachers and mentors. His connection with the Fort community and passion for the field of history is well represented in his classroom. Brock's notion that a public school provides an education that goes beyond the three R's of reading, writing, and arithmetic. This belief has become an important part of Brock's teaching philosophy. It is a credence of Brock's that working with students is a balance of teaching the class curriculum, meeting the students' needs, and filling the gap between.

<p><b>Riverheads High School</b>  <b>James Nicely</b>  <b>(Social Studies, Grades 9-12)</b></p> 	<p>James Nicely began teaching at Maury River Middle School in Lexington, Virginia in 2007 where he taught Civics and Economics and World History I to 7th and 8th-grade students. In 2018, he came to Riverheads High School where he currently teaches Virginia and U.S. Government, Virginia and U.S. History, and World Geography. Prior to teaching, James began coaching high school baseball as a volunteer assistant coach. That interest in coaching eventually led to a full-time career in education. James's philosophy of teaching is to find the balance between the need of the student to learn the content expected through the course while understanding that my classes are only a small part of the student's life. James's Government students complete 5 hours of community service during his semester-long course. This experience allows students to learn about specific needs within our community and how individuals can have an impact through service. With James's support students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and educational abilities discover many different ways to contribute to our community.</p>
<p><b>Stuarts Draft High School</b>  <b>Jessica Bergan</b>  <b>(Mathematics, Grades 9-10)</b></p> 	<p>As a high school graduate, Jess Bergan knew she wanted to be a teacher and coach, helping young people to be their best selves. Jess played college soccer at Bridgewater all four years and completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mathematics, with a Coaching Minor, and Secondary Mathematics Teaching Certification. She started at Stuarts Draft High School in the Fall of 2018. She has taught Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, AFDA, Math Analysis, Calculus, Statistical Reasoning in Sports, and Discrete Mathematics in a Fusion class with Government. In the Spring of 2021, Jess took over the role of Math Department head. In the Fall of 2021, she started the Master of Education in Mathematics graduate program at James Madison University. She will graduate in December of 2023. This will give her the needed expertise to teach several Dual Enrollment Mathematics courses for Stuarts Draft students. Jess is a lifelong learner and enjoys all of the opportunities to learn from her colleagues as well as participate in professional development opportunities. Jess blends her love of sports by being an assistant coach for volleyball and girls' soccer. She is an active member of the Stuarts Draft High School community. Jess's greatest contributions and accomplishments in education are the successes and wins that happen each day in her classroom. Jess believes in a class experience that helps students become independent math thinkers capable of approaching, analyzing, and solving problems. She works to create a classroom environment and class structure that promotes motivation to learn and engage in math. A noteworthy project that she has been involved in that positively impacts school culture is the Fusion class of Government and Discrete Mathematics she co-teaches. This innovative course provides a concrete example of how the subjects learned in high school blend together with real-world applications.</p>
<p><b>Wilson Memorial High School</b>  <b>Michelle Hutchens</b>  <b>(Mathematics, Grades 9-12)</b></p>	<p>Following two generations before her, Michelle Hutchens graduated from Wilson Memorial High School in 2002. Fueled by encouragement from her parents and high school language teachers, she continued her education at James Madison University where she pursued and received her B.S. in Mathematics with a minor in Secondary Education. Michelle started her teaching career shortly after at Wilson Memorial High School. In the classroom, Michelle is driven by a hatred for math. Not her own, but others'. She strives to break all the barriers and make learning math fun, while still keeping it rigorous and relevant. Michelle takes pride in the relationships and rapport that she develops with her students in the process. She is currently completing her 17th year as a math teacher-all</p>



years served at Wilson Memorial High School. During these years, she has accomplished many things in and outside the classroom, one including earning a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership. During her time at WMHS, Michelle has contributed to the school community by being a softball coach, academic team coach, after-school tutor, SCA Sponsor, Math Department Head, New Teacher Mentor, and Camp Wilson Coordinator. Committed to sharing her passion for math and for life in general, Michelle wants everyone she meets to feel that they are unique and valuable. Michelle's hope is to instill responsibility and accountability while teaching students, not only mathematical concepts but character and morals as well. She wants each student who walks into her classroom to feel accepted, safe, and respected. She wants them to know that she truly cares about them and their future. They are the future.

**Shenandoah Valley Center for  
Advanced Learning  
Elizabeth Trainum  
(Mathematics, Grades 11-12)**



Bess Trainum grew up in a family that valued education, though she did not initially plan to become a teacher. Her mother was an elementary school teacher and her father taught high school prior to becoming a lawyer. She majored in International Studies and minored in French at Miami University in Ohio. When she moved to Virginia and was working at a local business in Staunton, she was spending a lot of time teaching her coworkers how to navigate a new computer system. And she found she was good at teaching others. Bess decided to pursue a degree in education and enrolled in graduate school at James Madison University. Among innumerable other things, her cooperating teachers taught her the importance of building relationships with students (especially the "difficult" ones) and the importance of structure and organization in classroom management and lesson plan design. For her first three years of teaching at Stewart Middle School, Bess taught Language Arts and Civics. She was introduced to the middle school model of teams with flexible schedules and the ability of teachers to work together on cross-curricular units. During this time, her most memorable accomplishment was a joint unit between Civics and Language Arts in which students read different books tailored to their reading level but answered the same type of discussion questions about freedom, equality, and justice. The hard work of creating the unit was well worth it when the students (and teachers) were completely engaged in the content and discussions. This reinforced the idea that high student engagement depended on thoughtful and diligent planning. Additionally, high student engagement made teaching rewarding to her as well. This continues to be her focus. After three years at SMS, Bess left teaching for ten years, worked part-time elsewhere, and raised some children. During that time off, she decided that when she returned to teaching, she wanted to focus on math. She took many undergraduate math classes and when she returned to SMS in 2009, it was as an eighth-grade Algebra I and Pre-Algebra teacher. Working at SMS allowed Bess the freedom and flexibility to be creative and innovative in her teaching methods. She was able to collaborate not only with other math teachers but with various teachers from other disciplines. As one of the coaches for the MathCounts! club at SMS, Bess recognized the need to offer students a more meaningful math experience. Along with another teacher and a very supportive administrator, they created a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) program. The goal of the program was to challenge and engage students in a more cross-curricular, real-world environment. The STEM program was a challenge for both the



	<p>teachers and students, but it also allowed for more creativity and flexibility than the traditional classroom setting. The challenge was well worth it in the end for both the students and the teachers. While working on new curriculums in STEM and continuing with MathCounts!, Bess realized that she wanted to learn and teach higher levels of mathematics. She started taking graduate-level math classes at JMU and Radford University to prepare. Upon the completion of six graduate math classes in 2021, she earned a certificate to teach Dual Enrollment (DE) math classes. At this point, she accepted a position at the Shenandoah Valley Governor's School. She currently teaches Precalculus and DE Calculus to high school juniors and seniors. SVGS has again provided an environment that, while very challenging as a teacher, allows for the creativity in teaching that Bess thrives on.</p>
<p><b>Beverley Manor Middle School</b>  <b>Sarah Foster</b>  <b>(Family &amp; Consumer Sciences,</b>  <b>Grades 6-8)</b></p> 	<p>Sarah Foster has spent the last 30 years wearing a variety of hats in the field of education. After receiving an undergraduate degree from JMU in Early Childhood Curriculum &amp; Instruction and a Master's Degree in Education from George Mason University, she worked for the Fairfax County Office for Children as a toddler/preschool teacher, a curriculum trainer for Head Start staff, and a Child Development Associate (CDA) Advisor. When she and her husband returned home to Augusta County, she took a position offering graduate-level computer literacy courses through Old Dominion University to teachers in public school systems throughout the Shenandoah Valley. She also served for 6 years as the Program Manager for the Quality Child Care Initiative at the Family Resource &amp; Referral Center. Sarah began substitute teaching at BMMS and found that she liked the middle school setting much more than expected. She sees a number of similarities between toddlers and young teens, as both groups adamantly assert their independence, are often quite defiant, and always require a tremendous amount of patience. Sarah took classes to add the endorsements for all middle school core subject areas and then accepted a teaching position with the newly-formed math intervention program at BMMS in 2013. She continued as a math teacher until two years ago when a Family &amp; Consumer Sciences opportunity opened up. In this new role, Sarah has worked hard to develop an environment that balances the post-pandemic social and emotional needs of her students with as much hands-on learning as possible. Her most rewarding moments occur when students show up in class to report that they successfully replicated a recipe at home or purchased their own sewing supplies in order to practice outside of class. When she has free time, Sarah can often be found outdoors. She enjoys wildlife photography, nature walks, and bird watching. She is currently pursuing certification as a Virginia Master Naturalist in order to serve as a volunteer education specialist for local conservation organizations.</p>



**Stewart Middle School**  
**Coralie Roberts**  
**(Mathematics, Grade 8)**



Coralie Roberts has always loved working with children. At the age of twelve, she was CPR certified and began babysitting for neighboring families. Married at the age of 20 and raising two children by the age of 27, Coralie volunteered at her children's school, joined the PTA, led Children's Ministries at her church, and became a Girl Scout Leader so her daughter could be a Girl Scout. Being a Girl Scout Leader awakened a desire in her to do more than lead a troop of ten girls. Coralie enrolled at BRCC and began the educational journey that culminated in her receiving a Master of Arts Degree in Education in May of 2012, the same year her son graduated from high school. Hired that same year by Augusta County Schools, Coralie enthusiastically began her teaching career, joining the summer math curriculum team before she even began teaching. Eleven years later, Coralie has tutored countless students after school, stayed up late creating engaging lessons, taken classes to keep her teaching skills sharp, read several educational books, attended band concerts and sporting events to encourage her students, and enjoyed every minute of it. The joy she receives from her students on a daily basis is testimony to her devotion to teaching. Coralie believes that students need to be taught to be respectful, responsible, and reliable people both in school and in their future. This can happen when teachers, staff, and administration communicate and partner with the families of our students. Writing Pawsitive Referrals, nominating students for Stewart and Bulldog Awards, incorporating the Bulldog Way into her classroom, and consistently communicating with parents have allowed Coralie to connect with families in a positive way. Volunteering to stay after school to tutor students has given her an opportunity to work one-on-one with students in a relaxed atmosphere that encourages discussions about life outside of school. These are ways she ensures her teaching goes beyond her classroom and extends to the future.

**Stuarts Draft Middle School**  
**Edythe Shirley**  
**(English, Grade 7)**



Edythe Shirley has been in education for twenty-four years teaching in three schools and four grade levels. She started her career in elementary education. During this thirteen-year time period, Edythe was committee co-chairperson for the School Technology Committee, committee co-chairperson for the School Community Committee, a member of the School Improvement Team, and co-chairperson for the School Literacy Committee. Edythe was the team leader for her fifth-grade team for four years. Upon moving to SDMS, Edythe has taught English for six years. During this time she was chosen to be on the division's team of Trailblazers, English department co-chair and chair, 504 coordinator, and team co-leader and leader. Edythe also started and implemented the Rise reading intervention program at SDMS during the 2022-2023 school year. Her leadership in this program has resulted in multiple examples of student success and growth. Edythe's first inkling that she wanted to be a teacher was during her high school career in which she encountered what she felt was a 'bad' teacher. This encounter made her want to teach kids so that they could have a better experience with their education. Edythe loves the connection she has with her students. She loves to work with kids who struggle academically and behaviorally. She loves to connect and help these students. Edythe loves to see the light bulb go off when they get it! She has worked hard to make sure the students come away with more than just book smarts, but world and life smarts as well. She loves it when she gets an email or note from a child that says she is the best teacher they have ever had or that they miss her! Edythe is always willing to help colleagues and students with anything they need. She easily adapts to change. Edythe creates a classroom with a positive attitude and a healthy environment. She wishes and hopes for her room to be a safe place for her students. Edythe's greatest accomplishment is her students and their success!

**Wilson Middle School**  
**Timothy DeSimone**  
**(Band, Grades 6-8)**





Timothy DeSimone is in his second year as the Band Director at Wilson Middle School, where he oversees all teaching and administrative aspects of the program. Under his direction, enrollment has nearly tripled from 43 to over 110 students, including almost 30% of the incoming 6th-grade class. Timothy has introduced a regular Pep Band, Jazz Band, is co-chair of the Gifted and Talented Committee, and also acts as Assistant Director of the WMHS Marching Emerald Regiment. Most recently, the WMS Symphonic Band received unanimous “Superior” ratings from the Virginia Band and Orchestra Association at its annual Concert Assessment. In September of 2022, the WMS band was selected as one of 100 schools across the nation to collaborate with the *President’s Own Military Band* as part of their Centennial Celebration. As voted by his peers, he will act as the representative of the *Virginia Band and Orchestra Association’s District V*, representing over 40 schools and music directors in the counties and cities spanning Bath through Harrisonburg. He will serve a two-year term from July 2023-2025. Timothy attended James Madison University, graduating in 2021 with a Bachelor of Music (BM) in Music Education and a minor in Jazz Studies. During the closure of schools in March 2020, he organized his peers in the Music Education department to teach free online lessons to Virginia. Over 700 virtual lessons were taught in the first month alone. In his senior year, he served as Drum Major of the 475-member *Marching Royal Dukes* and was recognized by the *IN8 Society* for exceptional service to the Madison community. Timothy holds affiliation with the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), the Virginia Music Education Association (VMEA), Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, and is currently pursuing National Board Certification. He chose to become a teacher thanks to the profound influence his own educators had on him. He will remain a teacher thanks to the profound influence his own students have had on him. Timothy believes music is a gift that can be used in powerful ways. As we are fortunate enough to make it, we are duty-bound to share it. Timothy teaches generosity, community, pride, and unity in his daily work with students.

**Hugh K. Cassell Elementary School**  
**Holly Lotts**  
**(Art)**




Holly is an Augusta County native. graduating from Stuarts Draft High School. She's always wanted to give something back to the community and in particular something not available when she was a student, elementary art. Art has always been an outlet, form of expression, and place of self-discovery. It's her goal to share the joy and love of art, the process of creating, and the opportunity to be expressive with others and not just students but the entire school community. As a student, learning did not always come easy, as she had difficulty with math and reading requiring the use of a tutor or additional remediation. Progressing through middle and high school, her favorite or most inspiring classes and assignments were those providing the opportunity for a creative outlet. Holly's high school art teachers instilled a drive, ensuring an inquisitiveness into the art world. Art provided an opportunity to augment her creative expression through self-discovery, allowing her to build self-esteem and self-concept. Art presented a means by which she felt complete in knowing she had created an item. This sense of achievement is what Holly wishes to instill in children. All children need a variety of experiences to assist them in exploring their environment. Through art, children learn to value their own uniqueness and appreciate the individuality of others. Holly first started in 2005 as a long-term art substitute at Stuarts Draft Elementary. In 2006 she became an artist in residence at Ladd Elementary and then being part of the second group of elementary art teachers hired, splitting the year between Ladd Elementary

	<p>and Hugh K. Cassell Elementary. In 2014 she graduated from JMU earning her Bachelor's Degree in Art Education. Students need to be able to know there is more than one way to go about solving problems and in turn, develop critical thinking skills that can be applied to all aspects of life. Art is a space and way to communicate ideas when words and other conventional methods aren't effective. Art has been and continues to be an influential component of Holly's life. It is something she creates and a subject she's passionate about and has great enthusiasm towards. Holly wants to share that inquisitiveness associated with studying art with students in hopes they will become interested not only in art, but the world surrounding them.</p>
<p><b>Churchville Elementary School</b>  <b>Chynna Kison</b>  <b>(Grade 5)</b></p> 	<p>Chynna Kison decided that she wanted to make a difference in the lives of children from a young age. She earned an Associate's Degree in Elementary Education from Potomac State College. Chynna earned a Bachelor's Degree in Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies and a Master of Arts in Elementary Education from James Madison University. Through the years she had many amazing teachers and athletic coaches who supported her, challenged her, and not only developed her academic and athletic skills but also taught her valuable life lessons that would follow her into adulthood. With such wonderful teachers and role models in her life, Chynna wanted the opportunity to help children in the same way. These interactions helped Chynna find her perfect calling: teaching. Chynna has contributed to the Churchville Elementary School community through her service as a tutor in the After School Tutoring Program, Spelling Bee Coordinator, June Academy Teacher, 24 Math Club Coordinator, and 5th Grade Team Leader. Her greatest accomplishment in education so far has been the love and care that she gives to every student who walks through her classroom door. She builds lasting relationships that help students have a positive, fun, and successful 5th-grade year, while also preparing them to become the best that they can be. Chynna believes that life is all about having a positive mindset and building connections with others. The thoughts and ideas of kindness and positivity that students learn in her classroom follow them far after they leave 5th grade.</p>
<p><b>Clymore Elementary School</b>  <b>Christina Mozingo</b>  <b>(Kindergarten)</b></p> 	<p>Christy Mozingo is a passionate teacher with 17 years of experience working with students ranging from kindergarten to fourth grade. She believes in a constructive, student-centered learning community where students work collaboratively to solve real-world problems. She strives to form positive relationships with students, parents, and other teachers to further grow her students' learning experiences and to create a safe community environment at school. Christy received a Bachelor of Arts Degree from George Mason University in 1992 and later pursued her Collegiate Professional License in Elementary Education at Mary Baldwin College in 2002. She was inspired to become a teacher by the many great educators she had in Fairfax County, Virginia who fostered within her a love of learning and a desire to make a difference. Christy currently teaches Kindergarten at Clymore Elementary where she loves to encourage her students to be curious and to take responsibility for their learning. She feels that her greatest contribution and accomplishment is helping young learners grow socially, emotionally, and academically during these formative years to help ensure their future success. Christy is proud of her long-term role on the School Leadership Team. As part of the Leadership Team, she helps to increase the achievement and engagement of every student through continuous improvement of curriculum, instruction, assessment, culture, and climate. She takes great pride in knowing that she is a part of her school's continued</p>





	<p>progress and success. Christy loves each and every one of her students. She strives to instill in them not only a love for learning but a love and respect for others. In her kindergarten classroom, she models and celebrates kindness every day. Christy believes this creates a ripple effect that can last a lifetime.</p>
<p><b>Craigsville Elementary School</b>  <b>Crystal Hostetter</b>  <b>(Grade 4)</b></p> 	<p>Crystal realized by the time she was in high school that she was going to school to become a teacher just like one of her inspirational teachers. She earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology with a Minor in Early Education from Mary Baldwin College. Crystal considers dedication as one of her greatest contributions to education. She arrives early in the morning to get her classroom prepared for the day. She will often work several hours when she gets home to get papers graded and lesson plans ready for the next day. Crystal doesn't mind taking on new responsibilities when asked. She rises to every challenge and encourages her colleagues to take on new challenges with a positive attitude. She goes above and beyond for her students and colleagues. She is dedicated to helping all students succeed. Crystal works well with many different individuals at Craigsville Elementary School. She is currently mentoring two novice teachers. She plans with them daily to give them advice, suggestions, and assistance with anything they need. Crystal's classroom is a community of fourth graders. She uses morning meetings to get to know her students on a deeper level. Each morning, she leads a group activity encouraging students to collaborate to solve a problem or complete a task. Then her students discuss the day's routine. This builds trust and safety within her classroom community. She provides a safe environment for them to share ideas and collaborate with each other through hands-on learning. Crystal uses technology programs to differentiate instruction more effectively. She collaborates with other professionals to establish a safe learning environment so students know that wherever they are learning in Craigsville Elementary School, they are cared for and safe.</p>
<p><b>North River Elementary School</b>  <b>Rebecca Campbell</b>  <b>(4th Grade Reading and Social Studies)</b></p> 	<p>It wasn't until the summer of her sophomore year in college that Rebecca Campbell learned that sometimes our greatest passions take time to reveal themselves, and they can come through experiences and people that we never planned for. Rebecca took a position as an assistant preschool teacher that summer, not because she was interested in education, but because she just enjoyed working with kids. The encouragement of her lead teacher led to Rebecca realize that there was a talent here she needed to explore. That fall, Rebecca visited the head of the education department of her college and said that she didn't care how much effort it would take – she had found her calling and was determined to succeed. It took heavy class loads and an additional semester of schooling, but she made it happen. She proudly graduated from Bridgewater College in December 2008, certified to teach students in Pre-K through 6th Grade. Thirteen years and hundreds of students later, Rebecca can, without hesitation, say that life leads you where you are supposed to be. She settled in so comfortably into her role as a fourth-grade teacher at NRES that she remains there today. If you ask her to talk about her achievements, Rebecca won't provide a lengthy list of programs and committees, and awards. She believes her greatest achievement is the commitment she has made to her calling. Through thirteen years of tears and failures and frustrations, she's still here. Even on the days when she feels like a rookie in disguise, she keeps coming back for the days she knows she'll feel like a rockstar. That's all she thinks a great teacher has to do. Keep coming back, keep fighting for your students, and keep trying to make a difference even when it feels like you aren't. She knows that at the end of the day, the kids won't realize the time and money, and effort she put into making learning</p>

	<p>engaging and fun. Years from now they may not even remember those activities at all. But they will remember her support and her compassion and her love for them. They will know that she was committed to giving them her best. And that, she believes, is the only achievement the Teacher of the Year needs to claim.</p>
<p><b>Riverheads Elementary School</b>  <b>Linda Brake</b>  <b>(2nd Grade)</b></p> 	<p>Linda Brake's professional experiences in education began when she worked at Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center in the counseling department assisting a blind counselor working with patients who were in accidents or suffered medical conditions that would change their lives. She learned about occupational, physical, and speech therapy that could help support daily living. The most important thing she learned was how to talk to families, especially children, who were struggling with the trauma of dealing with the reality of life with a disability. She was hired as a special education instructional aide at Riverheads Elementary School in 1996 and worked with impressive educators who taught her how to differentiate, accommodate, but most importantly listen to the needs of children. After completing her degree, Linda was hired as a third-grade teacher at Stuarts Draft Elementary School. In this role, she learned that education is more than the "standards of learning" that she was tasked to teach. She understood that the relationships she built with those students were as equally important as the knowledge she implanted. In 2008, Linda left Stuarts Draft Elementary School and returned to Riverheads Elementary School. While at Riverheads Elementary School, she has continued to influence the lives of many children. In year 22 of teaching, her greatest accomplishment remains the relationships she builds with her students and parents. Linda talks with them, gets to know them, and shares her life experiences with them. She receives numerous compliments from parents thanking her for various "above and beyond" things she does for their children. Linda's philosophy of teaching is to educate the whole child and inspire each child to reach their fullest potential. Her main focus remains building positive social skills, relationships, and supporting student individuality. Through morning meetings, student modeling activities on being respectful to each other, and praising students for being responsible, her classroom culture establishes a safe learning environment where she and her students can collaborate, communicate, create, and solve problems together.</p>
<p><b>Stump Elementary School</b>  <b>Erin Leitch</b>  <b>(Kindergarten)</b></p> 	<p>As a student at Stuarts Draft Elementary School, Erin Leitch looked at her fourth-grade teacher like she was a superhero. Erin was constantly in awe of her teacher's energy, enthusiasm for teaching, and the connections she made with the students and content. Erin was inspired and immediately knew she wanted to be the same inspiration to other children. Erin works hard daily to have the energy the students need to stay engaged and make learning fun. She tries to make learning enjoyable and fun by creating real-world examples to truly understand the content. Erin builds strong relationships with her students and families to ensure that every child feels welcome and loved in their classroom. Regardless of grade level, these relationships have lasted years beyond the year Erin actually taught the student. Even on days when she does not feel high energy, she knows it is essential for the students in her class to have the best version of her to learn in the most engaging and positive environment possible. It has been said many times in observations, both formally and through conversations, that Erin has high energy in the classroom and the students would never know if she was having a bad day. Erin's greatest accomplishments are the growth she sees in her students each year. She works hard to help each child grow and celebrate their growth in areas both academically and personally. Erin views growth by progress not necessarily a final score.</p>

	<p>She values their strengths and highlights what they've improved upon. Erin feels she has contributed to education by seeing students who are now 20 years old, telling her that she inspired them to work hard to keep pushing through and to pursue their dream careers. Also, having students come back to see her in her current classroom or reach out years later to tell her that she was and continues to remain their favorite teacher for the remainder of their school years. Erin earned an Associate's Degree from Blue Ridge Community College and then a Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology with a PK-6 Teacher License from Mary Baldwin College. She has taught at Stump Elementary for four years. Prior, she taught at Wilson Elementary School and Ladd Elementary School.</p>
<p><b>Wilson Elementary School</b>  <b>Mallory Claytor</b>  <b>(Mathematics, 5th Grade)</b></p> 	<p>Mallory Claytor was born and raised in Augusta County and attended Augusta County Schools her entire life. She always knew she wanted to be a teacher from a very young age. Every Christmas she would ask for school supplies to play school in her make-shift classroom at her house. One of the teachers she had at Hugh. K Cassell Elementary School, motivated and inspired her to reach her goal of becoming a teacher. Mallory had this teacher in second grade, again in fourth grade, and then had the opportunity to complete a mentorship with her in eleventh grade. In her senior year of high school, Mallory was a student in the Teachers for Tomorrow class at Valley Career &amp; Technical Center. She again, completed her classroom work, in this teacher's classroom at Cassell Elementary School. After the many positive experiences in this classroom, Mallory knew she wanted to make a difference to students just like this teacher did for her. Throughout her high school years, Mallory tutored elementary students and worked in the children's ministry at her church. During this time she also helped coach Wilson's Little League cheerleading and worked as a camp counselor for the Augusta County Parks and Rec Summer Camps. After graduating from Wilson Memorial High School in 2015, Mallory attended college at Longwood University. She graduated early in December of 2018, obtaining a Bachelor of Science Degree in Liberal Studies with a concentration in Elementary Education grades Pre-K through sixth. The very next week, she landed herself a job as a second-grade teacher at William Perry Elementary School in Waynesboro, Virginia. Mallory took over a second-grade class in the middle of the year and finished the year at William Perry. She then applied to Augusta County Schools as she knew she wanted to spend her teaching career in the county she grew up in. In 2019, Mallory accepted a job at Wilson Elementary School where she has taught for the last four years. She taught second grade for two years at Wilson and in 2021, she moved up to fifth grade where she is currently. Mallory teaches fifth-grade Math to three diverse classes this year. She also coached High School Cheer for Wilson Memorial for two seasons. In her time as a teacher, she feels that her greatest contribution is the positive relationships she has built and continues to maintain. Relationships are her number one priority in her job as an educator. Mallory works hard to create bonds that will last far longer than the 180 days in the school year. She attends her students' extracurriculars outside of school, checks in with students daily, and finds ways to relate with each one of her students and their families. Not only does she work hard to create relationships with her students, Mallory also believes in positive parent relationships. Without these strong relationships, success in the classroom is unachievable. Mallory also works to teach her students skills that will be beneficial in life outside of school such as problem-solving, collaboration, kindness, and inclusion. She spends time teaching her students these tools so that they will be prepared for life outside of elementary school. Becoming Teacher of The Year has also been a goal of hers ever since she knew she wanted to be a teacher.</p>



<div data-bbox="126 186 540 289" data-label="Section-Header"> <p><b>Stuarts Draft Elementary School Elizabeth Benbow (Reading Specialist, Grades K-4)</b></p> </div> <div data-bbox="131 291 586 632" data-label="Image">  </div> <div data-bbox="131 1276 586 1619" data-label="Image">  </div>	<div data-bbox="609 86 1409 153" data-label="Text"> <p>Becoming Wilson Elementary Schools Teacher of the Year is a huge personal achievement for Mallory</p> </div> <div data-bbox="609 189 1495 1493" data-label="Text"> <p>Looking back from then to now, the path that led Liz Benbow from college student to Lead Reading Specialist is a long and winding road. Liz started college in Pennsylvania as a psychology major, but it was her linguistic course that held her interest. This love of linguistics caused her to change her major to English so she could take all of the linguistically related classes. As an English major, Liz decided to pursue her teaching license. Upon graduating, however, she decided that teaching literature did not match up with her interest in linguistics and so she wandered off into other pursuits. After working in management and fundraising, Liz decided to go back to school to get her Master's Degree in Special Education. However, as she was working on her Master's, she realized that she still did not know how to teach struggling readers to read. This one skill of teaching others to read became a driving force in Liz's life; so she got a job with Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes. There she learned many of the skills that she is now teaching participants of LETRS which is a comprehensive course that teaches educators how to be an expert in the Science of Reading. After earning her Masters in California, she started teaching in Augusta County Public Schools as a special education teacher at Churchville Elementary. She enjoyed teaching students with disabilities, but what she enjoyed most was teaching these students how to read. With this in mind, Liz went back to college in Virginia to earn her Reading Specialist credential. She never looked back. Now she gets to do what she loves all day. Liz worked as a reading specialist at Craigsville Elementary for ten years and is now working at Stuarts Draft Elementary. While working as a reading specialist, Liz also earned her Associates Level Certification with the Orton-Gillingham Association through VDOE, and she took LETRS Volume I and II and became a certified LETRS facilitator. In addition, she is now a lead reading specialist for Augusta County's elementary schools and a LETRS coordinator for the district. This means she is both a reading teacher and a reading coach. Liz still serves students all day and coaches teachers on Fridays and Professional Development days. This is definitely a pinnacle in her career as she not only gets to teach what she loves to students but also with teachers. However, recently she discovered one of her greatest accomplishments. A shy fifth grader told her he was now reading on a level Z and said it was because of her. He added that he now enjoys reading because he knows how to read the big words. This is the best accomplishment, as it is the reason we teach—to impact our students in a positive way, to make a real difference in the world: one child at a time.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="609 1629 1471 1698" data-label="Text"> <p><b>Congratulations on being named the 2023 ACPS Teacher of the Year, Ms. Benbow!!!</b></p> </div>
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