

Products of
PUBLIC
EDUCATION

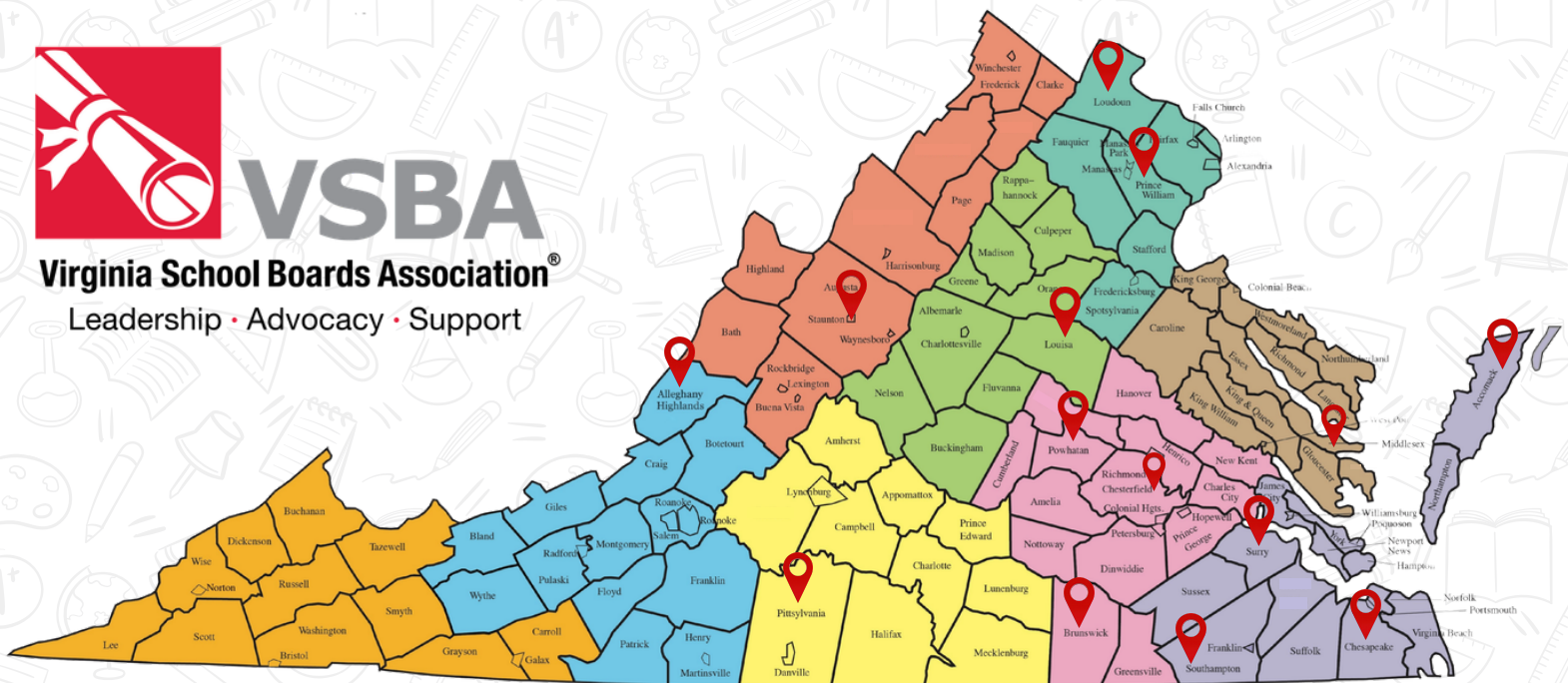
CELEBRATING THE STUDENTS & ALUMNI OF VIRGINIA'S PUBLIC EDUCATION



VSBA

Virginia School Boards Association®

Leadership • Advocacy • Support



Forward

from VSBA's Executive Director, Gina Patterson



Virginia's public schools are places where possibilities become realities. Every day, students across the Commonwealth enter classrooms, laboratories, career and technical education programs, athletic fields, stages, and countless other learning environments where they are encouraged to discover their strengths, pursue their passions, and imagine what is possible for their futures.

The Virginia School Boards Association is proud to present *Products of Public Education*, a collection that celebrates the remarkable students and graduates who represent the many successes of Virginia's public schools. Each story featured in this publication offers a glimpse into the diverse pathways students take and the many ways a public education can shape a life, open a door, or inspire a future.

The term "products" is intentional. Our schools produce far more than test scores or graduation rates. They produce artists and engineers, educators and entrepreneurs, healthcare professionals and skilled tradespeople, community leaders and public servants. They produce students who are prepared to continue their education, enter the workforce, serve their communities, and contribute to the Commonwealth and beyond.

Behind every student success story is a community of people who believed in that student and helped create opportunities for them to succeed. Teachers, administrators, support staff, families, community partners, and, importantly, locally elected school board members all play a role in building the conditions where students can thrive. Together, they ensure that public schools remain places where every student has the opportunity to find their path and reach their potential.

As school board members, you have the privilege and responsibility of helping shape the future of our communities by supporting the schools that serve them. Celebrating the accomplishments of our students and graduates reminds us why this work matters. It also challenges us to continue strengthening our public schools so that future generations have the same opportunities, and even greater ones, to learn, grow, and succeed.

The stories in this publication are as diverse as Virginia itself. They reflect the creativity, determination, resilience, and promise of students throughout the Commonwealth. While each journey is unique, together these stories demonstrate a shared truth: Virginia's public schools are making a lasting difference in the lives of students and in the communities they call home.

On behalf of the VSBA, I am honored to celebrate these students and graduates and the many individuals who have supported them along the way. Their accomplishments are a source of pride for all of us, and their stories serve as an important reminder of the extraordinary possibilities that emerge when we invest in public education.

We invite you to explore these stories, celebrate these achievements, and join us in recognizing the people that make Virginia's public schools such an important part of our Commonwealth.



Gina Patterson

Executive Director

Virginia School Boards Association

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Staunton City Public Schools

**Dr. Francis
Collins**



Staunton City Schools, Class of 1966



**Medical Researcher, former director of the
National Institutes of Health (2009-2021)**

“ His contributions to science, medicine, and society have been recognized with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the National Medal of Science, and the Templeton Prize. ”

Dr. Francis Collins was homeschooled until 6th grade when he entered Staunton City Schools. He not only graduated from R.E. Lee High School (now Staunton High School) in 1966, but went on to attend the University of Virginia to study Chemistry and later attend medical school at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill - both distinguished public universities.

In 1989, Dr. Collins and other scientific collaborators identified the gene responsible for cystic fibrosis. This discovery was followed by other genetic discoveries made by Collins and other contributors including the genes for Huntington's disease, neurofibromatosis, multiple endocrine neoplasia type I and Hutchinson-Gillford progeria syndrome.

Dr. Collins is a physician-scientist whose work has transformed modern medicine. Under his direction, the Human Genome Project produced the first complete sequence of the human genome in 2003. From 2009 to 2021, he served under three presidents as Director of the National Institutes of Health, the world's largest supporter of biomedical research. His contributions to science, medicine, and society have been recognized with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the National

Medal of Science, and the Templeton Prize. He is the author of six books, including his most recent, *The Road to Wisdom: On Truth, Science, Faith, and Trust*. Today, Dr. Collins continues to advance his lifelong mission through *Discovery Lives in Us*, a new initiative dedicated to collecting and sharing authentic patient narratives about the impact of medical research.

Dr. Collins continued his trajectory in Staunton City Schools when a 10th grade chemistry teacher inspired Francis to consider chemistry as an area of study. Dr. Collins has often spoken in interviews of the impact this teacher had on his thinking and on his career. He appreciated the orderliness of atoms and molecules in Chemistry as opposed to the “messiness” of Biology. That inspiration led him to the University of Virginia, where he earned a B.S. in Chemistry.

Dr. Francis Collins is among the most accomplished and widely recognized graduates of Staunton City Schools, and one of the most distinguished scientists in American history. He not only led the NIH through three presidential terms, but successfully led it through the Covid-19 pandemic.



DISCOVERY



INSPIRATION



EXCELLENCE



IMPACT



**Brunswick County
Public Schools**

**The Honorable
Cleo Powell**



Brunswick High School, Class of 1975



Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Virginia



Today you can see it, tomorrow you can be it – Chief Justice Cleo Powell



Chief Justice Powell is a 1975 graduate of Brunswick High School.

The Honorable Powell is the Chief Justice of The Supreme Court of Virginia. She is the second woman and the first African-American woman to hold this office. Additionally, Chief Justice Powell has served on the Supreme Court of Virginia since 2011. She has been a Judge at each level of the state's judicial system. Prior to her career on the bench, Chief Justice Powell worked as an attorney in the private sector.

She has made multiple efforts to engage with Brunswick County Public Schools' elementary and secondary students to share in her historic achievements during the 2025-2026 school year.

Chief Justice Powell led an assembly and talked to students about her career and her experiences growing up in Brunswick County. She also invited a group of students from Russell Middle



School and Brunswick High School to her investiture. Finally, she arranged for a group of sixth graders to observe a hearing at the Supreme Court and tour the capital.

Chief Justice Powell shared inspirational words of wisdom with the students as she told them, "Today you can see it, tomorrow you can be it."



LEADERSHIP



HISTORY



INSPIRATION



OPPORTUNITY



Southampton County Public Schools

The Honorable Bernard Goodwyn



Southampton High School, Class of 1979



Former Chief Justice of Virginia



Justice Goodwyn's remarkable journey from a rural Virginia public school system to the highest court in the Commonwealth stands as a powerful example of the promise of public education.



From his foundational years in the public schools of Southampton County to more than three decades of distinguished service within the Virginia judiciary, Justice S. Bernard Goodwyn's journey reflects academic excellence, professional achievement, and an unwavering commitment to the rule of law.

A proud product of public education, Justice Goodwyn graduated as valedictorian of Southampton High School's Class of 1979. During his high school years, he excelled academically and demonstrated leadership as quarterback of the football team, captain of the track team, saxophone player in the band, and class president. He later graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University in 1983 before earning his Juris Doctor from the University of Virginia School of Law in 1986. While at UVA, he was inducted into the Raven Society and received the Ritter Award for honor, character, and integrity.

Justice Goodwyn holds the rare distinction of serving at every level of Virginia's judiciary. His judicial career began in the Chesapeake General District Court, continued through the Chesapeake Circuit Court, and culminated with eighteen years on the Supreme Court of Virginia, including service as Chief Justice from 2022–2026.

Throughout his career, Justice Goodwyn has been recognized for his leadership, integrity, and dedication to justice. House Joint Resolution No. 131 (2026 Session) described him as “a champion of problem-solving and treatment-focused judicial programs” and recognized his work advancing fairness, accessibility, and justice for all Virginians. In 2025, he received both the Harry L. Carrico Outstanding Career Service Award and the Gerald L. Baliles Distinguished Service Award, the Virginia Bar Association's highest honor.

Justice Goodwyn consistently viewed the law as a promise to the people—a promise that rights would be honored, voices heard, and humanity respected. His leadership embodied these principles throughout his service to the Commonwealth.

Justice Goodwyn's remarkable journey from a rural Virginia public school system to the highest court in the Commonwealth stands as a powerful example of the promise of public education and the lasting impact of Southampton County Public Schools.



EXCELLENCE



ACHIEVEMENT



JUSTICE



IMPACT



**Chesapeake City
Public Schools**

**Dr. Jared
Cotton**



Great Bridge High School, Class of 1988



Former Superintendent of Chesapeake City Public Schools



Public schools educate the future, but they also build the leaders who return to ensure public education remains strong for generations to come.



After Dr. Jared A. Cotton retired as superintendent of Chesapeake City Public Schools in 2026 after a distinguished 34-year career, he left behind a legacy that perfectly defines what it means to be a “Product of Public Education.” Dr. Cotton’s journey in Chesapeake Public Schools began as a fifth-grade transfer student at Crestwood Intermediate. Raised by a single mother who struggled with alcoholism and chronic depression, he faced numerous challenges. However, public education and the opportunities available to him became a driving force behind his success.

At Crestwood Junior High, joining the band to play trumpet and tuba gave him a creative outlet and a dedicated group of friends, leading to selections in All-City and All-State groups. He developed his critical thinking skills through Odyssey of the Mind. At Great Bridge High School, he played varsity tennis, joined the National Honor Society, and served in the Digna Phi service fraternity. His dedication to learning German led him to become German Club president and earn a competitive senior-year exchange trip to West Berlin.

These formative experiences shaped his desire to become an educator himself. After earning degrees from Tidewater Community College and Old Dominion University, he returned as a first year teacher to the exact classroom where he once sat as a fifth-grade student. He later transitioned into educational leadership roles, serving in numerous

positions supporting technology, assessment and accountability before becoming superintendent of Henry County public schools in 2012, and ultimately returning to lead Chesapeake Public Schools in 2018.



Dr. Cotton’s impact spans local, state, and national levels. Known for closing achievement gaps, he was named Virginia Superintendent of the Year in 2019 and Region II Superintendent of the Year in 2025. Regionally, his championing of Career and Technical Education (CTE) led to the creation of the J. A. Cotton Career Scholar Award for workforce-bound graduates and recognitions by the Hampton Roads Workforce Council. The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) honored him with the 2022 Communications Technology Award.

Dr. Cotton’s story is proof that while public schools educate the future doctors, Olympians, astronauts and congressmen, they also, and perhaps more importantly, build the very leaders that return to ensure that our public school system remains strong for generations to come.



RESILIENCE



LEADERSHIP



ACHIEVEMENT



SERVICE



Pittsylvania County Public Schools

Dr. Steven Mayhew



Dan River High School, Class of 1994



Pittsylvania County Public Schools Superintendent



His journey is a perfect example of how local education can shape a lifelong career of service right here at home.



Dr. Steven Mayhew isn't just leading Pittsylvania County Schools (PCS); he's a part of them. As a three-time alumnus, Dr. Mayhew grew up in the same classrooms he now oversees. His journey is a perfect example of how local education can shape a lifelong career of service right here at home.

Dr. Mayhew's path through PCS has touched almost every part of our school system. He started in the classroom as a student, then as a high school teacher before stepping into leadership as an assistant principal. He then served as principal at Twin Springs Elementary and later at Dan River High School. These roles gave him a real-world look at what our students and teachers need at every level, from their first steps in kindergarten to their high school graduation.

His career eventually took him to the central office as Assistant Superintendent for Administration, leading up to his current role as Superintendent. Because he has been in nearly every position, as a student, a teacher, and an administrator, he leads with a genuine understanding and heart for our community that you can only get by living the experience.

During his first year as Division Superintendent, he successfully completed his doctoral degree with research focused on decreasing teacher turnover at the high school he previously attended as a student and later served as principal.

At a minimum three nights a week, he can be found in an auditorium supporting the fine arts, a gymnasium, track, or ball field cheering on and support PCS athletics. This is in addition to his participation in monthly School Board meetings and attending assemblies, awards and recognitions all throughout the school division of over a 1000 square miles with 18 base schools, two alternative, and one regional STEM center.

Dr. Mayhew's experience across all levels of the division, from the classroom to the central office gives him a unique genuine understanding and heart for PCS and its community. This full-circle story reinforces the value and quality of Virginia's public schools by showcasing a leader who believes in the system because he is literally a product of it.



LEADERSHIP



SERVICE



COMMUNITY



LEGACY



Accomack County Public Schools

**Dale
Spilker**



Chincoteague High School, Class of 2007



Welding Instructor, Accomack County Public Schools

“Public education did not simply teach him a trade, it gave him confidence, direction, and the opportunity to become someone capable of positively impacting the next generation.”

Growing up within Accomack County Public Schools, Dale Spilker was not considered a model student or someone most teachers would have predicted would one day become their colleague. He struggled to find direction and was never viewed as the student others would rely on academically. That changed when he entered the school division's welding technical education program during his junior year of high school.

Originally, welding was simply a second-choice program. At the time, his interest in the trade came from wanting to build skateboarding obstacles for himself and his friends. However, once Dale entered the welding classroom, he met his welding instructor, who immediately saw potential in him that he had never recognized in himself.

Through his mentorship, Dale learned far more than welding techniques. He learned accountability, discipline, professionalism, and the importance of taking pride in his work. The welding program gave him structure, purpose, and a sense of belonging that Dale had not previously experienced in school. It transformed his attitude toward education and helped him realize that success is often built through hard work, consistency, and mentorship.

That experience ultimately shaped the path of his life. Today, Dale has the privilege of returning to the same school division as a welding instructor, where he now works to provide students with the same encouragement and opportunities that once changed his future. Public education did not simply teach him a trade, it gave him confidence, direction, and the opportunity to become someone capable of positively impacting the next generation.

What has always stood out most to him, however, was the opportunity to teach others. Whether it was mentoring a new employee on the job site or introducing students to the possibilities within the welding industry, education consistently became the most rewarding part of his career. That passion ultimately led him back to public education as a welding instructor.

Dale's story stands out because it reflects the impact career and technical education can have on a student who may not initially see their own potential. Through mentorships, hands-on learning, and opportunity, public education helped shape a student who once struggled academically into an educator dedicated to helping others find confidence, purpose, and success.



MENTORSHIP



OPPORTUNITY



PURPOSE



IMPACT



Louisa County Public Schools

Darren Poindexter



Louisa County High School, Class of 2012



**Professional Drummer,
Touring Drummer for musical artist Shaboozey**



Talent alone is not enough; success requires perseverance, dedication, and a willingness to embrace every opportunity.



When Darren Poindexter walked the halls of Louisa County High School as a student, he dreamed of one day making a career out of music. Today, that dream has become a reality in spectacular fashion.

A 2012 graduate of Louisa County Public Schools, Darren has emerged as one of the region's most successful young musicians, performing as the touring drummer for chart-topping artist Shaboozey and appearing on some of the nation's biggest stages. His journey from rural Virginia to national television serves as a powerful reminder of the opportunities that public education can help create.

Darren's love for music began early. He started singing at age seven, learned the trumpet during his school years, and taught himself to play drums at age twelve. Throughout his time at Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, Louisa Middle School, and Louisa County High School, he continued to refine his talents while building the discipline and work ethic that would later define his career.

While attending Louisa County High School, Darren discovered Berklee College of Music and realized that a career in music was possible. That realization inspired him to pursue his passion with even greater determination. After graduating from Louisa County High School, he enrolled at Berklee, where he earned a Bachelor of Music degree and immersed himself in performance opportunities that helped launch his professional career.

Following college, Darren spent years performing with wedding bands and local artists while continuing to build his reputation as a

versatile and highly skilled drummer. His dedication eventually opened doors to larger opportunities, including work with acclaimed artists such as Forrest Frank before ultimately joining the touring band for Shaboozey.

The opportunity placed Darren in the spotlight during one of the biggest years in modern music. Shaboozey's hit single, "A Bar Song (Tipsy)," became a cultural phenomenon, topping the Billboard Hot 100 for 19 weeks and reaching audiences around the globe. As the band's drummer, Poindexter found himself performing for sold-out crowds across the country and appearing on NBC's Saturday Night Live in December 2024.

Despite his success, Darren remains grounded in the values he learned growing up in Louisa County. He often speaks about the importance of joy, preparation, and continuous learning. His journey demonstrates that talent alone is not enough; success requires perseverance, dedication, and a willingness to embrace every opportunity.

For current LCPS students, Darren's story offers a powerful lesson: no dream is too big. Whether in a classroom, rehearsal room, or on a national stage, the skills developed through public education can open doors to incredible possibilities.

Louisa County Public Schools is proud to celebrate Darren Poindexter—a talented musician, dedicated professional, and outstanding example of what it means to be a Product of Public Education.



PASSION



PERSEVERANCE



OPPORTUNITY



SUCCESS



Allegheny Highlands Public Schools

**Matthew
Lindsay**



Covington High School, Class of 2013



Head Custodian, Allegheny Highlands Public Schools



Simply put, Matthew is an example of working hard for an institution that once served him – a shining example of giving back.



Matthew Lindsay, a graduate of Covington High School in 2013 and Jackson River Technical Center in 2016, proudly serves Allegheny Highlands Public Schools as a head custodian. Always receiving “rave reviews” for his dependability and dedication, Matthew never

hesitates to respond to unusual, time-sensitive, and complex requests to support the schools. Importantly, he understands that his work is ultimately in the service of the children of AHPS. He is consistently described as honest, reliable, friendly, and trustworthy.

Near his graduation, Matthew began working at Edgemont Primary and Jeter-Watson Intermediate School, a new building in the historic Covington City Public Schools. His service continued through the pandemic time with Matthew being the main point of contact for cleaning this large building on a complex schedule. Today, Matthew is celebrating a promotion to head custodian for the building. He credits his work ethic to his mother, to mentor custodians Gary Wayne Twitty and Toby Allen, and to many

teachers and school leaders who have supported him along the way.

Matthew has worked diligently for Allegheny Highlands Public Schools and its component historic school divisions for nine years. His community impact is paramount. Every student knows “Mr. Matt” and can count on Mr. Matt for a smile, a kind word, and helpful reminders. Matthew is truly invested in the success of the children, the school, and the school division.

“Children and staff know they can count on ‘Mr. Matt’ for support and a smile,” noted outgoing Principal Cindy Morgan of Jeter-Watson Elementary School.

“Matthew’s dependability is remarkable – and inspires much respect,” stated Superintendent Kim Halterman. “Simply put, Matthew is an example of working hard for an institution that once served him – a shining example of giving back.”

Matthew is a kind presence, and in 2026, he was recognized by the Allegheny Highlands Chamber of Commerce as Jeter-Watson Elementary’s School Support Staff Member of the Year.



DEDICATION



RELIABILITY



SERVICE



GIVING BACK



Surry County Public Schools

Cameran Drew



Surry County High School, Class of 2024



Surry County Board of Supervisors Member



Cameran's message of leadership, service, and perseverance reflects the values public education seeks to instill in every student.



Cameran Drew exemplifies the power and potential of public education. As a 19-year-old college student and the youngest person ever elected to the Surry County Board of Supervisors, he demonstrates how public schools can inspire students to become leaders, problem-solvers, and active citizens in their communities.

Beyond his academic achievements, Cameran has embraced public service at an age when most students are still exploring future career paths. While attending Virginia Peninsula Community College, he balances his studies with the responsibilities of elected office and leadership of his own foundation. His commitment to creating opportunities for youth and improving the lives of county residents demonstrates maturity, vision, and a strong sense of civic responsibility.

Perhaps most importantly, Cameran encourages other young people to become involved in their communities and take action when they see a need for change. His message of leadership, service, and perseverance reflects the values public education seeks to instill in every student.

Cameran Drew's impact spans from immediate local governance to a national symbol of political civility.

At just 19 years old, Cameran made history as one of the youngest elected officials in Virginia. By winning a seat on the Surry County Board of Supervisors, he shattered traditional age barriers in local politics. His victory directly engaged younger generations, proving that youth can successfully run for office and influence local government policy.

Through the CBS Evening News feature "On the Road with Steve Hartman," Drew's story reached millions of Americans. It provided a powerful counter-narrative to modern political polarization. The race demonstrated that political opponents can debate with dignity, uphold mutual respect, and maintain deep personal friendships despite differing views.

Cameran's success is rooted in the meaningful educational experiences and relationships he developed through Surry County Public Schools. One of the most influential factors was the mentorship of his high school civics and government teacher, Kenneth Bell. More than simply teaching course content, Bell inspired Cameran's interest in government, public service, and civic engagement. Their relationship demonstrates the powerful impact educators can have in helping students discover their purpose and potential. Through his public school education, Cameran gained leadership opportunities that encouraged him to think critically about community issues and the role of government. His exposure to civics, government, and social studies education helped him develop the knowledge, confidence, and communication skills necessary to pursue public office at an unusually young age. The fact that his story is now used as a lesson plan for social studies students around the world highlights the effectiveness of those educational experiences.



Scan for a video featuring Cameran Drew
or visit: <https://bit.ly/3UpCqS1>



MENTORSHIP



PURPOSE



LEADERSHIP



POTENTIAL



Prince William County Public Schools

**Alyssa
Sagle**



Battlefield High School, Class of 2026



Graduate, Student Athlete, Role Model

“Alyssa’s success highlights how strong academic programs, school-based athletics, and long-term mentorship can help students reach their full potential.”

A product of Prince William County Public Schools throughout her entire educational journey, Alyssa credits the coaches, teachers, and mentors she encountered along the way with helping her develop into the exceptional student-athlete she is today.

Alyssa Sagle is an exceptional student-athlete whose accomplishments have earned recognition at the state, national, and international levels. She competed in the 2024 U.S. Olympic Trials and captured the title at the U.S. Open swimming competition in December 2024. A nine-time Scholastic All-American and 11-time state champion, Alyssa has consistently excelled both academically and athletically. She also holds the national public-school record in the 100-yard backstroke, further cementing her place among the nation’s elite swimmers.

Alyssa is a member of the USA Junior National Team and was selected to represent Team USA at an international competition in Vancouver in June 2025. Beyond her success in the pool, she is committed to giving back to the sport by serving as a role model for younger athletes and sharing her experiences as a speaker at swim camps for aspiring swimmers. Her achievements, leadership, and dedication make her an outstanding representative of Prince William County Public Schools.

Alyssa’s success was shaped by the strong support system she experienced throughout her time in Prince William County Public Schools. Having attended PWCS for her entire educational career, she benefited from the guidance of dedicated teachers,

career, coaches, and mentors who recognized her potential and encouraged her to pursue her goals. A particularly influential factor was the continuity of coaching she received, as many of the coaches who worked with her on the Battlefield High School swim team had also trained and mentored her since she was 5. Their consistent encouragement, combined with the opportunities available through school athletics, helped her develop the skills, confidence, and work ethic that contributed to her success both in the classroom and in the pool.

Alyssa’s story exemplifies the transformative impact of public education and the opportunities available to students through Prince William County Public Schools. Her achievements as a nationally recognized swimmer, nine-time Scholastic All-American, 11-time state champion, and member of the USA Junior National Team reflect not only her dedication and perseverance but also the support she received from teachers, coaches, and mentors throughout her educational journey. As she prepares to attend the University of Virginia and continue her athletic and academic pursuits, her story serves as an inspiring example of the outstanding outcomes public education can help make possible.



Scan for a video featuring Alyssa Sagle
or visit: <https://bit.ly/4f0QU01>



EXCELLENCE



PERSEVERANCE



MENTORSHIP



ACHIEVEMENT



Powhatan County Public Schools

**Ella
Yarhouse**



Powhatan High School, Class of 2026



Graduate of Powhatan County Public Schools

“Ella’s story reflects a student who has grown through public education not only in achievement, but in purpose: learning to listen, to lead, and to understand the weight of decisions that affect others.”



The first time Ella Yarhouse stepped into the Virginia State Capitol, she expected to observe government in action. Instead, she left with a fundamentally changed understanding of what leadership means.

Ella is a Class of 2026 graduate of Powhatan High School in Powhatan County Public Schools who participated in the Advanced College Academy partnership with Reynolds Community College, earning an associate degree before she received her high school diploma. However, her high school experience was defined not only by academic excellence, but by moments of real-world learning that shaped her purpose. That day at the Capitol became one of those defining moments. While meeting state leaders through a school-sponsored experience, the then-sophomore witnessed how deeply policy decisions affect real people. In a raw hallway moment, she saw the emotional weight of advocacy firsthand – people responding not to abstract ideas, but to decisions that had deeply personal consequences. It was there she began to understand government as lived human impact rather than distant systems.

That realization became a foundation for everything that followed.

Throughout her time in PCPS, Ella has pursued rigorous academics, completing Advanced Placement and dual enrollment coursework while maintaining a GPA above 4.0. She has also

balanced extensive leadership roles, employment beginning at age 14, and more than 500 hours of community service.

Ella has served as Student Liaison to the School Board, representing student perspectives directly to district leadership. She has also held executive and presidential roles in organizations such as FBLA, Community Problem Solving, and honor societies, where she has helped lead initiatives focused on service, problem-solving, and student engagement.

Beyond school leadership, Ella has been selected for highly competitive opportunities including Virginia’s delegation to the United States Senate Youth Program and participation in HOBY Youth Leadership. These experiences reflect both academic achievement and a demonstrated commitment to civic engagement.

Her public education journey has been shaped by mentorship from educators, including teachers who encouraged critical thinking, strengthened her communication skills, and introduced her to government, literature, and law. Outside the classroom, she also worked in multiple roles, including retail, childcare, and a multi-year internship with a local law firm.

These combined influences helped her develop confidence in both academic and civic spaces.

Ella’s story reflects a student who has grown through public education not only in achievement, but in purpose: learning to listen, to lead, and to understand the weight of decisions that affect others.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



ADVOCACY



LEADERSHIP



PURPOSE



**Loudoun County
Public Schools**

Products of
**PUBLIC
EDUCATION**

**Saniya
Yamin**



Broad Run High School, Class of 2026



Graduate of Loudoun County Public Schools



Yamin's public education experience taught her not only how to lead, but how to use that leadership to strengthen her community.



Public education shaped Saniya Yamin's understanding of equity, leadership, and public service. From kindergarten through high school, she learned alongside students from diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds, including English language learners, refugee students, and first-generation Americans like herself. These experiences gave her an early understanding of how access, opportunity, and belonging can look different for every student.

As captain of her school's Speech and Debate team, Yamin also learned to be resourceful and build opportunities from within. While some schools had access to private coaching and paid resources, she and her teammates relied on collaboration, mentorship, free resources, and preparation. Her team's success in sending students to national competition demonstrated the impact of students and educators investing in one another.

Through Loudoun County Public Schools, Yamin participated in the Youth Advisory Council and Youth in Government Day. After being elected to represent approximately 80,000 students on the Advisory Commission on Youth, she gained firsthand experience with student voice and local government. The experience led to an internship with the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors and helped inspire her continued interest in government and public service.

Her experiences in public schools also motivated her to support students facing barriers to success. After seeing more refugee students enter her schools, Yamin worked through her Girl Scout troop to create a mentorship program serving more than 20 refugee

students, helping them navigate academics, school culture, and social life. She also became an advocate for greater college access through her work on SAT School Day and Virginia HB410, recognizing that access requires more than simply making opportunities available, it requires addressing the practical barriers students face.

Yamin's public education experience taught her not only how to lead, but how to use that leadership to strengthen her community. Through Speech and Debate, Model United Nations, Rho Kappa, and other student organizations, she developed skills in organizing, mentoring, advocacy, and creating opportunities for others. Those lessons continued into her work beyond school, including advocacy for HB410, co-founding PIVOT, and working with local government.

Her story reflects the power of public education to prepare students not only for their own futures, but to become engaged citizens who use their experiences to make a difference in the communities around them.



OPPORTUNITY



EQUITY



LEADERSHIP



IMPACT



Chesterfield County Public Schools

**Naren
Ponnusamy**



Cosby High School, Class of 2027



Current Student, Student Innovator



Naren's journey demonstrates the power of public education to cultivate curiosity, innovation, and leadership.



Naren Ponnusamy represents the very best of public education and the opportunities it provides students to grow as scholars, leaders, and innovators. As a junior in Chesterfield County Public Schools, he has built a strong academic foundation through rigorous core coursework and numerous Advanced Placement classes, particularly in science, while also exploring Career and Technical Education through Sports Medicine and participation in HOSA and DECA.

His accomplishments already extend far beyond the classroom. Independently, Naren has conducted advanced research using generative AI to explore challenges in cancer immunotherapy, focusing on the PD-L1 checkpoint protein that allows cancer cells to evade the immune system. Using a computational pipeline that included RFdiffusion, ProteinMPNN, and AlphaFold2, he designed novel protein binders intended to target PD-L1, demonstrating both technical depth and remarkable initiative for a high school student. He also applied Python coding skills to refine his models and presented his work at Chesterfield County's first Generative AI Student Fair.

At the same time, Naren has excelled in competitive student organizations and academic activities. Through HOSA, he advanced to the State Leadership Conference and earned 4th place in competition, while in DECA he qualified for the International Career Development Conference. In debate, he earned recognition as an NHUDL Statewide Debate Champion at Yale University and a Top 10 Speaker at the Yale Osterweis Debate Tournament.

Public education has played a central role in shaping his success. His experiences in rigorous academics, Advanced Placement courses, CTE programs, CTSOs, debate, and leadership opportunities such as the Superintendent's Student Advisory Group on Education (SSAGE) have helped develop his critical thinking, communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills. Through SSAGE, he has also contributed student perspectives on important topics including the role of generative AI in education.

Naren's story stands out because it reflects the power of a well-rounded public education to cultivate curiosity, innovation, and leadership. His journey demonstrates that public schools empower students not only to achieve academic success, but also to make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world.



CURIOSITY



LEADERSHIP



INNOVATION



IMPACT



Middlesex County Public Schools

Products of
**PUBLIC
EDUCATION**

**Kinsley
Horn**



Middlesex High School, Class of 2028



Current Student, Student Innovator



Kinsley is an intelligent student, a talented athlete, a critical thinker, an advocate for others, a strong leader, a trailblazer, and a role model.



Nelson Mandela said it best when he said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world," and those who receive public education are challenged and taught necessary skills to excel in a diverse world. Public schools serve students from various backgrounds; therefore, the students are exposed to a variety of perspectives. Kinsley Horn is one of those students who encompasses strong interpersonal communication and collaborative abilities due in large part to her experience as a student in Middlesex County Public Schools.

Kinsley is inspired by her parents, but she also attributes her success to some of the teachers who have motivated her over the years—Carrie Ward (Science), Kelly Cox (Spanish), and Melvina Robinson (CTE). They ignited her curiosity through PBLs (Project-Based Learning) and current event integration. Kinsley is also a member of DECA, FBLA, FCA, and Key Club. She has also received numerous accolades as one of our MHS athletes, excelling in volleyball, swimming, and track. Kinsley is an active participant in our school and in our community.

Although she has maintained over a 4.0 GPA, Kinsley shines in other areas, as well. She has facilitated two service projects. The summer before her 9th grade year, she started her first service project. Kinsley collected over 300 bags of clothes and donated them to the Cryer Center, which is a non-profit organization in Middlesex County that relies upon donations and volunteers for its operations. Her most recent project is called "A Fresh Start." Kinsley collects hygiene

products, creates care kits, and disperses these kits to local schools. These care kits affect students' health, confidence, relationships, and success in school. She also volunteers 12 hours a week at Walter Reed Riverside Hospital in Gloucester, Virginia, and she has volunteered with other organizations, benefiting and helping our community members.

Kinsley hopes that she will foster the ripple effect and inspire other students to also help others and give back to their community. She is an intelligent student, a talented athlete, a critical thinker, an advocate for others, a strong leader, a trailblazer, and a role model. Kinsley is self-disciplined and wants to hopefully pursue a career in the medical field, but even more importantly, she wants to see others achieve success, as well. Her ability to empower others shines bright. Educators want to inspire students, but sometimes, students, like Kinsley, inspire us.



Scan for the "A Fresh
Start" Facebook page
or visit: <https://bit.ly/3SpfwK0>



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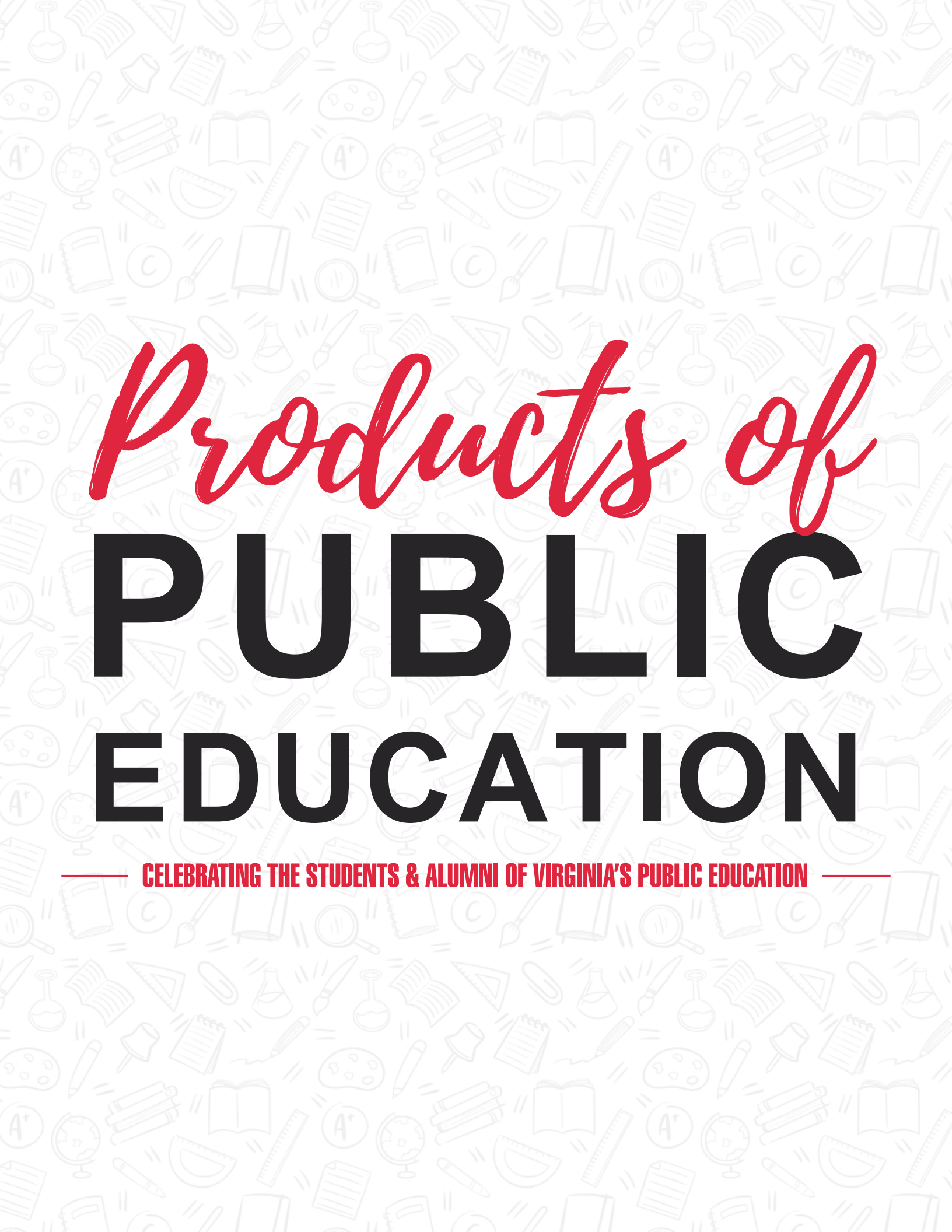
SERVICE



EMPOWERMENT



INSPIRATION

The background is a light gray field filled with a dense, repeating pattern of small, white line-art icons. These icons represent various educational subjects and tools, including books, pencils, paper clips, globes, rulers, protractors, paint palettes, and laboratory flasks. The icons are scattered across the entire page, creating a textured, academic atmosphere.

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