

**Laurens County  
School District 55**

301 Hillcrest Drive  
Laurens, SC 29360  
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[www.laurens55.org](http://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.

March 27, 2023

Greetings Laurens County School District 55 Family,

March is coming quickly to an end. It has been a packed month full of celebrations. We continue to celebrate our music educators and women this last week of March.

We wrap up this month also celebrating many students' accomplishments and appreciating your support and the support of old and new partners. Thank you for enhancing the educational experiences of our LCSD 55 students!

This weekend, we will welcome April, and Spring Break begins next week on April 3rd. I hope that you will take the time to recharge. Students and staff will return to school on Tuesday, April 11, 2023.

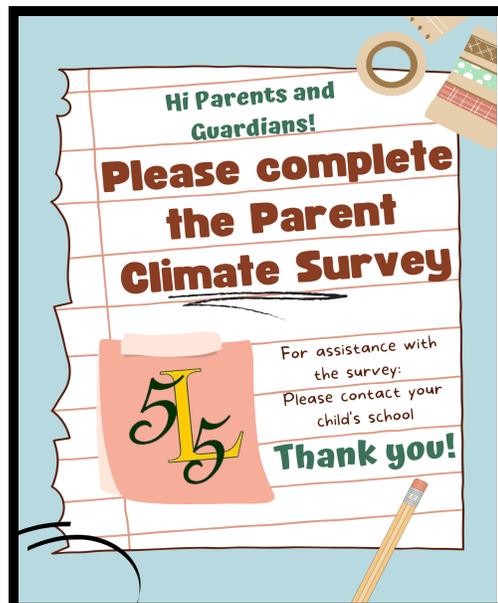
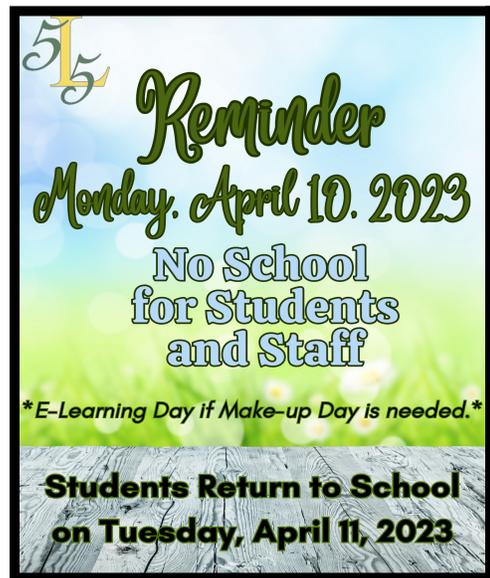
While we are out, special celebrations will take place. National Assistant Principal Week is from April 3rd-7th, School Librarian Appreciation Day is April 4th, and Paraprofessional Appreciation Day is April 5th. Please join me in expressing my sincerest appreciation to our wonderful staff members. Thank you for making our students CHAMPIONS!

## FREE MOBILE DEVICE WITH SERVICE VIA TRUCONNECT PARTNERSHIP

LCSD 55 is now in partnership with TruConnect to offer eligible families free smartphones and free service. The overall benefit of the TruConnect partnership is providing reliable and stable mobile/internet service to our eligible families. Our students will have reliable access to online educational programs that are geared to enhance students' academic skills. LCSD 55 families can qualify for this benefit, under the Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility requirement. The process from application to receipt of the mobile device may only take seven days. The [Community Eligibility Letter](#) can be used as proof of eligibility. The LCSD 55 Student Nutrition Services Office can be reached by families who wish to have a copy of their student's Free and Reduced Lunch Certificate of Eligibility. Visit our [LCSD 55 TruConnect Webpage](#) for more information.

## LINKS

[Lush Acres Farm Spring Festival](#) and [Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Presentation](#)  
[First Steps Laurens National Child Abuse Prevention Month Flyer](#)  
[City of Laurens Earth Day Community Clean Up Flyer](#)



## MARCH IS MUSIC IN OUR SCHOOLS MONTH (MIOSM)

Thank you to all Laurens County School District 55 music teachers! We feature two amazing educators in this issue.

### SARAH RINAUDO

Sarah Rinaudo is the Orchestra Teacher at Laurens Middle School (LMS) and Sanders Middle School (SMS). She has been teaching in public education for seven years, three of which are in Laurens County School District 55.

Her career in teaching started in her teenage years, teaching private violin lessons. Later, she had a part-time orchestra job. She then decided to pursue a music education degree. Rinaudo loves teaching orchestra and middle school students. She said, "I love to see them excited to play music and have fun."

Rinaudo sums up the importance of music, "Music is an essential part of all cultures, and it is also a language that transcends all barriers. Countless studies are showing that students who have the opportunity to make music in school tend to achieve more academically, stay in school, and be less prone to negative behaviors. Music is an important outlet but also a way to foster connection and teach students how to work as a team through playing or singing in an ensemble."

The 7th and 8th grade orchestra students at LMS and SMS recently participated in Region 1 Concert Performance Assessment at Spartanburg High School. The ensemble earned an Excellent rating. This is the first time these students have participated in a judged event, and they had a great time.



### TAYLOR BAXLEY

Taylor Baxley is in her third year teaching music at Ford Elementary School. She was always interested in music from an early age. Her mom says that as soon as Baxley could form words, she was singing and making up her own songs. Music was Baxley's favorite related arts class in elementary school. She continued on the Fine Arts path by doing choir and theater in middle and high school. Baxley says she was inspired by arts teachers who fueled her passion for music and showed her the potential for teaching that she didn't know she had. "I wanted to be like those wonderful educators I had and ignite a passion for music in my students!", said Baxley.

Her greatest joy as a music teacher is that "Aha!" moment students experience when they finally understand something she's been teaching. She said, "Seeing kids smiling and saying something was fun or sounded good makes the often difficult process of getting there completely worth it!"

Taylor Baxley shared the relevance of music, "It serves as an outlet for the many things our students may be struggling with throughout the day, whether that be troubles at home, arguments with classmates, or frustrations over their schoolwork. Music also teaches necessary life skills and values, like dedication and persistence when learning a new skill, ability to work as a team with effective communication and collaboration, problem-solving skills and intrinsic motivation! As a child who thrived in the music classroom and didn't have many opportunities to learn about music outside of those classes, I'm glad we teach music in our schools!"

## MARCH 2023 CHAMPION STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Laurens County School District 55 (LCSD 55) has named Chalen Smallwood the Champion Student Spotlight Award recipient for March 2023 for his entrepreneurial endeavor in the drone industry.



L-R Back: NJROTC Instructor Armond Flood, Ben Dyar, Chalen Smallwood, Gemini Dyar, Superintendent Dr. Ameca Thomas, AINautics Director of Operations Booker Little  
Front: LDHS Principal Lewis Compton

Chalen completed the Drone Academy Program offered by LCSD 55 through the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) and in partnership with AINautics. The JROTC under then Commander John Walker and Senior Chief John Davis (both retired) purchased a set of drones for the JROTC program. Walker and Davis encouraged JROTC students to prepare for and participate in drone competitions against other local high schools. The LCSD partnership with AINautics helped students obtain formal drone training, which qualifies students to become FAA Part 107A certified commercial drone pilots.

Chalen's parents, Gemini Dyar and Ben Dyar, are very thankful for the Drone Academy Program at LDHS. Gemini Dyar said, "Chalen had inexpensive drones at home for fun. When the opportunity presented itself to have drone education as part of his high school curriculum, we were excited for him. We knew he would be super excited about this opportunity."

Chalen has successfully passed the aeronautical knowledge exam and has obtained his Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Part 107A Remote Pilot Certificate. Chalen's certification reflects his competency in his aeronautical knowledge to safely operate a drone. Among the content he was tested in are airspace classification and operating requirements, radio communications procedures, airport operations, and aeronautical decision-making and judgment.

Booker Little, AINautics Director of Operations and Chalen's drone instructor, praised Chalen's drone-flying skills, stating Chalen possesses all the tools to reach any goal he set his mind to and has the opportunity to make an impact in the drone industry with focus, dedication and hard work.

Chalen has taken the initiative to start a drone aerial photography business on a word-of-mouth basis. He hopes to do real estate photos of houses and properties. He rents his photography drone from the JROTC class and hopes to save enough to buy his own. His first client is Mrs. Debbie Simpson, for whom Chalen captured beautiful photos of her property.

Booker Little surprised Chalen at LDHS on March 27, 2023, with a promise to support his business. AINautics will be giving Chalen his own drone. Congratulations Chalen and thank you AINautics!

## ROBOTICS CLUB WINS BACK-TO-BACK COMPETITIONS



Laurens District 55 High School (LDHS) is part of the winning youth robotics club team First Robotics Competition (FRC) Team Number 4451, Robotz Garage. The team is also composed of students from Fountain Inn High School (Greenville County Schools). The team's 2023 robot is Maverick. The team was the District Event Winner at Peachtree District (PCH) Anderson Qualifiers robotics competition held March 11-12, 2023. The team also received the #1 Alliance Captain Award and the Industrial Design Award sponsored by General Motors. The team is also the District Event Winner at the PCH Hartsville Qualifiers robotics competition sponsored by the South Carolina Department of Education, held March 23-25, 2023. The team also received the #1 Alliance Captain Award and the Quality Award.

Mason Gibbs, FRC Team Number 4451, Robotz Garage Captain said, "I am proud of our big accomplishments!"

FRC Team Number 4451, Robotz Garage has garnered points to join the April 5-8, 2023, District Championship (competition between 27 youth robotics club teams in South Carolina and Georgia), which will determine eligible teams to compete in the For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (*FIRST*) World Championship in Houston, Texas. *FIRST* World Championship is a culminating, international event for youth robotics competition season and an annual celebration of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Isaac Adams, one of the two robot operators, is hopeful to make it to the *FIRST* World Championship this year. He reminisced about his experience in 2022, "That was an amazing experience! It was a great atmosphere and feeling being with teams from all over the world."

Laurens County School District 55 (LCSD 55) is proud of all the LDHS students who are part of FRC Team Number 4451, Robotz Garage. A big shout-out to registered nurse Michelle Gibbs, LDHS educator and one of the coaches of FRC Team Number 4451, Robotz Garage. LCSD 55 is thankful for its partnership with Greenville County Schools and the collaborative work of Fountain Inn Coach Robert Sheffield, and the dedication of mentors. LCSD 55 is also thankful for FRC Team Number 4451, Robotz Garage sponsors, namely Laurens County Water and Sewer Commission, BOSCH, Bosch Rexroth Corporation, STUEKEN Precision Metal, ZF Transmissions, Palmetto Air Solutions, and Michelin.



L-R: LDHS Robotics Coach Michelle Gibbs, Mr. Jeremy Gibbs (Mentor), David Allred (Mentor), Coach Robert Sheffield, Neal Wilhite (Mentor)

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The next LCSD 55 Board of Trustees regular monthly meeting will be today, Monday, March 27, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. The meeting will be held in the auditorium of Laurens Middle School located at 1035 West Main Street in Laurens.

## STAY IN THE KNOW

	<i>A weekly video to share school district news</i> <a href="#">March 10, 2023</a>
	<i>A podcast of one-on-one conversations</i> <a href="#">Michael Cade</a>
	<i>A chance to hear how L55 has positively impacted students</i> <a href="#">Tucker McHone</a>
	<i>A chance to hear about our excellent teachers</i> <a href="#">Madeline Crowder</a>
	<i>A chance to hear how L55 graduates achieved greatness</i> <a href="#">Adam Taylor</a>

## CLOSING

On behalf of the LCSD 55 Board of Trustees, administrators, and staff thank you for your partnership, support, and continued engagement 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](mailto: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.*