

Laurens County School District 55

301 Hillcrest Drive
Laurens, SC 29360
864-984-3568

www.laurens55.org



A MESSAGE FROM YOUR SUPERINTENDENT

Ameca C. Thomas, Ph.D.

VISION STATEMENT
Empowering and Inspiring
All to be Educated and
Informed

MISSION STATEMENT
Laurens County School
District 55 prepares
students for success in
learning and careers
through engaging,
challenging, and
personalized learning
experiences. Students are
curious, confident in their
own abilities, and
competitive in the local,
national, and global
environment. Students are
safe, valued, and supported
in their learning by highly
effective staff, families,
and community.

OUR THEME

World-Class Champions . . . every child, every chance, every day!

OUR GOALS

- Provide world-class safety and a positive school culture.
- Provide world-class, high-quality instruction to increase student achievement.
- Provide world-class communication and family engagement.

December 12, 2022

The countdown continues to the end of the semester! We have just 5.5 school days left until our winter holiday break, and a lot is happening between now and then. It is hard to believe the time has already come for me to write my last newsletter of the calendar year. As I reflect on the past semester, I can't help but swell with pride as I think about how we all showed up on the first day back in August, ready to "**Start Strong**". That excitement of beginning a new school year was evident, and all of you have kept the joy going throughout the semester. Let's continue to remain engaged and focused as we wrap up the semester.

Our district motto is, "Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day." This message remains vital, relevant, and clear. I often reflect on the important responsibility we accept as educators and as a community in support of Laurens County School District 55 (LCSD 55). Collectively we create an inviting atmosphere that fosters the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral growth of our children so they will become world-class citizens who are global-minded, compassionate leaders of a diverse, challenging, and constantly changing world.

I am so proud when I see our Laurens 55 scholars developing their leadership skills as they learn to evaluate and make meaning of complex information, find creative solutions to challenging problems, and understand others' perspectives through collaborative work. Our students are already developing the tools of leadership that they will need throughout life.

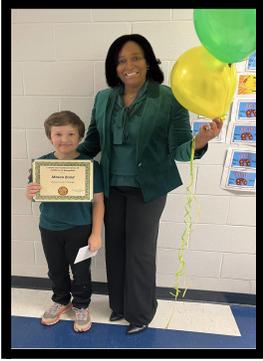
In LCSD 55 we provide our students with learning opportunities that include experiences with soft skills, social-emotional learning, complex mathematics, and hands-on scientific exploration. We know this academic and social-emotional rigor is foundational to success in both education and in the workplace.

We believe that a well-rounded quality education will carry our students into adulthood with the capability to shape better lives for themselves and a better world for all. This belief drives our work to ensure each child is learning today so that whatever they choose to do with their life, they will be world-class citizens capable of leading a better, more compassionate world.

It is an honor to serve your family. Let's finish 2022 strong!



NOVEMBER 2022 CHAMPION SPOTLIGHT STUDENT



Mason Bond, pictured on the left with Superintendent Dr. Ameca Thomas, is the Champion Spotlight Student of the Month for November 2022. Mason is a student at E.B. Morse Elementary School in Amy Blakely's 5th grade Montessori class. Mason gets along well with everyone. He is patient, helpful, and always tries his best.

Mrs. Blakely has this to say about her experience teaching Mason, "I have had the pleasure of teaching Mason for the last two years. I know that there are no perfect children, but Mason is pretty close! He has a calm, sweet personality and he never gets rattled! He is a joy to teach!"

Principal Dr. Jason Bailey is equally proud of Mason and says, "Mason is a kind, hardworking student who tries his best in all aspects both academically and socially. I am grateful to have him as a student at E.B. Morse Elementary School."

NOVEMBER 2022 CHAMPION ADMINISTRATOR



Superintendent Dr. Ameca Thomas presented Lakesha H. Austin with the LCSD 55 November 2022 Champion Administrator of the Month award. Mrs. Austin is the Elementary Assistant Principal at Gray Court-Owings School (GCO). She's in her 12th year in LCSD 55 and previously served as a classroom teacher and instructional coach. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from South Carolina State University, a Master's Degree in Counseling from Webster University, a Master's in Early Childhood Education from Converse College, and an add-on certification in School Administration from Gardner Webb University.

Mrs. Austin enjoys interacting with her students and watching them become excited about learning. She lives by Rita Pierson's quote, "Every child deserves a champion; an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best they can possibly be."

GCO Principal Farrell Thomas says this about Mrs. Austin, "Mrs. Austin is an amazing assistant principal in whom I have total faith and trust. She understands instruction and assists teachers with helpful strategies and classroom instruction. She has a phenomenal rapport with parents and you can always depend on the warmth of her smile daily."

NOVEMBER 2022 CHAMPION INDUCTION TEACHER



Mrs. Jennifer Crecco, a first-year 4-year-old kindergarten teacher at Hickory Tavern School, was personally recognized by LCSD 55 Superintendent Dr. Ameca Thomas as the LCSD 55 Induction Teacher of the Month for November 2022. Mrs. Crecco holds a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education and Psychology from Kean University.

From a very young age, she enjoyed caring for and teaching young children. She remembers feeling very accomplished when she was able to teach the younger kids in her neighborhood. It was a very natural decision for her to go into education. Her greatest joy as a teacher is providing opportunities for her students to learn and discover the world

around them. She said, "Seeing their excitement, love for learning, and self-confidence grow is what encourages me to do my best for them."

A quote from Brooke Hampton speaks to Mrs. Crecco's heart as an educator and parent, "Speak to your children as if they are the wisest, kindest, most beautiful and magical humans on earth. For what they believe is what they will become."

Principal Brandon Addy said, "Hickory Tavern School is so blessed to have Mrs. Crecco on our team. Her students learn the fundamental skills needed to be successful in an environment appropriate for 4-year-olds. Mrs. Crecco has high expectations for her students' learning yet she holds them accountable in the most caring way possible."



NOVEMBER 2022 SPIRIT OF 55 CERTIFIED STAFF

JoAnn Timberlake is a kindergarten teacher at Waterloo Elementary School. She is the November 2022 LCSD 55 Spirit of 55 Certified Staff Member of the Month.

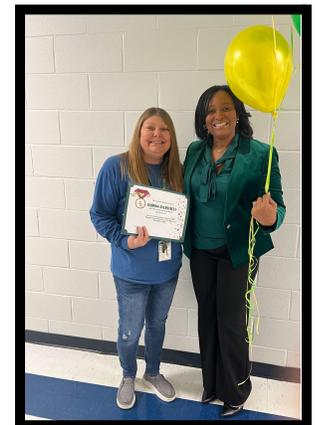
Mrs. Timberlake earned her Bachelor's Degree in Special Education from Georgia Southern University and her Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of South Carolina Upstate. She has 35 years of experience in education and her greatest joy as an educator is that she gets to interact with students daily and learn from them.

She would like to share with our community her favorite quote from Benjamin Franklin, "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

NOVEMBER 2022 SPIRIT OF 55 SUPPORT STAFF

Sabrina Overstreet at E.B. Morse Elementary School (EBM), has been named the Spirit of 55 Support Staff Member of the Month for November 2022.

Mrs. Overstreet has been at EBM for nine years as a kindergarten assistant, five years as a Primary Montessori assistant, and four years in a scholar 5K classroom. She is certified as a Paraoptometric (Optometrist Assistant) and worked in that capacity before joining the staff of EBM. She said this about her work, "I enjoy watching the children grow in their education and when they get that glister in their eyes when they finally master something."



Principal Dr. Jason Bailey has this to say about Mrs. Overstreet, "Mrs. Overstreet is a team player in many ways. She has been a consistent voice in her 5K classroom this year and fulfills other duties throughout the school, such as collecting bus numbers for dismissal at the end of each day. I appreciate her work ethic, willingness to serve, and dedication to her students and E.B. Morse Elementary School."

LCSD 55 BOARD OF TRUSTEES CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

Superintendent Dr. Ameca Thomas hosted a holiday luncheon for the LCSD 55 Board of Trustees on Friday, December 9, to express her appreciation for the board's commitment to serving the community. The Student Nutrition Services Department prepared and served the meal.



LAURENS 55 MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS SING FOR SANTA

Chorus teacher Rachel Bullock and students from Laurens Middle and Sanders Middle Schools joined the Sing for Santa event at the Greenville Swamp Rabbits Hockey Game on Saturday, December 10. Students sang Christmas carols then enjoyed the match between the Swamp Rabbits and the South Carolina Stingrays.

A big shout-out to the LCSD 55 Student Nutrition Services and Transportation Departments for helping to make this opportunity possible for these students.

Pictured on the left (from left to right) are Madisson Trammell, Kayleigh Griffin, Isabella Diaz and Ms. Bullock.

FIRE SCIENCE PROGRAM IN LCSD 55

Laurens County School District 55 (LCSD 55) continues to pave the path in giving its students unique learning opportunities that help prepare them to be college and career-ready. Dr. Ameca Thomas, Superintendent, believes in the importance of providing students options for finishing high school with specialized skills and certifications.

Feedback from the students and the community regarding the need for a Fire Science Program led Superintendent Thomas to pursue another partnership with Piedmont Technical College (PTC). The Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) Program is already in place at Laurens District 55 High School. Beginning second semester, students can earn a Fire Science Technician (FST) Certificate via the Dual Enrollment Program.

PTC is a reputable post-secondary institution accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. PTC seeks to transform lives and strengthen communities by providing opportunities for intellectual and economic growth. According to PTC, Fire Science is, “the study of all aspects of fire, including fire behavior to fire investigation.” The PTC Fire Science Program prepares students for entry-level and career-level advancement in fire service. It is a two-semester program totaling 20 credit hours.

Dr. Thomas is truly appreciative of this partnership with PTC and said, “This is such a wonderful opportunity that fits our district’s mission and vision. We plan to continue to work with Piedmont Technical College in adding more programs that will benefit our students and the community.”

Students will be educated in the fundamental concepts of professionalism, communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and hands-on training for a successful career in fire service. Specific courses include Firefighter I Basic, Firefighter I Advanced, Firefighter II, Basic First Aid, and Emergency Medical Care I & II. PTC instructors will be teaching on-site at Laurens District 55 High School beginning in Spring 2022. A Fire Science Parent Night was held at the high school on Tuesday, December 6.



PROJECT SEARCH IN LCSD 55

Project SEARCH in LCSD 55 is a one-year, internship program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It provides for a total workforce immersion, wherein participating students spend 36 weeks interning at a quality host business. The host business for LCSD 55 is PRISMA-Health Laurens County Hospital, which underwent a preparation process to participate in the program. Students attend a three-week orientation and three 10-week internship rotations within three different departments of the host business. Students dig into the Employability Skills Curriculum for an hour in the morning with Lauren Dean, LCSD 55 Project SEARCH Instructor, then spend 4.5 hours at their assigned departments. At the end of the day, students engage in reflection, problem-solving, and evaluation. The goal of the program is for students to obtain competitive employment upon completion of their internship. Hence, Project SEARCH provides customized job-search assistance at the end of the program to match the students with jobs that fit their skills and interests.



Project SEARCH has grown the employment viability of participating students. LCSD 55 plans to continue its implementation in the district in the 2023–24 school year. Informational materials will be available in January 2023. A Project SEARCH Parent Information Session will be held in February 2023. Information-sharing with appropriate parents will also be embedded in upcoming Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. Students will learn about the program in school during a Project SEARCH Student Information Session.

Superintendent Dr. Ameca Thomas said, “I am very excited that we were able to bring Project SEARCH to our district and community. This is our first year and we are grateful for the real-world opportunities this partnership with PRISMA-Health Laurens County Hospital provides for the students with disabilities in our district. Each day our students have work-based learning opportunities. The goal of this program is for each student to obtain competitive employment. To reach that goal, the program provides real-life work experience combined with training in employability and independent-living skills to help young people with disabilities make successful transitions to productive adult life. The most important criterion for acceptance into Project SEARCH is a desire to achieve employment.”

Laurens County School District 55 serves approximately 816 students with disabilities on IEP each year. The Project SEARCH initiative is just one of the programs the district has implemented to ensure special needs students and families have access to services. LCSD 55 has a variety of transition programs which Carolyn Shortt oversees as the LCSD 55 Transition Coordinator. Among those transition work-based programs are Raider Joe’s Coffee and Raider Creations Print Lab located at Laurens District 55 High School.





ACADEMIC RECOVERY INTERVENTIONS

The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) was signed into law on December 27, 2020. Through the said Act, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds were allocated to Local Education Agencies (LEAs). According to the South Carolina Department of Education website, the funds are used to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the nation.

Laurens County School District 55 (LCSD 55) is a recipient of ESSER Funds. Through these funds, LCSD 55 was able to create the Office of Academic Recovery and Interventions beginning Fall 2021–22. LCSD 55 has interventionists on staff to serve students in kindergarten through 6th grade. The LCSD 55 Office of Academic Recovery and Interventions finds strategic ways to be able to help students perform at their optimal academic levels. Each interventionist identifies deficit areas on standardized tests, utilizes universal screeners, and specifically identifies what is needed to help a student experience academic improvement.

The LCSD 55 Office of Academic Recovery and Interventions invested in numerous programs to support students. Among the programs are Read180 and Math180, which are aligned with the South Carolina Curriculum Standards. These programs have an independent student-work component and an interventionist-led component.

The use of ABii Robot is another intervention currently in place in LCSD 55. Ten ABii robots were provided to LCSD 55 at no cost by Van Robotics. ABii assesses students according to the South Carolina English Language Arts (ELA) and Math Standards and places students in appropriate lessons. ABii helps students with their academic performance and supports students' social-emotional learning. ABii motivates students to work hard through positive words of encouragement and dancing.

Kathy L. McMillan-Bennon, Ed.S., LCSD 55 Director of Academic Recovery and Interventions, shares that students love ABii and other intervention programs. Mrs. Mcmillan-Bennon has seen the individual growth of students served by the program. Gains were evident even as early as the Spring of 2022. She is thankful for all the hard work that LCSD 55 interventionists do, day in and day out.



MEET KATHY L. MCMILLAN-BENNON

Kathy L. McMillan-Bennon, Ed.S., (photo on the left) is the LCSD 55 Director of Academic Recovery and Interventions. Through her 30 years of experience in education, she was able to build her office and put together an expert team of interventionists. She was very diligent in filling positions and researching best programs and practices for intervention. In her 7th year with LCSD 55, Mcmillian-Bennon's joy as an educator and director is "seeing a student have an 'Aha!' moment."

Mrs. McMillan-Bennon is a fourth generation educator from Orangeburg, South Carolina. She holds an Education Specialist Degree from Winthrop University and is currently working on her Doctorate in Organizational Leadership at Grand Canyon University.

E.B. MORSE ELEMENTARY ORNAMENTS & COOKIES

Principal Dr. Jason Bailey would like to invite the community to support the [E.B. Morse Ornaments & Cookies event](#) to be held at E.B. Morse Elementary School on Thursday, December 15, from 5:00-6:30 PM. This event is hosted by the EBM Parent Teacher Organization to help fund future projects at the school.

PARENT ACADEMY VIRTUAL SERIES

Parents and guardians of LCSD 55 students are invited to participate in the next Virtual Parent Academy to be held on December 20 at 5:00 p.m. Mary Lynn Tollison, Director of Family Promise of Laurens County, will be sharing information and resources. According to Family Promise of Laurens' website, their promise is, "Transforming the lives of families experiencing homelessness. Because every child deserves a home."

Please read the [Parent Academy Virtual Series](#) flyer for meeting details or join the LCSD 55 Facebook page to watch the livestream.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Watch the LCSD 55 [Board Work Session](#) and [Board Meeting](#) held on November 28, 2022, using the links provided. The next LCSD 55 Board of Trustees regular monthly meeting will be on Monday, January 23, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. in the large training room of the district administrative office. Doors will open at 6:00 p.m. for the meeting. Individuals who desire to speak during Public Participation of the regular monthly meeting must complete the [Request to Speak During Public Participation form](#) and submit the form to the Office of the Superintendent no later than 12:00 noon on the day of the meeting. The form is also available at the reception desk of the district administrative office.

WE'RE HIRING AT LAURENS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT 55

If you are interested in becoming an employee of Laurens County School District 55, please watch the [We're Hiring Video](#) for current openings and details on how to apply.

SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS NEEDED

If you are interested in becoming a substitute teacher in LCSD 55, please contact Kiantae Boyd at 877-983-2244 or Kboyd@ess.com.

P-EBT CLARIFICATION

- Students who were enrolled in LCSD 55 the last 20 days of the 2021-2022 school year qualified for the second round of payments.
- This is a one-time only payment. Students who already received funds will not receive the next round.
- New cards will be mailed to all eligible students.
- Parents can check the DSS portal [after December 15, 2022](#), for newly eligible students that were enrolled in a NSLP school during the 2021-2022 school year. Please do not call the school district nor the SC Department of Education requesting this information, as neither agency has access to it at this time.
- All inquiries should be submitted to PEBT@ed.sc.gov.

Issuance of P-EBT will be in accordance with Federal Law upon which the program is based.

AMIRA READING

We are so excited to be able to offer Amira for our students in grades K-5. Amira provides personalized tutoring for children as they read, to build critical foundational skills. Amira's support is based on the Five Pillars of Literacy identified as critical elements of early literacy instruction. Research shows that twenty minutes per day of Amira can double the pace of reading growth for children ages 5-10. If you have any questions about using Amira at home, please contact your child's teacher.



PARENT PORTAL

Laurens County School District 55 offers parents/guardians electronic web access to their student's school information through the PowerSchool Parent Portal. By using this system, you can see *your student's attendance, grades, fill out important forms, etc.* This is a great tool to have a positive impact on your student's progress in school by communicating regularly with teachers, monitoring results, and academic progress reports. Additionally, the South

Carolina Department of Education has uploaded a Directory and Military Opt-Out Survey in Parent Portal for any parent interested in *opting-out* of those areas.

Easy Steps to Set Up Your Account:

1. Call or visit your student's school to get your student's personal Access ID and Access Password. *This step is very important to protect their information.*
2. Go to the **PowerSchool Parent Portal** link under the **Quick Links** tab on the LCSD55 website (www.laurens55.org) and then click on the **PowerSchool – Students, Parents, Guardians** link under **Parents and Students**. If you have already created an account for another child, simply log in and add the Access ID and Access Password of another child you wish to add (each student's Access ID and Access Password are different).
3. Review the **Terms of Use**. By using the Parent Portal, you agree to these terms. Click on the **PowerSchool Parent Portal** button.
4. You must create your account at the bottom of the screen. Click the **Create Account** button.
5. Enter your first name, last name, and email address (this should be an email address you use regularly).
6. Enter your username and password. These can be almost anything you wish.
7. Under **Link Students to Account**, enter your student's name. This is for your use.
8. In the Access ID and Access Password box, enter the information received from your student's school and then choose the relationship from the dropdown box.
9. Click **Enter**.
10. After clicking **Submit**, you will be taken to the login page where you can immediately login to view your student's information. You can subscribe to notifications and updates (upper right-hand corner), and it is recommended you select **Weekly** when subscribing to reduce the amount of email you will receive.

STAY IN THE KNOW

	<p><i>A weekly video to share school district news</i> December 2, 2022 December 9, 2022</p>
	<p><i>A podcast of one-on-one conversations</i> Armond Flood</p>
	<p><i>A chance to hear how L55 has positively impacted students</i> Mason Gibbs</p>
	<p><i>A chance to hear about our excellent teachers</i> Connie Lewis</p>

CLOSING

On behalf of the LCSD 55 Board of Trustees, administrators, and staff, thank you for your partnership, your support, and your continued engagement with us as we work together to serve your children and our community. Your input is greatly valued and we love to hear from you. Contact me at athomas@laurens55.org, call 864-984-3568, attend our school and district events, or view our school board meetings. Have a great week!

Sincerely,

Ameca C. Thomas, Ph.D.
Proud Superintendent of
Laurens County School District 55



Laurens County School District #55 is committed to the principle of equal opportunity. It is the policy of the district not to discriminate on the basis of race, religion, sex, color, age, national origin, immigrant status, English-speaking status, familial status, or disability with regard to students, employees, or applicants for admission or employment.