



Board-to-Board, May 2025

A monthly report from the Albemarle County School Board to the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors

Jay Thomas Appointed Principal of Center I—Albemarle County Public Schools is pleased to announce the appointment of Jay Thomas as the next principal of Center I, which will be renamed the Albemarle Career Exploration Academy @ Seminole Trail (ACE Academy Seminole Trail) at the start of the 2025-26 school year. Thomas brings more than 25 years of educational leadership experience, including eight years as Executive Director of Secondary Education for ACPS and eight years as principal of Albemarle High School. In each role, he has demonstrated a strong commitment to student-centered learning and innovative instruction.

As principal of Albemarle High School, Thomas led initiatives that improved the school's graduation rate to 95% and greatly expanded participation in Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment courses. He also launched interdisciplinary programs like the TEAMS initiative and increased student engagement in creative pathways, such as the school's music studio and STEM-focused Learning Commons. In his current role, he has designed and supported strategic instructional programs across the division's secondary schools, overseen principal and curriculum coordinator evaluations, and partnered with local organizations to expand college and career readiness.

Thomas's leadership extends beyond Albemarle County. He previously led STEM and CTE-focused high schools in Virginia Beach and North Carolina, where he developed international partnerships to build students' global competencies. His work has been recognized with awards such as the Lenoir County Wachovia Principal of the Year and finalist honors for Virginia Beach City Public Schools Assistant Principal of the Year.

"It was evident through multiple rounds of interviews that Mr. Thomas has a clear and compelling vision for the future of Center I," said Dr. Matthew Haas, Superintendent of Albemarle County Public Schools. "He understands the unique needs of this learning community and brings both the knowledge and the passion to lead it forward."

Thomas's expertise in problem-based learning, Career and Technical Education, and interdisciplinary instruction aligns directly with the mission of ACE Academy, which offers innovative, real-world learning through the Scholars Studio model. Thomas will officially assume his new role on July 1, 2025.

Albemarle County Public Schools Celebrates 2024-25 Outstanding Educators and Staff—Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) is proud to announce the nominees and winners of its 2024-25 division-wide recognition program, which honors excellence among educators, support staff, and school and division leaders. The Licensed Employee of the Year award celebrates licensed staff members such as classroom teachers, school counselors, librarians, instructional coaches, and speech pathologists. The Classified Employee of the Year award recognizes non-teaching staff who play vital roles in schools and departments, such as office associates, custodians, bus drivers, and other support professionals. The program also includes a Leader of the Year award for division administrators and school leaders who exemplify the ACPS mission. New this year is a category honoring First-Year Teachers who have demonstrated exceptional performance as they begin their careers in education.

Each year, school communities and departments nominate individuals who go above and beyond in their service. From these exceptional nominees, one winner in each category is selected by a committee of peers, parents/guardians, and administrators.

This year's winners are:

Licensed Employee of the Year: Sarah Kiscaden, Mountain View Elementary School

Classified Employee of the Year: William Morse, Transportation Services

Leader of the Year: Ashby Johnson, Principal, Journey Middle School

First-Year Teacher of the Year: Mia Giacomo, Agnor-Hurt Elementary School

"We are grateful to each of our nominees for the difference they make in the lives of students every day," said Superintendent Matt Haas. "And we are thrilled to honor Sarah, William, Ashby, and Mia for their exceptional contributions this year."

Nominees and winners receive a plaque to commemorate their nomination and will be celebrated during an upcoming School Board meeting. Winners also receive a \$500 award. Additionally, the Licensed Employee of the Year will have the chance to advance to the regional and state Teacher of the Year competitions, and the Classified Employee of the Year will be eligible for the Virginia Department of Education's Recognizing Inspiring School Employees (RISE) Award.

[2024-25 Licensed, Classified, Leader and First-Year of the Year Nominees](#)

2025 Golden Apple Award Recipients Announced—Each year, exceptional teachers from Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS), Charlottesville City Schools (CCS), and local independent schools are recognized for their dedication to students, their craft, and their communities. The Golden Apple Awards highlight educators who spark curiosity, encourage critical thinking, and go above and beyond to support student growth and success—both in and out of the classroom.

Nominated by members of their school communities, these teachers are selected for their ability to inspire a love of learning, set high expectations, respond to individual student needs, and foster meaningful connections with families.

"Each year, I so look forward to celebrating the hard work and dedication of our teachers," said Richard Nunley, former president of Better Living Building Supply and Cabinetry. "They take on the crucial role of guiding our future leaders, scientists, artists, and more, and it is the least we can do to thank them for that."

Sponsored by Better Living Building Supply and Cabinetry for more than two decades, the Golden Apple Awards celebrate educational excellence by honoring the passion and dedication of teachers. Each recipient receives a \$500 classroom grant from Better Living as part of the recognition.

The 2024-25 Golden Apple Award recipients will be honored at a community celebration on May 14, 2025, in Lane Auditorium at the County Office Building located at 401 McIntire Road, Charlottesville. The event will begin with a reception at 5 p.m., followed by a recognition ceremony.

The evening will once again be led by Golden Apple Selection Committee Chair, Steve Koleszar, a former Albemarle County School Board member who spent more than 20 years advocating for public education. Koleszar took over committee leadership in 2023, following the retirement of founding chair Dr. Kevin Castner.

"Educating our children is the most important thing we do. In reviewing the nominations, I see the great work our teachers and staff are doing to transform lives," Mr. Koleszar said.

This year's selection committee includes Steve Koleszar (Chair), Jonno Alcaro (Retired ACPS School Board Member), Lisa Utz (CCS Representative), Amber Wilkins (Blue Ridge School Dean of Faculty), and Gwedette Crummie (ACPS Representative).

The Golden Apple Awards continue to be a powerful way for the community to say thank you to teachers who make a lasting difference every day.

[The 2024-25 Golden Apple Winners](#)

Noteworthy and Newsworthy

- On March 28, several of our bus drivers competed in a [Bus Road-E-O](#) to show off their skills. The driver with the highest score will be sent to the state competition this summer.
- At Journey Middle School, students aren't just learning math, reading, science, and history. [Students like Alex Cruz Cabarello](#) also learning what it's like to have a daily job with tasks and responsibilities.
- Several of our students were [awarded scholarships](#) through the Emily Couric Leadership Forum, including Monticello's Seenam Dumor, who is one of the top two recipients.
- During Spring Break, our Building Services Department held their annual [Building Services Olympic Games](#) to work on team building and to have some fun.
- Recently, Baker-Butler Elementary School honored students of military families on [Purple Up for Military Kids](#) Day.
- On April 17, ACPS partnered with the Special Olympics to host the annual [Little Feet Meet](#), where special education students participate in a variety of Olympic games.
- Each of our comprehensive high schools is holding a [job fair](#) to help connect students with local businesses looking to hire summer employees or interns.
- On April 25, Western Albemarle High School Students participated in a day to mirror [what it is like in the United States Congress](#).
- Also on April 25, Community Lab School's ecology class took a [fly fishing trip](#) to get hands-on experience with local native species!