

## BOARD AGENDA INFORMATIONAL ITEM

---

**DEPARTMENT:** Communications/Public  
Information Department

**TOPIC: GOOD NEWS**

**FOR THE MONTH OF:** March 2023

---

1. **Gaston County Schools** received the Spirit of North Carolina Award, which is presented by the United Way of North Carolina. The recognition honors businesses, organizations, and individuals that “exemplify the spirit of their community.” **Todd Hagans**, chief communications officer, and **Valerie Yatko**, director of business and community partnerships, accepted the award, which recognizes the school district for its outstanding annual fundraising efforts for the United Way of Gaston County. Over the past three years alone, employees, students, and parents have worked together to contribute more than \$287,000.
2. The five finalists for Gaston County Principal of the Year 2023-2024 are **Justin Beam, North Belmont Elementary; Bryan Denton, Hunter Huss High School; Jessica Steiner, Stuart W. Cramer High School; Jaime Wallace, Brookside Elementary;** and **Sheila Wyont, Bessemer City High School**. The winner will be announced on May 2 at the Evening of Excellence ceremony.
3. The five finalists for **Gaston County Schools** New Teacher of the Year 2023-2024 are **Mallory Gibby, Bessemer City Primary; Kassidy Jones, Stanley Middle; Whitney Marr, Robinson Elementary; Ashley McPherson, Cramerton Middle; and Jasmine Rompilla, Lowell Elementary**. The winner will be announced in May.
4. The six finalists for **Gaston County Schools** Teacher Assistant of the Year 2023-2024 are **Jennifer Hartsell, Pinewood Elementary; Minonne Hoey, Brookside Elementary; Patricia Jeter, Carr Elementary; Belinda Lewis, Lowell Elementary; Courtney Shull, Tryon Elementary; and Scott Young, Stanley Middle**. The winner will be announced in May.
5. The following students were chosen as the “Do the Right Thing” award winners for March: **Josiah Sutton, Brookside Elementary; Jayla Matthews, Pinewood Elementary; Jackson Kuveikis, Mount Holly Middle; and Vara Rodriguez Enriquez, East Gaston High School**.
6. The **Gaston County Schools** Communications Department began distribution in March of the 2023 edition of the “Gaston County Schools Storybook.” The publication features stories about students, teachers, and alumni as well as information about the school district.

7. Students, teachers, and staff in **Gaston County Schools** observed “Read Across America Day” on Wednesday, March 2 with a variety of special activities. The event coincided with Dr. Seuss’ birthday.
8. The **Gaston County Schools** Career and Technical Education Department in partnership with Be Pro, Be Proud North Carolina held an event on March 7-8 for middle school students to learn about career opportunities through virtual reality and hands-on simulations.
9. **Mount Holly Middle School** was among six schools that participated in the “Polar Plunge” event and raised \$4,684.57 for the Special Olympics of Gaston County. **W.C. Friday Middle School** raised \$2,644.37, **Ashbrook High School** raised \$1,610, **Gaston Early College High School** raised \$1,272.77, **Grier Middle School** raised \$729, and **Stuart W. Cramer High School** raised \$628. The top fundraising coach was **Amber Radford** from **Ashbrook High School**.
10. Ten students won awards in the Gaston County Senior Art Show: **Erin Poteat, Ashbrook High School**, Best of Show; **Mark Morales Royes, Hunter Huss High School**, First Runner-Up; **Brittany Garcia Barrantes, Hunter Huss High School**, Second Runner-Up; **Ashton Pope, North Gaston High School**, Third Runner-Up; **Emily Edmondson, East Gaston High School**, First Merit; **Trevor McCanless, Forestview High School**, Second Merit; **Summer VanGastle, Forestview High School**, Third Merit; **Pakou Hang, Ashbrook High School**, First Honorable Mention; **Carla Gamez Gutierrez, Bessemer City High**, Gaston County Art Guild Board Award; and **Kelly Diaz, Cherryville High**, Rauch Gallery Coordinator Award.
11. The Battle of the Books winners were **Belmont Middle**, first place; **Stanley Middle**, second place; and **Cramerton Middle**, third place.
12. The following schools received a \$300 beautification grant from the City of Gastonia and Keep Gastonia Beautiful: **Chapel Grove Elementary, Brookside Elementary; Grier Middle; Hawks Nest STEAM Academy; Highland School of Technology; Webb Street School; Woodhill Elementary; and York Chester Middle**.
13. **Gaston County Schools** held the annual Middle School Cheer Showcase at North Gaston High School on March 3. The following schools received recognition: **W.C. Friday Middle**, first place; **Stanley Middle**, second place; and **Mount Holly Middle**, third place.
14. The **Southwest Middle School** boys’ team and the **Holbrook Middle School** girls’ team won the county basketball championships.
15. **Emily Cianciotta** of **Ashbrook High School** was named the School Psychologist of the Year.
16. **Ashbrook High School** junior **Maggie Griffin** received the Dina Jo Hanna Scholarship and sophomore **Sebastian Yelton** received the Gaston Music Education Foundation Scholarship to attend the UNC-Greensboro music camp.

17. **Madison Cole** of **Ashbrook High School** was named Big South 3A Basketball Player of the Year.
18. **Rex Dover** of **Belmont Middle School** finished third in the Carolina Panthers Regional Spelling Bee and is one of four students to qualify for the National Scripps Spelling Bee.
19. The **Belmont Middle School** kindness club, spirit club, and scrapbooking club made Valentine's Day cards for residents at Holy Angels.
20. **Bessemer City High School** senior **Randall Pettus** was selected for the 2023 Carolinas Classic all-star basketball game. The game is scheduled for March 25 at Hoggard High School in Wilmington. Pettus also was named South Piedmont Conference 1A/2A Player of the Year.
21. Members of the National Technical Honor Society at **Bessemer City High School** wrote 400 Christmas cards that were delivered to four area nursing homes during the holidays.
22. **W.A. Bess Elementary** second grader **Chloe Thompson** received second place in the Keep Gastonia Beautiful Arbor Day Contest. Her artwork titled "Spring Cherry Tree" will be displayed in the Gastonia main library through April. Her art teacher is **Michelle Curnhow**.
23. **Carr Elementary** principal **Dr. Rebekah Duncan** and assistant principal **Thomas Plecnik** sponsored a service project for students attending the Dallas Boys and Girls Club. Staff provided cupcakes for the students to decorate and a craft project for them to complete.
24. **Chapel Grove Elementary** partnered with Keep Gastonia Beautiful on a service project that involved students collecting more than 100 pounds of litter around the school. Fourth grade teacher **Victoria Brown** organized the service project.
25. **Stuart W. Cramer High School** junior **Alan Whitley** (alto saxophone) received the Martha Kendrick Scholarship to attend the Cannon Music Camp at Appalachian State University. The scholarship valued at \$3,000 is funded through the Gaston Music Education Foundation.
26. **Stuart W. Cramer High School** had three students win individual 3A wrestling state championships. **Matt Karagias** won his first individual state championship in the 160-pound weight class. **Charlie Sly** won his second individual state championship and was named the most outstanding wrestler in the 3A classification. This year, Sly won in the 132-pound weight class; he won his first state championship last year in the 113-pound weight class. Additionally, ninth grader **Bentley Sly**, Charlie's brother, won his first individual state championship in the 120-pound weight class.
27. **East Gaston High School** cheerleaders **Trinity Brown**, **Ally Codgill**, and **Davanee Crisp** were chosen for the 2023 North Carolina all-state cheerleading team. The all-state team will perform at the North Carolina East-West All-Star Games in July.

28. **East Gaston High School** men's basketball coach **Eugene Farrar** was named Southern Piedmont 1A/2A Coach of the Year.
29. The **Forestview High School** Beta Club, Student Council, and Red Cross Club donated \$1,270 in gift cards for the Destiny Lives On Foundation to present to transplant recipient families at Levine Children's Hospital. The donation coincided with the February Heart Tree community project. In addition, the Red Cross Club members collected coats, jackets, hats, gloves, and pants for the winter clothing drive and donated these items to local families and charities.
30. **Forestview High School** sophomore **Nana Eshun** received the Margaret Alexander McArver Scholarship to attend the UNC-Greensboro music camp.
31. **Gaston Early College High School** alumnus **Allen Chen** spoke at the February N.C. State Board of Education meeting to report that the **Gaston Early College High School** gave him the opportunity to take rigorous and advanced courses while also teaching him life lessons. He highlighted the school's efforts to forge close connections with the community and the school's family-like culture.
32. The **Gaston Early College High School** Adulthood 101 Club held a "Cuts for Kindness" ceremony on February 17. Thirteen students and faculty members donated eight-inch locks of their hair to Children with Hair Loss, a nonprofit organization in Michigan. Teacher **Tabatha High** organized the program.
33. **Gaston Early College High School** students assisted Keep Gastonia Beautiful with preparing 1,035 native seed packets for the city's Beetopia program, 1,000 litter education packets for elementary students, and 45 grab and go litter packets for the Great American Cleanup. In addition, students swept the entire Gastonia Farmers Market, cleaned out old chairs, and picked up about 40 pounds of litter on the grounds.
34. **Gaston Early College High School** students spent time with the Gastonia Police Department Crime Scene Investigation (CSI) unit to learn how officers investigate and process crime scenes. The students also learned how officers use a drone to assist in police investigations.
35. **Gaston Early College of Medical Sciences** teacher **Tommy Ramkissoo** was selected as the Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year. The Veterans of Foreign Wars for the United States (VFW) annually recognizes teachers who instill a sense of national pride in students by teaching citizenship education topics and promoting America's history and traditions.
36. **Gaston Early College of Medical Sciences** freshman **Morgan Melton** won the Voice of Democracy Certificate of Merit with her written and voice-recorded essay on the topic, "Why is the Veteran Important?" She was selected as the winner for the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post District 14.
37. The **Highland School of Technology** HOSA club made more than 100 appreciation bags and delivered them to healthcare workers at five different facilities.

38. **Hunter Huss High School** senior **Justin Ross** was named the Big South 3A Basketball Player of the Year. In addition, women's basketball coach **Bobby Lipscomb** was named the Big South 3A Coach of the Year.
39. **Lingerfelt Elementary** welcomed a special visitor on March 1. **Forestview High School** alumnus and LIV professional golfer **Harold Varner III** visited with students to talk about his time as a professional golfer and the importance of staying in school. In addition, he spent time with students involved in the First Tee program, which focuses on teaching students about golf and character education.
40. **Leah Ammons** of **New Hope Elementary** was named the **Gaston County Schools Media Specialist of the Year**.
41. **Page Primary School** hosted an open house for incoming kindergarten families. The event included guided tours of the school, an expo of information about the school, a visit to the Belmont Fire Department truck to meet "Sparky" and several firefighters, and a Hungry Howie's food truck. More than 100 families attended the open house.
42. **Pinewood Elementary** fourth grader **Caroline Czekaj** had her artwork titled "Hearts of Fire" selected as one of the winners for the Mount Holly traffic signal wrapping project. Her artwork will be used to wrap a traffic signal box near Freightliner.
43. The **North Gaston High School** Science Olympiad team competed in the regional competition in Hickory. **Jenna Mason** and **Camryn Tuttle** placed fourth overall in the anatomy and physiology category; **Mason Newton** and **Kamarria Grigsby** placed fourth overall in the forensics category; **Savannah Moore** placed fourth overall in remote sensing category; and **Brayden Robinson** and **Ta'aliyah Thomasson** placed third overall in write it, do it category.
44. The following **North Gaston High School** students were selected for the all-county band: **Leslie Rosas, Ajah Harris, David Trujillo-Gomez, Hala Freeman, Sydney Sheppard, Alejandra Unmanzor, Ayannah Harris, Nicholas Hudson, Kaden Dupuis, Michael Salas, Charlie Eason, Nehemiah Howard, Mikaili Small, Audrey Guthrie, Eric St. Laurent, and Parker Roper**.
45. The **South Point High School** team placed first in the Battle of the Books competition, and the **Stuart W. Cramer High School** team was the runner-up.
46. **South Point High School** senior **Bruce Boney** received the Hinda Honigman Scholarship valued at \$4,000 from the Gaston Music Education Foundation. Boney will attend Appalachian State University this fall and major in music education.
47. **South Point High School** senior **Jerry Bradley** was selected for the 2023 North Carolina Senior High School All-State Honors Band. He will participate and perform with the prestigious ensemble at UNC-Greensboro in April.

48. **South Point High School** junior **Lauren Arthurs** was crowned Miss South Point during the school's pageant on February 18, winning a \$13,000 scholarship. Runner-ups were **Nicole Allen**, first, and **Maci Norton**, second. **Kayla McMorris** was named Miss Congeniality.
49. **South Point High School** men's basketball coach **Kody Kubbs** was named Big South 3A Coach of the Year.
50. **Stanley Middle School** teachers **Amber Reeves** and **Diana Baxter** partnered with Angie Bittle from Duke Energy to bring the Students@Work to the school. Eighth grade students were involved in interactive presentations that highlighted careers at Duke Energy in the following areas: aviation/drones, electric vehicles, and solar power.
51. **Debbie Will** of **Webb Street School** was named **Gaston County Schools** Service Provider of the Year.
52. **York Chester Middle School** resource officer Patricia Davis worked with Maylo United Methodist Church, Gateway Cowboy Church, Community Pentecostal Church, and Holy Trinity to collect bookbags for students.