A Teacher of the Year (TOTY) has been selected by each CCSD school and center! School staff nominated, and then voted for, their 2022 school TOTY. These teachers will now compete to become CCSD TOTY finalists. The four finalists will be selected in February 2022 by a panel of retired educators and community partners. The District TOTY will be announced in March 2022.

Below is a list of each TOTY from each school. Congratulations on this prestigious honor!

ACTIVE Academies: Whitney Robinson; Arnold Mill Elementary School: Alisha Talley; Avery Elementary School: Heather Massey; Ball Ground ES STEM Academy: Julie Miles; Bascomb Elementary School: Rhonda Ryder; Boston Elementary School: Debbie Howell; Carmel Elementary School: Jessica Million; CCSD Preschool Centers: Catrina Wilson; Cherokee High School: Jonathan Gustin; Clark Creek ES STEM Academy: Kim Harrison; Clayton Elementary School: Jennifer O’Connell; Creekland Middle School: Jennifer Camp; Creekview High School: Janet Baggett; Dean Rusk Middle School: DeLaney Campbell; E.T. Booth Middle School: Lori Salvino; Etowah High School: Margo Kemmerer; Free Home Elementary School: Kristin Davis; Freedom Middle School: Kim Hester; Hasty ES Fine Arts Academy: Allison Hawkins; Hickory Flat Elementary School: Gina Haggerty; Holly Springs ES STEM Academy: Karen Schnell; Indian Knoll Elementary School: Tara Costello; Johnston Elementary School: Paige Chandler; Knox ES STEM Academy: Christina Parker; Liberty Elementary School: Heather Juras; Little River Elementary School: Emily Mickel; Macedonia Elementary School: Barbara Scharich; Mill Creek Middle School: Amanda Carter; Mountain Road Elementary School: Kristin Covington; Oak Grove ES STEAM Academy: Ally Potter; R.M. Moore ES STEM Academy: Lesley Carmichael; River Ridge High School: Tara Dugan; Sequoyah High School: Andrew Oberlies; Sixes Elementary School: Lauren Grimsley; Taseley Middle School: Kerry Voytek; Tippens Education Center: Margie Pullen; Woodstock Elementary School: Danielle Cosey; Woodstock High School: Henry Oglesby, Jr; and Woodstock Middle School: Justin Brown.
**Who’s Who and What Does He Do?**

Meet Dr. Ben Lester — Director, Student Services

“I am firm believer that the smartest person in the room is the room, so to speak -- CCSD is full of very talented personnel with a wealth of professional experiences.”

Ben is a proud graduate of Sequoyah HS, University of Georgia, Florida International University and the University of Miami. In his current role, he leads the districtwide social and emotional learning initiative, focused on five core areas: access, opportunity and cultural competence; positive behavioral framework; mental health and suicide prevention; trauma-informed practices; and staff well-being and self-care.

He supports counselors, social workers, student support specialists and nurses. Ben and his team in the Student Services department spend a great deal of time working on operational projects and providing consistent support for all schools across the district, including everything from Department of Family and Child Services (DFCS) situations to fire drills and discipline. On a regular basis, you will find him working with a Principal, social worker, counselor or coworker to collaborate and facilitate resolution to complex situations.

“I feel most satisfied when I am coaching others through a complex situation, and, through strategic dialogue, we think through and problem-solve together in a manner wherein it grows our collective capacity,” said Ben.

Ben also spends much of his day planning and monitoring the Title IV budget, serving as the homeless liaison and serving as the foster care point of contact for the district.

“Every day is an adventure in Student Services, and it is a privilege to serve our district,” Ben said.

Ben also has served CCSD as a Spanish, language arts, reading and ESOL teacher at all grade levels. His administrative career began with the opening of the new Teasley MS in 2014 where he later served as Principal.

**Hidden Talent:** I can juggle. It is a skill I developed as a member of my church youth group. **Most Memorable Moment:** The birth of my daughter … the world changes when you become a parent. **Most Influential Person(s):** Three women have influenced me the most: my wife of almost 20 years, my mother and my mother-in-law. Each are supportive, wise, and truth-speakers. Their bold and loving energy has helped me in my life’s journey. **Interesting Fact:** I lived in Cost Rica in the late 90s. **Motto:** Work hard. Be nice. Give thanks.

**Q & A with CCSD’s 2022 Middle/High/Centers Support Staff Employee of the Year**

ACTIVE Academies School Nutrition Worker Crystal Williams has nine years of service with CCSD, all in the same role.

**Q.** How did you feel the moment your name was called as CCSD’s 2022 overall winner for Middle/High/Centers Support Staff Employee of the Year?

**A.** Amazed, shocked — I couldn’t believe it! It was like a dream hearing my name called. I cried (happy tears). I’ve had a few rough years, and this was such a positive thing that was now happening.

**Q.** What is the most rewarding part of your job?

**A.** Seeing the smiles on the kids’ faces as they come through my line. It’s rewarding just to talk to them each day; some of our students have such hard lives, so if I can make their day a little better … that’s what it’s all about. I love my job, and I believe I make a difference in the students’ lives.

**Q.** What’s your “why”?

**A.** Honestly, at first, I wasn’t sure how I felt about working at ACE, but I quickly began to love it! I truly feel like I belong here. I wake up each day to come here and make the kids happy; that’s my goal.

**Q.** Outside of work, how do you enjoy spending your time?

**A.** I like to hike, spend time with my teenage girls and travel—not far, but just get out and see new places and do new things. I recently went ziplining for the first time in my life.
Q & A with CCSD’s 2022 Elementary School Support Staff Employee of the Year

Knox ES STEM Academy kindergarten paraprofessional Carol Dunn has 38 years of years of experience with CCSD, including 33 in her current role.

Q: How did you feel the moment your name was called as CCSD’s 2022 overall winner for Elementary School Support Staff Employee of the Year?
A: I was (am still am) so excited and honored! I would have never dream of being selected by my coworkers as the Knox ES Support Staff Employee of the year - I was so honored! Then, to be named CCSD’s Support Staff Employee of the Year for all the elementary schools, was the icing on the cake! As I prepare to retire at the end of this year, I am retiring with happiness and pride in my heart.

Q: What is the most rewarding part of your job?
A: When I see the progress students make and feeling the love they have for me. To watch struggling students see the light bulb moment when he/she understands what is being taught — there is truly no better feeling; they begin to love to learn!

Q: How do you feel your work makes a difference in the students’ lives?
A: Students work for me because they know that I care. I always push them to try their best and to always work hard. In their eyes, I am both their teacher and a nurturing grandmother.

Q: What’s your “why”?
A: I work for a very smart, supportive and hardworking team that makes every day a wonderful day at the office, because their heart is in the right place. We work seamlessly together, supporting each other to accomplish the same objective. I am here to help lighten the load of the leaders so that they can focus on the most important aspects of their jobs, which is what impacts our students.

Q: What is the most rewarding part of your job?
A: Every week I have rewarding experiences at work, whether finishing a project or completing tasks successfully. The Special Education world is fast moving, very challenging but very rewarding at the same time; because in the end, everything that we do, every decision that is made, is to the benefit of our kids. I love the team I get to work, and I know that together we really make a difference in the children’s and their families’ lives.

Q: Outside of work, how do you enjoy spending your time?
A: I love going to the beach and to the mountains with my two best friends, who are retired CCSD teachers. I also love to work in my yard!

Q & A with CCSD’s 2022 Central Office Support Staff Employee of the Year

CCSD’s Division of Curriculum & Instruction, Special Education Department Executive Director’s secretary Nilda Tippins has 15 years of service with CCSD, including eight in her current role.

Q: How did you feel the moment your name was called as CCSD’s 2022 overall winner for Central Office Support Staff Employee of the Year?
A: I was shocked and in disbelief, as I have never won anything like this before, and because there are so many other deserving people. I am humbled to be honored for the job that I love doing.

Q: What’s your “why”?
A: I work for a very smart, supportive and hardworking team that makes every day a wonderful day at the office, because their heart is in the right place. We work seamlessly together, supporting each other to accomplish the same objective. I am here to help lighten the load of the leaders so that they can focus on the most important aspects of their jobs, which is what impacts our students.

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Q: Outside of work, how do you enjoy spending your time?
A: I spend my time gardening and hiking. I also spend a lot of time traveling to visit my kids out west and to my home country of Argentina.
Swap and Share: Creative Instructional Strategies Submitted by Classroom Teachers

"STEM and SEL—Natural Fit for Physical Education"
By: Free Home Elementary School physical education teacher Keith Furstenberg

Physical Education, STEM and SEL are a natural fit for each other. Connecting all those ideas gives students an opportunity to be creative, move, think, collaborate and support one another. It is also an opportunity to integrate standards from other content areas. In these pictures, students are planning six complete ideas of what they want their group to perform. They also have collected materials that they will need to perform these tasks. They are encouraged to use the STEM process of planning and designing their work, as well as use the goals and objectives of the physical education standards. Those ideas are posted and shared on the oversized dry erase board in the front of the class.

As a physical education teacher, I am often presented with opportunities to bring games from all over the world to our students. Students in our gym are then encouraged to look at the games from different points of view. By using the STEM process, they seek out unique ways to modify almost every game that we play. One day each week, we will play the game as it is “normally” played, following all the guidelines. I then give the students the next day to think it over so that the next time they come that week, we can see if anyone wants to suggest a logical change or two. It is in those discussions that I can really see students trying to figure out if something is going to work. In some cases, it alters the game in new and exciting ways. There are also times when it does not work out, and so we take the time to discuss those results as well. It can really bolster a student’s confidence to have something work out for them in a positive way.

We also incorporate vocabulary that gets the students to a deeper understanding of those words by creating an evolving word wall each week. I write the words, “STEM, Physical Education and SEL/Other” on the board. As a class, we take some time to decide why some words would belong in a particular column or why it could be in multiple areas. Giving the students choice creates a special kind of bond between physical education, other content material and each student.

Over the past 22 years I have had a lot of time to contemplate my lessons. It has taken some time for me, as their teacher, to release some of that power. When I did, the engagement and excitement grew. The games and experiences have continued to evolve yearly out of intentional planning and guidance. I have honestly learned so much from my Free Home students.
#CCSDfam

**Newlyweds: Ben and Margaret Barger**

**Wedding Date:** October 30, 2021

**School:** Margaret teaches at Teasley MS.

**Name: Kennedy June Braswell**

**Birthdate:** August 16, 2021

**Parents:** Michael and Hannah Braswell

**School:** Hannah teaches at Sequoyah HS.

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**#CCSDfam—We want to see your baby and wedding photos!**

If you recently got married or had a baby, we'd love to share your pics and information in this section of the District Delegate.

Here's what we need from you:

- Submit photos to: penny.dempsey@cherokeek12.net by the 27th of each month. Photos should be recent.

- If you are sharing a baby photo, we need: your baby’s name and birthdate, your name and work location, and your spouse’s name (if he or she works for CCSD, indicate where). If you are sharing a wedding photo, we need: your name and where you work, the wedding date, and your spouse's name (if he or she works for CCSD, indicate where).

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**Employee Shoutouts**

*Please submit your shoutouts [here](#)*

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**1985-89**

**Penny Valle (BBA ’85)** of Holly Springs began her seventh year as principal of Oak Grove Elementary STEAM Academy in Acworth. The school was named a STEAM Academy in June for its consistent culture on problem-based learning through integration of science, technology, engineering arts and mathematics. Valle was honored to receive the Georgia School Bell Award in 2017. The award is given to school principals in recognition of outstanding curriculum and organizational leadership.
Creative Corner … a section dedicated to CCSD employees who express themselves artistically outside of work or the classroom. To be considered for this section, please submit information here.

Meet Duane Willoughby, Indian Knoll ES physical education teacher

Last year, Duane wrote, illustrated and published his first book, “Eddie Eats Everything.” He is currently writing and illustrating a picture book and the sequel to “Eddie Eats Everything.” He has also written two plays, “Stuck in Suburbia” and “MANopause,” which were performed at Canton Theatre.

“I wanted to be a cartoonist when I was a kid and now I have the opportunity to follow those dreams while teaching.”

Describe your art and how you discovered and developed it: I began creating comic books in fourth grade. Then, in high school, a couple of teachers encouraged me to create comic books instead of writing traditional papers. I wanted to be a political cartoonist, and I worked for my school’s newspaper. My senior year, I wrote to Don Addis, a nationally syndicated cartoonist, and he critiqued my work. It was years later before I truly appreciated what he taught me.

Several years ago, I wrote and illustrated a short story which led to paid writing work. I’ve written screenplays, stage plays, illustrated training material and published a children’s book. My focus is writing and illustrating more books.

Who inspires you: I’m inspired by people who tell stories — authors, playwrights, screenwriters, and especially kids … they create amazing stories.

How do you develop ideas for your creations: My work comes from everyday life and the people I meet. My friends and family know that anything they do or say will probably inspire something in a story or comic strip. People often share random events with me, hoping I can use it later.

What is your why: I enjoy entertaining people.

How did you end up in the education field: I never planned on going to college because I worked full time after high school. The bank I worked for encouraged volunteering, and I volunteered at an elementary school. I realized then how much I enjoyed teaching, so I went to college and majored in education.

What influenced you: As a kid, I watched Saturday morning cartoons and read comic books. Underdog was my favorite cartoon, and I’ve always liked Batman. As a teacher and a parent, I was curious to see what the kids liked. Wimpy Kid, Captain Underpants, Dog Man and Timmy Failure are some of my current favorites.

Share a memorable experience about writing/illustrating: I did a Q&A with students after reading “Eddie Eats Everything” on Teams. A second-grade girl asked me if I planned on writing a sequel to “Eddie Eats Everything” from the perspective of Bratty Patty, Eddie’s nemesis and older sister. I had not considered it until that moment! It will probably be the third or fourth book in the series.

What’s your favorite performing experience: I wrote “Stuck in Suburbia,” a play, that was performed at Canton Theatre. After the show, I talked to the audience about the show and how I came up with the characters. I loved hearing how similar my fictitious HOA was to their real HOA.

How does your writing/illustrating fit into your life now: Writing and illustrating used to be a hobby and something I did to relax. Working on projects for other people turned my hobby into a job, and I wasn’t having as much fun. Now I focus on my projects, and I can be flexible with deadlines, because they are my deadlines. I’m unlikely to fire myself!

How do you share your talent at school: I love talking about writing and illustrating. Students often think one draft is all that’s needed, but it takes several to make the book (almost) perfect! I bring my sketchbook and writing idea book so the students can see all the work that goes into a book. I also talk about books when possible. The best way to become a better writer or illustrator is to see what others are doing. I’ve learned a lot by watching videos from published illustrators.

How do you express yourself artistically in your personal life? I haven’t bought a greeting card in years!

How do you express yourself artistically in the classroom? A student at Bascomb ES described my teaching style as unconventional. I think that’s the nicest thing a student has ever said about me! When I have the chance to approach a lesson or activity from a different perspective, I take it. Students remember lessons from innovative and creative teachers.

What does your art mean to you? Art is an escape, but it also opened doors and led to new opportunities.

Why are the arts important in school? Art is more than something that hangs on the wall or collects dust on a shelf. It is also music, cooking, carpentry, engineering, medicine, music, and teaching. Art is creative problem solving and innovation begins with creativity.

Eddie’s book is available on Amazon, Instagram and Twitter: @duanewrites
Woodstock MS collected 794 toys for their Toy Drive for MUST Ministries.

Clark Creek ES STEM Academy Student Ambassadors collecting new toys for the Toys for Tots campaign.

Sixes ES donated collected nearly 1,500 food items, which were donated to Papa’s Pantry.

River Ridge HS National Art Honor Society students sponsored The Empty Bowl project—a charity event designed to raise money to combat childhood hunger. They raised $300 for the Anna Crawford Center.

Arnold Mill ES held its 25th annual Giving Tree celebration. The truckload of gifts were donated to MUST Ministries to benefit children in need.

Woodstock HS Elves’ Club shopping for families in need.

Knox families volunteered to purchase holiday gifts for 25 students within their community.

'Tis the Season for CCSD Holiday Service Projects
Clark Creek ES STEM Academy kindergartners learned about how the season of winter can be a challenging time for the homeless; they made cards and donated new socks for a local homeless.

Hickory Flat ES collected 656 toys for the Toys for Tots parade.

Boston ES Food Drive collected over 3,200 items and 1,230 pounds of food to restock the Etowah HS Food Pantry.

Dean Rusk MS Fish Club collected socks for MUST Ministries to distribute this winter.

Johnston ES fourth-graders brought in pajamas to donate, and for each pair of pajamas, Scholastic Book Clubs donated a brand new book to Pajama Program, which gives to children who are facing adversity.

Mill Creek MS Beta Club members collected gifts to support families in need for Christmas!

Tis the Season for CCSD Holiday Service Projects