

GCS Information Ambassador Newsletter



November 21, 2022

Keeping Our Schools and Communities Safe

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the singularly most disruptive force in our communities in a century, especially in public education. Yet, despite the trauma, pain and suffering that the pandemic brought, it also taught us we can overcome significant challenges when working together as one community. As longtime residents of Guilford County, we were proud of how our community came together during the pandemic, supporting one another. However, our work is not done here. We are just beginning to understand the impact the last two and a half years have had on our schools and communities. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, we lost years of academic progress, faced many mental health challenges and witnessed increased violence nationwide. We are committed to providing a high-quality education for all Guilford County students, which means supporting their success and building pillars of support that extend far beyond the classroom.

As parents, educators and leaders, keeping students and staff safe at school and in the community is a vital part of our work to provide every student an opportunity to have a great life. Following school closures due to COVID-19, we have seen an increase in the number of individuals fighting in schools. Although many of these incidents include students, some incidents also include parents. This type of behavior does not belong in our schools. Recent community violence trends have also raised alarms and it is clear that we must do more as a community to address violence. Just two weeks ago, our community lost two young people to senseless gun violence. And just as we, as adults, feel the profound impact of these tragedies – so do our students. Our children simply cannot focus on academics until they first feel safe. Firearms have become the number one cause of death for children and adolescents in the United States, surpassing even motor vehicle deaths. Additionally, data from the FBI Uniform Crime Report shows the violent crime rate in North Carolina increased by 11 percent between 2019 and 2020, and the homicide rate increased by nearly 30 percent. While we cannot solve the region's or the nation's gun safety crisis on our own, we are taking measures in our schools to keep students and staff safe.

Our efforts include the installation of security screeners, upkeep of school bus cameras, upkeep of cameras in school buildings, safe entry points, a clear bag policy at large gatherings, additional mental health support for students and staff and more. We have also begun working with leaders across the community to solve this issue. Solving this important issue requires a multi-layered approach and long-term commitment from our community as a whole. We know schools are a microcosm of the community at large. We cannot keep our students and staff safe until we address the root causes of the issues impacting our community. Tragedies like the shooting two weeks ago require us to unite and work together as one community. We can't sit by helplessly and watch. Guilford County is a resilient community that makes things happen. We do not wait for others to solve our issues. While there is not one solution to solve the challenges we face today, we hope you will join us in working together for the betterment of our community.

We are convinced Guilford County is on the verge of a new chapter post-pandemic – one full of opportunity and promise. But to fully capture that opportunity, we must unite. We know that by working together, hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder, we can make Guilford County a safe and thriving community where every student has equitable access to everything they need to succeed.

Deena Hayes-Greene, Chair, Board of Education
Melvin "Skip" Alston, Chair, Board of County Commissioners
Whitney Oakley, Superintendent

GCS Announces Key Appointments to Superintendent's Leadership Team



Guilford County Schools (GCS) appointed Jusmar Maness as chief academic officer and José Oliva as chief of staff.

“To be a successful district, our district’s leaders - at every level - need to lead with empathy and focus on the work to create opportunities for every student to thrive. Our leadership team is united in that mission,” said Superintendent Oakley. “Guilford County Schools is a forward thinking school district constantly striving to grow and cultivate leaders who make an impact on education. I look forward to working with these fine leaders as they transition into their new roles, to build on our progress to continued success. Our entire team will always put students first.”

Jusmar Maness is a bilingual and bicultural leader committed to improving learning and life outcomes for all children. She has served as deputy chief of schools since August 2021 and previously served as a principal supervisor. In these roles, Maness worked collaboratively with school and district leaders to provide high-quality instruction and prepare students to succeed beyond high school.

Maness started her career as a teacher in Venezuela and later became a teacher in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools before serving as a curriculum facilitator, assistant principal and principal in Guilford County Schools and Asheboro City Schools. Maness was named Piedmont Triad Principal of the Year in 2017. She holds a bachelor’s degree in English from Universidad de Carabobo, Venezuela, a master’s of school administration degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and is a graduate of the American Association of School Administrator’s Aspiring Superintendent Academy for Latinos/Latina Leaders.

José Oliva previously served as GCS deputy chief of staff and will become chief of staff, effective immediately. In his former role, Oliva led various public engagement, communication and advocacy efforts to support 21st-century learning and safe schools. Oliva currently serves as the Superintendent’s Transition Team staff liaison and leads Better Together, a series of community conversations to inform the district’s next strategic direction.

With a broad range of public, private, nonprofit and philanthropic sector experiences, Oliva joined GCS in September 2021. Oliva has served in a number of leadership roles on several local and state boards, including the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro, Duke University’s North Carolina Leadership Forum and two advisory councils for the Governor of North Carolina. He holds a bachelor’s degree in economics and political science from Guilford College and is a proud GCS graduate.

GCS Superintendent Announces Expansion of School Safety Office

Continuing her focus on school safety, Superintendent Dr. Whitney Oakley announced the expansion of the district’s School Safety Office, led by Mike Richey. Richey was promoted to assistant superintendent for school safety at the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday and will report directly to the superintendent.

“The safety of our students and staff is a top priority for me. When kids are safe and when they feel safe, they perform better,” said Oakley. “Earlier this year, we launched various projects to strengthen our school safety infrastructure and increase mental health services for students and staff. The expansion of the school safety office adds one more layer of support. For too long, our school safety office has operated with limited staff. We can — and should — do more to keep our schools safe, so our children can focus on learning.”

Studies show that students perform better when they feel safe and seen in school. GCS's School Safety Office is integral to accelerating learning and providing every student with an opportunity to learn. The district's focus on school safety aligns with best practices and incorporates curriculum.

Richey's appointment comes at a time when school and community violence is a top priority for district leaders, educators, parents and others. District leadership presented [safety data](#) to the Board of Education on Tuesday, revealing an increase in school violence referrals so far this year as compared to the last pre-pandemic year, 2019-20. Schools are reporting more assaults, fighting, affray and aggressive behavior, as well as an increase in the number of out-of-school suspensions. Guilford County Schools' data is consistent with an increase in violent offenses in the county, state and nation.

"Our schools are a reflection of our community, and our community is seeing greater numbers of homicides, aggravated assaults and firearms possessions," Richey said. "It will take all of us working together to reverse this trend, both in our schools and in the community itself."

Richey has served as executive director of emergency management since July 2021. The retired deputy chief of the Greensboro Police Department brings 27 years of law enforcement experience to the district. During his time in law enforcement, Richey has held the positions of commander, captain, lieutenant, sergeant and corporal. He holds a bachelor of administrative science degree in justice and policy studies from Guilford College.

In addition to Richey's promotion, Oakley also announced she is adding four additional school safety specialist positions who will be responsible for implementing the district's safety strategies, emergency management, and developing school safety plans in collaboration with school leadership. The expanded school safety office will include Richey, who will serve as assistant superintendent, a director and five school safety specialists. The school safety specialists are in addition to the school resource officer positions managed by local law enforcement agencies.

As part of her Better Together community conversations, Oakley hosted a school safety summit on Thursday, Nov. 17, with more than 100 students from across the district to gather input on school safety initiatives. Oakley will also meet with her teacher and principal advisory councils this week to discuss various topics, including school safety.

This announcement followed additional school safety strategies deployed earlier this year, including the installation of security screeners, upkeep of school bus cameras, upkeep of cameras in school buildings, safe entry points, a clear bag policy at large gatherings and additional mental health support for students and staff.



Policy Committee Moves Revised Immunizations and Health Requirements Policy Forward

As part of its ongoing policy review process, the Guilford County Board of Education's Policy Committee voted to send a revised Immunizations and Health Requirements for School Admission policy out for a 30-day public comment period.

[Policy 4110's](#) revision brings the policy into alignment with [state law](#). If approved, the policy formally requires all Guilford County Schools (GCS) students entering the district for the first time to produce proof of a health assessment. The revised policy also formally requires all students entering the twelfth grade or who have reached age 17 to have a booster dose of MCV.

After comments for 30 days, the Board will then consider the policy at their Dec. 15 board meeting.

November is National Family Engagement Month

Family time is precious. To promote and strengthen family engagement during this special month, Guilford Parent Academy continues to carry the torch of service to assist our families by providing a calendar full of fun and learning activities. Let's continue raising awareness and celebrating the family's vital role in children's education and well-being. Click [HERE](#) for some great family time ideas.

