

Next week we will celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week. I am truly grateful to our L55 teachers both as a fellow educator and as a parent. THANK YOU to all of our teachers for staying focused, for your hard work, and your service to the students in our district. There has never been a more important time to show the teachers in our district the gratitude and respect they deserve for the crucial role they play in our schools, District, community, and most importantly, the lives of our students.

LINKS

[May 6, 2023 Books and Blankets Laurens County Literacy Association Flyer](#)

[May 18 & 23, 2023 St. Francis Mobile Mammography at Laurens District 55 High School](#)

[April 21, 2023 Special Olympics Photos](#)

[LDHS Greenhouse Sale Flyer](#)

CLARIFICATION FROM THE SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The South Carolina Department of Education Office of Research and Data Analysis has issued a [memorandum regarding school ranking information provided by commercial websites](#). Different websites will show different data. Some of those show Laurens County School District 55 (LCSD 55) ranking higher than neighboring districts (US News) and some of them show LCSD 55 lower. Therefore, it is important to do the proper research to determine the reliability and validity of sources. Stakeholders are encouraged to visit [SCDE's website](#) for questions regarding school and district performance.



REMINDER

Please [register and join our next virtual Family Mental Health Night](#) on Tuesday, May 9, 2023.

ParentGuidance.org offers free mental health support resources:

- [How Digital Media is Changing our Children's Mental Health](#).
- [Recording of the Family Mental Health Night](#) April 13, 2023.

SCHOOL LUNCH HERO DAY

Between preparing healthy food, adhering to strict nutrition standards, navigating student food allergies, and offering service with a smile, Laurens County School District 55 student nutrition professionals have a lot on their plate. To celebrate their hard work and commitment, Laurens County School District 55 schools will celebrate School Lunch Hero Day on May 5. School Lunch Hero Day is an opportunity for parents, students, school staff, and communities to thank those who provide healthy meals to nearly 30 million of America's students each school day.



U.S. SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' DAY

This year, we celebrate School Principals' Day in the United States on May 1, 2023. Please join Laurens County School District 55 (LCSD 55) in extending appreciation to all our principals. They work hard to make our students champions. They always aim to make our schools better. They provide leadership and support to our classroom teachers and school staff members and give our district input on serving our stakeholders. Our principals are committed to the district's vision and mission. Thank you to all our LCSD 55 Principals!

FEBRUARY 2023 CHAMPION SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR OF THE MONTH

Jonathan Schwalbe is the Laurens County School District 55 (LCSD 55) February 2023 Champion School Administrator of the Month. He is the Middle-Level Assistant Principal (AP) at Gray Court-Owings (GCO) School. He has 16 years of experience in education and served 13 years with LCSD 55.

AP Schwalbe believes he has a calling to work with young people. He can make connections with our youth. He uses his ability to help grow our students. Schwalbe became an administrator because he also has a calling to support other teachers and inspire them in their craft.



"My greatest joy as an administrator is seeing the positive connections between teachers and students. I want to do everything I can to support teachers who have the drive to grow students to their full potential," said AP Schwalbe.

GCO Principal Farrell Thomas praised AP Schwalbe, "A recognition well deserved by Mr. Jonathan Schwalbe, also known as the voice of the GCO Tigers. In his first year as assistant principal, Mr. Schwalbe has been a shining light and an epitome of excellence. From morning bus duty to morning announcements, daily discipline, and our resident security czar, Mr. Schwalbe is a positive example for our GCO Champion students and teachers."

APRIL 2023 CHAMPION STUDENT SPOTLIGHT AWARD RECIPIENTS

Two juniors at Laurens District 55 High School have been recognized as April 2023 Champion Student Spotlight Award recipients. Both students are very creative.



D'Zareaun Streater (photo on left) is an author of a published book, *Oh Acorns!*, while Elizabeth Sullivan (photo on right) designed the graphics for the framed State of South Carolina Motto and United States Motto displayed at LCSD 55 schools. In South Carolina there are state laws regarding patriotic depictions in schools. A recent update to this legislation requiring the addition of the state and US mottos along with our flags was passed last year.



Jill Wrobel, one of D'Zareaun's teachers at LDHS, said, "D'Zareaun is such an amazing student. He is always willing to go above and beyond what is expected of him. He follows classroom and school rules without any negativity and is very respectful of his teachers and peers. D'Zareaun takes pride in his work and has the motivation to attempt all work on his own. He truly is a model student!"

Amy George, Elizabeth's English teacher, said, "Elizabeth is a talented artist, but she's also an excellent English student. She brings her artist's creativity to assignments in my classroom, and she possesses a curiosity that drives her to know more about anything we discuss in class. She's always the first to say, 'Let's Google that!' when we need to know more about a topic."

LDHS STUDENT RECEIVES COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP



Laurens District 55 High School (LDHS) student Jace Bishop will attend Montreat College in North Carolina under a golf scholarship. Signing day was on Tuesday, April 25, 2023, at the LDHS gym. Bishop will have 75% of his tuition at Montreat College covered under the scholarship.

LDHS Golf Coach Jake Heald is very proud of Jace. He said, “Jace Bishop is a very respectful young man and never wants any attention to himself. He works hard. Everyone else sees him as a leader because he leads by example. He comes alongside his peers and works with them. He puts God first in everything he does, and it's evident in how he conducts himself with others on the team and in the classroom.”

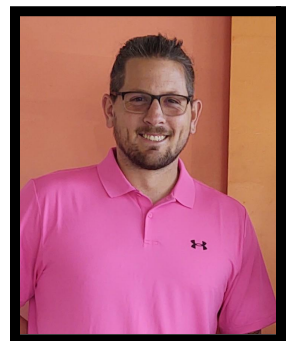
Jamie Bishop, Jace's father, said, “We are thankful Jace has the opportunity to play golf at another level at a school with a vision to educate students in a Christ-centered environment. We are so proud of Jace with or without his scholarship.”

Mr. Bishop said, “Although Jace was approached by Montreat, LDHS Golf Coach Heald and Jace's teammates have helped Jace improve his game both physically and mentally. I am thankful for their support.” Mr. Bishop added, “Also, a special thanks to Trevor Kitzmiller and Samuel Fallaw for encouraging him to begin playing in 9th grade.”

Amy Bishop, Jace's mother, also expressed her thankfulness to Jace's teachers throughout the years. “Jace had many great teachers and leaders throughout his time at Hickory Tavern and LDHS. From second-grade teacher, Mrs. Duncan, Mrs. Gillespie, Mrs. Patterson, Mrs. Penny (Tavenner), Mrs. Youmans, Mr. White, Mrs. Martin, and Mrs. Robinson, all who have impacted Jace's life greatly and helped him achieve his academic goals,” said Amy Bishop.

MEET COACH JAKE HEALD

Jake Heald is the Laurens District 55 High School (LDHS) Football and Golf Coach. He has recently joined the LDHS Family because he lives in Laurens and desires working closer to home. He became the LDHS Head Coach of Golf because there was a need for one, and he wants to help our students succeed at every sport at our school. He has a passion for golf and wants to help share that with the young men that are on the team. His greatest joys as a coach and an educator are spending time with young adults and helping them find their voice/dreams/passions in life. He would like to point our young students in a direction to chase after when they graduate from high school.



To learn more about the LDHS Golf Team, email Coach Heald at jeheald@laurens55.org.

MEET GERRI MCCONNELL

Gerri McConnell is a Special Education Teacher at Waterloo Elementary School (WES). She has faithfully served Laurens County School District 55 for 26 years. She wants to make a difference in the lives of students.

Gerri McConnell is a collaborative educator. She recently worked side-by-side with Krystal McGrew to apply for an Earth Day grant from Michelin. WES was granted \$1,000 to celebrate Earth Day. McConnell also partnered with McGrew to apply for a Michelin STEM grant. McConnell and McGrew received the STEM grant funds, which helped purchase STEM materials for the WES Science Labs and provided WES teachers with additional classroom materials.



LAURENS DISTRICT 55 HIGH SCHOOL (LDHS) NAVY JUNIOR RESERVE OFFICERS TRAINING CORPS (NJROTC) FIELD TRIP APRIL 25-27, 2023



The LDHS NJROTC students visited the State Capitol on April 25, 2023, on their way to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in Parris Island. The students experienced hands-on training at the depot on April 26th and 27th. The students were physically and mentally challenged during the training. The students also visited the University of South Carolina in Columbia and learned about their ROTC programs.

Baylan Harlan, LDHS NJROTC 10th-grade Naval Cadet and Color Guard Commander said, “The one thing I think that was most positive about the Parris Island trip is the team building skills. We did a lot of drills and tasks that required us to use our team skills. This is instilling values in us that we will use for the rest of our lives. Our stop at USC was a big eye opener as to what college has to offer to NJROTC cadets.”

FUN FRIDAY AT LAURENS MIDDLE SCHOOL



Laurens Middle School (LMS) holds Fun Friday behavior celebrations on the last Friday of each month to celebrate and reward LMS students who display excellent behavior. Student activities vary from month to month. April’s Fun Friday celebration included volleyball, 4-square, 3-on-3 basketball tournament, board/card games, and soccer. Three hundred thirty-five students participated in the LMS April Fun Friday last April 28th.

RIDING WITH MR. THOMAS

Gray Court-Owings (GCO) School Principal Farrell Thomas holds a bike ride one Saturday a month with students and parents to unite the school and community and encourage healthy habits. The most recent Riding with Mr. Thomas was on Saturday, April 22, 2023 at the GCO school parking lot.



BREAKFAST WITH CHAMPIONS

The Gray Court-Owings (GCO) School Community Outreach Committee sponsored a two-day Breakfast with Champions event. GCO students had the opportunity to invite two people to join them for breakfast on April 24th and 25th.

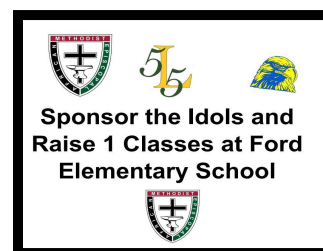
WATERLOO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SPRING FLING AND S.T.E.A.M NIGHT

Waterloo Elementary School (WES) held a family engagement event on Thursday, April 27, 2023, from 4:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m. The WES Spring Fling and STEAM Night was a fun family night with an educational twist. Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) activities were offered to students and parents. Activity stations included drones, Ozobots, Legos, Sight Word BINGO, and math graphing. Music materials and equipment were showcased. Participants also engaged in hands-on music-related activities. Attendees enjoyed playing carnival games, face painting, and jumping in a bounce house.



MT. ZION - LAURENS AME CHURCH SUPPORTS FORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Laurens County School District 55 is thankful for the partnership between Ford Elementary School (FES) and Mt. Zion-Laurens AME Church. Mt. Zion-Laurens AME Church is providing classroom supplies to the Idols and Raise 1 Special Education classes at FES.



ATHLETICS UPDATE




The baseball team will host Northwestern on Monday, May 1st at 6:30 pm in the first round of the SCHSL Playoffs. The only passes accepted will be SCHSL passes. No century club, season tickets, or district IDs can be used for playoff games.

Ticket prices will be \$8 at the gate or online at <https://gofan.co/app/events/982989?schoolId=SC1287>.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The LCSD 55 Board of Trustees will hold a Special Called Meeting tonight, May 1, 2023, at the District Administrative Office. The meeting will start at 6:30 PM.

STAY IN THE KNOW

	<i>A weekly video to share school district news</i> April 28, 2023
	<i>A podcast of one-on-one conversations</i> Michael Cade
	<i>A chance to hear how L55 has positively impacted students</i> Mykayla Neely
	<i>A chance to hear about our excellent teachers</i> Johnathan White
	<i>A chance to hear how L55 graduates achieved greatness</i> Bryanta Maxwell

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, 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.