

September 21, 4:30-6 pm



Dr. Garrett Smith has devoted over 30 years to public education, serving as a teacher, principal, central-office leader, and, since 2017, superintendent of Staunton City Schools. A passionate educator and longtime adjunct professor for the University of Virginia and Old Dominion University, he is widely known for his commitment to equity, high expectations, and meaningful personal connection. Under his leadership, Staunton achieved record academic growth, rising from 105th to 35th in state rankings, posting a 93% graduation rate, closing longstanding achievement gaps, and earning recognition as a top place to work. His tenure has also advanced major initiatives in instructional innovation, student support systems, facilities improvements, and strong community partnerships that support long-term student success. Throughout his career, Dr. Smith has emphasized collaborative leadership, instructional excellence, and the belief that strong schools are built through trust, purpose, and shared responsibility. Dr. Smith holds degrees from the University of Virginia and Marymount University. He and his wife, Wendy, an educator, have two adult children.



Dr. Stenette Byrd III has built a career spanning more than two decades in public education, serving as a teacher, principal, district leader, and currently as Chief of Schools for Suffolk Public Schools in Suffolk, Virginia. A native of Hampton, Virginia, Dr. Byrd is also an adjunct professor in the School of Education at Old Dominion University and has previously taught at Norfolk State University. He is widely recognized for building strong academic cultures, leading effective school improvement efforts, and providing empowering leadership across diverse educational environments. Throughout his career, Dr. Byrd has guided elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as district-level instructional initiatives, with a focus on student achievement and organizational excellence. He holds degrees from Norfolk State University and Old Dominion University and earned his doctorate in Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership from The College of William & Mary. He is the proud parent of twins, Stenette IV and Trae Denise Byrd, and remains deeply committed to mentorship, service, and leadership development through his work and as a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

October 12 4:30- 6 pm



Dr. Melody D. Hackney is in her twelfth year as superintendent of Hopewell City Public Schools, and is currently the longest serving superintendent in the Commonwealth. During her twenty-one years as a Virginia superintendent, she has championed high expectations, deeper learning, and meaningful opportunities for every student. Under her

leadership, Hopewell has made great strides towards full school accreditation and strengthened students' engagement by connecting classroom learning to a spirit of community, real-world experiences, empathy and equity and a culture honoring high quality student work. Dr. Hackney was named the **2021 Virginia Superintendent of the Year** in recognition of her transformational leadership and commitment to student success.



Mr. Byron Davis has 22 years of experience in education with 11 years in Hopewell City Public Schools. He currently serves as Director of Strategic Initiatives. As principal, he led a Title I elementary school from being unaccredited to achieving full accreditation in just one year and maintained its status. He led the design and implementation of the first division-wide year-round school program in the state of Virginia, named the Balanced Calendar. That program is in its sixth year of implementation. Byron's additional roles include directing the division's strategic plan, division policy, and the division's tutoring program.

October 22 (4:30-6 pm)



Dr. Stephen Geyer has served as Assistant Superintendent of Instruction for Goochland County Public Schools since 2012, leading division-wide instructional programming and supporting the conditions that allow both students and teachers to thrive. A former elementary school principal and secondary English teacher, Steve has helped Goochland develop a reputation as a high performing, student-centered school division. He led the development of Goochland's Profile of a Graduate and has bolstered its commitment to continuous student growth. Dr. Geyer also serves as an adjunct assistant professor of education leadership at the University of Richmond, connecting theory and research to day-to-day practice while helping prepare the next generation of school leaders.



Ms. Shelley Olsen is the Director of Teacher Support for Goochland County Public Schools, bringing instructional leadership experience from her previous role as Lead Instructional Coach in Goochland and school leadership positions in Boston Public Schools in Boston, Massachusetts. Shelley was a secondary math teacher prior to that. Ms. Olsen has led Goochland's teachers through complex work related to curricular alignment, assessment development, and resource implementation. Ms. Olsen believes meaningful instructional improvement happens when educators are empowered to collaborate, reflect, and use evidence of student learning to guide their practice.

November 4 (4:30-6 pm)



Dr. Jason Van Heukelum has served as Superintendent of Winchester Public Schools since 2016, bringing 27 years of experience as a teacher, principal, international school director, and district leader. He is committed to creating innovative, student-centered schools that combine high expectations with strong family and community engagement. His division's groundbreaking work is featured in the documentary *Multiple Choice*, which has been viewed in states across the United States and internationally. The newest *U.S. News & World Report Best High Schools* rankings for [John Handley High School](#) continues to demonstrate what is possible when high expectations are paired with meaningful opportunities for ALL students:

#1 high school in the Winchester Metro region

#85 public high school in Virginia

Top 25% of public high schools in Virginia AND the United States

November 17 (4:30-6 pm)



Dr. Andrea Whitmarsh has served as Superintendent of Greene County Public Schools since May 2013. Throughout her tenure, she has focused on creating opportunities for students, investing in exceptional staff, and ensuring that Greene County's schools are prepared for the future. Under her leadership, the division launched the IMPACT 2027 strategic plan, established a highly successful Early College program in partnership with PVCC, significantly expanded career and technical education, and invested more than \$33 million in modernizing learning environments across the division. At the heart of Dr. Whitmarsh's leadership is a deep commitment to the students, staff, families, and community of Greene County and to ensuring every student has the opportunities and support needed for lifelong success.



Dr. Donna Payne is beginning her fifth year as Director of Teaching and Learning and her 24th year in public education. She is passionate about leading meaningful instructional change and improving student outcomes by supporting teachers, identifying data trends, and ensuring the right professional learning and resources are in place. Her work focuses on building the capacity of educators and leaders to turn collaboration and data into purposeful action.

December 8 (4:30-6 pm)



J. Douglas “Doug” Straley II, Superintendent of Louisa County Public Schools, has built a positive, team-centered culture while making the 5 Cs—communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and citizenship—central to student learning. Under his leadership, Louisa has developed one of the nation’s most comprehensive career and technical education programs, expanded hands-on workforce preparation, and earned state recognition for innovation and excellence. Named the 2024 Virginia Superintendent of the Year, Straley has also been recognized nationally among K-12 Dive’s “Top 5 Superintendents to Watch” and District Administration’s “Top 100 Education Influencers.”



Dr. Justin S. Grigg serves as the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction for Louisa County Public Schools in Virginia. A former teacher and principal, Justin has spent his career creating meaningful opportunities for students while supporting the educators who make those opportunities possible. He leads division-wide efforts in teaching and learning, professional development, and innovation, with a passion for the 5 Cs (communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and citizenship), innovative and data-informed practices, and professional learning that gives educators greater voice and choice. His work has been recognized by the Virginia Association for Teaching, Learning, and Leading (VATLL), earning the Impact Award in 2023, and by the Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals (VAESP), earning the Leadership in Professional Development Award in 2024. At the heart of his work is a belief that strong relationships, high expectations, and a commitment to servant leadership make a lasting difference for students, educators, and schools.

January 12 (4:30-6 pm)



Dr. Jamie Soltis became Superintendent of Roanoke County Public Schools in July 2026 after serving the division as a teacher, principal, director of secondary instruction, and deputy superintendent. He is leading the next phase of the division’s *Opportunity Ready* mission, with priorities that include workforce preparation, regional student apprenticeships, responsible use of artificial intelligence, student well-being, and strong academic achievement. His leadership builds upon Roanoke County’s standing as a fully accredited school division recognized for strong statewide academic performance and innovative career-readiness opportunities. In June 2025, Roanoke County Public Schools joined the prestigious Carnegie Foundation Future of High School Network as one of only 24 school divisions nationwide.

January 19 (4:30-6 pm)



Dr. Daniel Smith has served as Superintendent of Stafford County Public Schools since December 2024, leading a division of more than 32,000 students and 5,400 employees. His work focuses on strengthening instructional coherence, organizational effectiveness, community engagement, and the systems that support student and staff success. Under his leadership, Stafford Schools has opened three new schools in a single year, launched the division's final three specialty centers in Business and Information Technology, Arts and Media Production, and Aerospace, Supply Chain, Energy, and Navigation Technology, and expanded multi-tiered academic and wellness supports. He has also led efforts to redesign transportation and strengthen leadership structures across the organization. An ASCD Emerging Leader and former Virginia Region IV Outstanding Principal of the Year, Dr. Smith brings extensive experience leading change at the school and division levels. He also serves as policy team co-chair for the Virginia Association for Teaching, Learning and Leading (formerly Virginia ASCD).

February 3 (4:30-6 pm)



Dr. Brian J. Nichols has served as Superintendent of New Kent County Public Schools since 2019, leading a student-centered transformation focused on stronger instruction, workforce and postsecondary readiness, strategic communication, and community connection through the unifying *#TeamNewKent* initiative. Under his leadership, New Kent rose from 34th to ninth statewide in SOL performance over four years, achieved full accreditation across all schools, and opened the award-winning Quinton Elementary School, designed around innovative and collaborative learning. Dr. Nichols was named a 2022 National School Public Relations Association "Superintendent to Watch," while Quinton Elementary received the Virginia School Boards Association's 2024 Gold Design Award.



Mr. Ross Miller serves as Chief Academic Officer for New Kent County Public Schools, leading the division's work in curriculum, instruction, professional learning, instructional technology, and continuous improvement. Under his academic leadership, New Kent has expanded early-college, career and technical education, work-based learning, and regional Governor's School opportunities. All New Kent schools are fully accredited, with three earning Virginia's Distinguished designation and New Kent High School receiving the National Beta School of Merit Award. New Kent is a member team of the Virginia Leads Innovation Network.

February 16 (4:30-6 pm)



Dr. Pamela Bell serves as Interim Superintendent of Essex County Public Schools, bringing more than 30 years of experience as a teacher, principal, school-turnaround leader, and central-office executive. In prior leadership roles in Henrico and Petersburg, she created mobile family-engagement and literacy centers, expanded parent resource services and a districtwide Fatherhood Initiative, and strengthened coordinated support for student health, wellness, and advancement. A national finalist for ASCD's Outstanding Young Educator Award, In her roles as a teacher, principal, and central office leader she has been recognized for her commitment to student health, wellness, and achievement through the Henrico Instructional Leader Award, REB Distinguished Educational Leader Award, and NAACP Community Leader Award. Dr. Bell is now advancing the *All In for Essex* partnership to expand college and career awareness, student and staff recognition, and community investment in the schools.