



Franklin County Schools welcomes students back

Special to the Times
By Dr. Rhonda Schuhler
Superintendent,
Franklin County Schools

We are thrilled to welcome our students, families, and staff back for the 2025-26 school year. I am often asked about what we do in the summer, and I thought I would begin by providing a few updates on the work that has taken place.

A total of 623 students participated in our Summer Learning Programs across all grade levels.

- Our elementary “Read to Achieve” and “Prep” Academies provided 1,992 additional days of instruction for second and third graders. Impressively, 45.1% of the students assessed showed measurable growth in reading, and 11% improved their reading tier.
- Middle school students explored career options through eleven different Career/Fine Arts Camp sessions, with a total of 111 participants. Topics included agriculture, automotive, and health science.
- High school students recovered a total of 439 credits through the Credit Recovery Lab.
- The Career Accelerator District C Summer Teamship, a four-day intensive program, brought together rising 8th-12th graders to solve problems for four local businesses. Student surveys showed an increase in their confidence to work on a team (from an average of 3.2 to 4.2) and to solve complex problems (from 3.4 to 4.4). Students also became more likely to consider working for their partner businesses after the program.

The start of a new academic year always brings



Superintendent
Rhonda Schuhler

a renewed sense of energy and optimism, and we are eager to embark on this journey. Our schools are ready and have already hit the ground running, with Youngsville Elementary and our Early College High School in full swing. At our traditional schools, our staff has been actively preparing for the return of students.

Blueprint 2030: Our Strategic Plan

One area of critical focus as we begin the school year is implementation of our new strategic plan. This plan was developed over the course of last year with input from key stakeholders -- parents, staff, students, and community members -- and it represents a commitment to forward progress for our schools. An important component of implementation of this plan is two-way communication between our stakeholders and the district on our progress in these key areas. Here is a basic overview of each goal:

Goal 1: College, Career and Life Readiness

Our first goal is to ensure students graduate prepared for college, career, and life beyond the classroom. We are committed to exposing students in grades 5-12 to

a wide range of career opportunities through a comprehensive development continuum.

For our youngest learners, this means introducing various careers and building essential skills like communication, collaboration, and critical thinking.

In middle school, we increase exposure to career exploration through use of Xello, a platform that matches students to their interests. We also have a Paxton-Patterson lab that provides students with hands-on opportunities to learn more about a variety of potential careers.

In high school, we will place a stronger emphasis on connecting students to career pathways and increasing enrollment in programs like Career and Technical Education (CTE), Career and College Promise (CCP), and Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Each high school will also create and monitor individualized graduation plans to ensure every student is on a clear path to success.

Goal 2: Academic Proficiency and Growth

We are dedicated to helping every student demonstrate proficiency and growth across academic areas, including reading, math, and science. Our teachers will use research-based strategies and district resources to set and achieve ambitious goals.

You can expect to see daily learning objectives posted in student-friendly language in every classroom, ensuring bell-to-bell learning.

We are also strengthening our Professional Learning Communities/Teams (PLCs), where staff will regularly review assessment data and use research-based approaches to address student needs, providing both remediation and enrichment.

Our instructional coaches at the elementary and middle school levels will play a vital, non-evaluative role in elementary and middle schools, supporting teachers with modeling, co-teaching, and feedback.

Goal 3: A Safe and Caring Environment

Creating a safe, orderly, and caring environment is one of our top priorities. We will closely monitor student engagement, including attendance, behavior, and academic progress, and provide timely interventions and support when needed.

We will also be examining discipline data to ensure consistency with our behavior matrix. A safe learning environment is a top priority, supported by clear communication, timely responses to potential threats, and consistent safety drills.

We value strong family partnerships and recognize that we must work together collectively so that our students can achieve.

We will continue to engage parents through opportunities like our Parent Summits and encourage volunteerism in our schools. We are excited to offer learning-centered events and expand extracurricular options to bring our community together.

Goal 4: High-Quality Professionals

Our final goal is to actively recruit, support, and retain high-quality professionals. We believe in empowering our staff with regular opportunities for professional growth. We will be celebrating the hard

work and successes of our team throughout the year to foster a positive and supportive climate. When performance concerns arise, they will be addressed promptly and professionally with support plans to help staff improve. We're all in this together, and our dedicated educators are the heart of our schools.

In addition to implementation of Blueprint 2030, we have several specific areas of focus as we enter the new school year:

Cell Phone Policy

We are enacting a new cell phone policy that was developed locally and approved by our Board of Education.

This policy aligns with new state law on cell phone use in schools. Students are allowed to use phones before and after school, during lunch, and during class changes if the school permits it.

However, phone use is prohibited in classrooms unless there is a documented medical reason for its use. It can also be turned on briefly at our Early College for multifactor authentication, but once login is complete it must be put away.

Using a phone in a restroom is not allowed. During tests, smartwatches must be removed and phones must be stored away.

If a phone is misused, the first two offenses result in the student picking it up from the office at the end of the day, but a parent or guardian must retrieve the phone after the third offense.

The school is not responsible for any lost, stolen, or damaged devices.

Character Education

We will continue our district wide focus on character education. Each month, our schools will highlight and reinforce different character traits.

Last year's Board recognition of students demonstrating good character was a highlight for all involved and we look forward to continuing this tradition.

Free Meals

We are thrilled to continue offering free meals to all FCS students this year. We are encouraging our families to take advantage of this opportunity for our children to receive hot meals each day at no cost.

Infinite Campus

Franklin County has transitioned to a new Student Information System, Infinite Campus, replacing PowerSchool.

We aren't alone in this -- all North Carolina districts have either made this transition or are making it this year. To access the Parent Portal, parents will be asked to complete the Annual Student Update in early September. This not only provides portal access but also ensures we have accurate and up-to-date information on file.

As with any change, there will likely be growing pains as we adjust to this new system. We're excited about the improved experience Infinite Campus will ultimately offer our families.

As we begin this new year, on behalf of the Franklin County Board of Education, we are grateful for the opportunity to serve the families of our community.

We recognize the importance of our role in preparing our students for a future, and we are committed to their personal success and the long-term success of Franklin County.

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Review these safety tips with your kids

1. Opt for a backpack with wide, padded shoulder straps and keep it light. You may want to consider a rolling backpack for heavy books.
2. At the bus stop, wait for the bus to reach a complete stop before approaching it.
3. Stay seated on the school bus until it arrives at your stop, and remember to wear your seatbelt. Always keep your head and arms inside the bus.
4. Use the handrail when exiting the bus, and cross in front of the bus so the driver can see you. Remember to check both ways for traffic before crossing the street.
5. If you walk to school, go with a buddy, and avoid crossing through any empty lots or fields along the way.
6. If you ride a bike or scooter to school, remember to always wear your helmet.
7. Don't talk to strangers, and never accept gifts or rides from strangers.
8. Cross the street only at designated crosswalks, and obey school crossing guards.
9. If you're bullied or see somebody being bullied, tell a teacher or trusted adult.
10. Memorize your home address and phone number. In case of an emergency, call 911.

Your Safety is Our Business!

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Study smarter, not harder: Study tips any student can employ

It would be convenient if every student had a photographic memory, making it a snap to recall pages of text or concepts in great detail. Photographic memory is not real, but a very small portion of the population, around 2 to 10 percent of children, has something called an eidetic memory, which is a similar phenomenon and one that’s virtually nonexistent in adults, according to Psychology Today. That means that students will have to rely on other skills to get ahead in their coursework, perhaps none more important than effective study skills.

Some students recognize that their study habits simply are not cutting it and they’re just squeaking by in their courses. What might get a student by in high school may be ineffective for college classes. Learning effective study skills early on is a key to academic success.

Don’t cram

Many students procrastinate with their study sessions, leading to last-minute studying before a big test. According to the American Psychological Association, students may perform well on a test for which they have crammed, but that doesn’t mean they’ve actually learned the material. Studying with the goal of long-term retention is best for learning.

Engage in active studying

Reading and re-reading texts or notes is not engaging with the material. Therefore, it likely won’t help with information retention. The Learning Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill says a student will need to make connections with the material, which can include making a study guide, becoming the teacher and teaching the concepts to others, deriving examples



Learning effective study skills early on is a key to academic success

from one’s own experiences, or working problems out and explaining why they work.

Ask for help

Students do not have to struggle through difficult

material alone. In addition to studying with fellow students, who may have different ways of interpreting and sharing the information, individuals can seek assistance from a tutor or an academic resource center inside of the school. Working with someone else also helps students stay accountable and remain on track.

Determine a study style

Students may need to employ some trial and error to identify the study methods that work best for them. This can include a combination of note-taking, summarization, reviewing what already is known about the topic, and individual or group study sessions. Environment also is an important study variable. Some students thrive in a quiet environment, while others need ambient noise to sharpen their focus.

Work intensely

Studying in intensive, short sessions may enable students to get more done with less wasted effort. Taking breaks can boost attention, says the National Institutes of Health.

Eliminate distractions

The more research that is done on multitasking, the more data indicates it isn’t effective. Studying while browsing the web, texting or looking at social media will increase the amount of time needed to learn the material and decrease the quality of the study session, according to research published in Computers & Education in 2012.

Intelligent studying can help students make the most of their academic careers.

Nutritious school lunch ideas for children

No two children are the same, but many youngsters share a number of similarities. Few young children enjoy going to bed on time, and many can’t resist a good trampoline. Kids also have a reputation for being picky eaters, which can be challenging for parents tasked with picking and preparing school lunches.

When dining at home, parents know which foods their kids eat and which they push around their plates in the hopes they won’t have to consume them. School lunch is a different scenario altogether, as parents are not around to ensure their youngsters eat a full and nutritious meal. Kids who are picky eaters may not eat any lunch at all. Parents who want to ensure their children get the nutrition they

need to do well in school can consider the following school lunch ideas.

- **Make-your-own sandwich:** Kids may be more likely to eat a full lunch if they get to put it together themselves. Parents can put all the elements of a tasty sandwich into youngsters’ lunch boxes, but let kids assemble the meal themselves. Sandwiches are not necessarily the healthiest midday meal, but they are much more nutritious when parents pack whole grain bread, tomatoes, lettuce, and low-sodium deli meat in students’ lunch boxes. If a do-it-yourself sandwich is a nonstarter, consider a DIY taco lunch complete with whole grain tortillas.
- **Burrito bowl:** A burrito bowl with kid-friendly yet nutritious ingredients is another great school

lunch option. Red beans are a good source of fiber and the Harvard Medical School notes all beans are rich in potassium. Fiber is filling, so a burrito bowl that includes fiber-rich ingredients, including red beans but also quinoa or brown rice, can help students avoid late-day hunger pangs that can compromise how they feel and perform in the classroom. Burrito bowls are so tasty that kids may not even realize Mom and Dad have snuck some healthy foods like vegetables into their midday meal.

- **Parfait:** Parfait has all the looks of a tasty dessert without the pitfalls of ice cream and other treats. The nutritional value of parfait depends on the ingredients Mom and Dad choose to include. Protein-rich Greek yogurt paired

with some fruit and granola makes for a filling and tasty meal that’s also loaded with vitamins, minerals and fiber. An insulated and airtight lunch box packed with ice packs can ensure the parfait is still cool come lunchtime.

- **Pasta salad:** Kids tend to be especially fond of pasta, and parents can use that affinity to their advantage when planning school lunches. A whole-wheat pasta salad with some cherry tomatoes and diced broccoli makes for a nutrient-rich lunch that kids can enjoy. If broccoli figures to raise youngsters’ ire, consider a nutritious substitute, such as shaved cucumber or zucchini.

School lunches can be nutritious and still make kids excited to eat their midday meal away from home.



Send your child to school with a healthy lunch

KVA Early Learning Center earns Cognia full accreditation

HENDERSON, NC -- Kerr-Vance Academy in Henderson announces that its Early Learning Center (ELC), serving children ages 18 months through four years, has officially earned full accreditation through Cognia, an internationally recognized education accrediting body. This milestone marks a significant achievement for the school and the surround-

ing region.

While Kerr-Vance Academy’s K-12 program has maintained accreditation for over 50 years, this is a new distinction for the Early Learning Center.

“This accomplishment reflects our deep commitment to educational excellence and holistic growth from the very beginning of a child’s development,” said Matthew McLaughlin, Head of School at

Kerr-Vance Academy. “We’re proud to provide families with an exceptional foundation of learning that supports every stage of their journey.”

The Cognia accreditation underscores the quality

of KVA’s curriculum, staff expertise, and dedication to continuous improvement. It also solidifies the school’s reputation as a leader in early childhood education across the region.

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Play It **SAFE** this school year

by following these smart tips!

- Make sure you know your full name, street address and phone number including area code. If you can't remember all of these things, carry them on a piece of paper. In case of emergency, call 911.
 - Know how to use the telephone for help in case of an emergency.
 - Never get into anyone's car without your parents' permission.
 - Always tell your parents if you are going somewhere after school.
 - Cross streets only at corners or crosswalks, and always look both ways before crossing.
 - Observe and obey traffic signals as well as crossing guards.
 - Walk, don't run, across streets. If you are riding
- a bike, walk it across the street. Always wear a helmet when you ride your bike or scooter.
 - If you are walking where there are no sidewalks, walk on the shoulder of the left side of the road, so you are facing oncoming traffic.
 - When walking to school, stay away from parks, vacant lots, fields and other places where there aren't many people around. Always walk with a buddy. Follow a familiar route to school. Never talk to strangers along the way.
 - Exercise caution with unfamiliar animals you may see on your way to school. Remember, not every animal is friendly.
 - When waiting for the school bus, stay away from the bus until it comes to a complete stop



- and the driver signals you to enter. Use the handrail to enter and exit the bus.
- Seat belts should always be worn, even on the bus. Never get out of your seat while the bus is moving.
 - When leaving the bus, walk ten giant steps away from the bus before crossing in front of it. Never cross behind the bus.
 - Tell your parents, teacher or another trusted adult if somebody at
- school is making you feel uneasy or doing something you think is wrong.
- If you're bullied or see somebody being bullied, tell a teacher or trusted adult.
 - Don't talk to strangers, and never accept gifts or rides from strangers.
 - If you are home alone after school, be sure to lock the door and call a parent as soon as you arrive. Never open the door for anyone you don't



- know well and trust.
- Instructions during fire drills should be followed carefully. This way you'll know what to do in
- a real fire.
- Say NO to smoking, vaping, alcohol and drugs!

Adults can take action to prevent bullying

Millions of children wake up very day in fear of harassment. Bullying is an epidemic that can result in humiliation, poor grades, low spirits, and even suicide. In years past, bullying may have ended after kids left the classroom or school grounds, but technology has enabled bullying to follow children home through their devices.

Studies indicate bullying is getting worse. The National Center of Safe Supportive Learning Environments says that, despite a number of school programs designed to decrease bullying, one in five students between the ages of 12 and 18 are bullied every year in the United States. According to 3rd Millennium Classrooms, which offers schools courses on topics like bullying, the most common type of bullying is verbal harassment, followed by social harassment. Cyberbullying now accounts for 25 percent of all bullying.



Intervening in bullying can be a multifaceted process that requires adults know what to do as they seek to safeguard youngsters.

be vigilant in recognizing that bullying may be taking place. Warning signs of bullying include being afraid to go to school; using excuses to stay home or return home from school; having nightmares; becoming withdrawn; or a decline in academic performance.

- should be able to speak to someone confidentially, and bullies will be investigated and dealt with promptly and effectively.
- Encourage participation in activities. Children should be encouraged to do what they enjoy and try out various activities in and out of school. These activities give kids a chance to have fun, let off steam and meet others with similar interests. A strong circle of friends can boost kids' confidence and serve as another defense against bullying.
 - Keep lines of communication open. When children feel comfortable speaking with their parents, an older sibling or another trusted adult about their feelings, they can express their concerns and seek advice regarding how to address them. This can go a long way toward making children feel better.
 - Cultivate a strong parent-school relationship. Children benefit the most when there is a strong partnership between schools and families. Schools should foster strong pathways of communication with parents.

Adults can do their part to prevent bullying by embracing various strategies designed to keep youngsters safe and happy.

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