New Board Prepares to Serve BCS

The 2021-2025 Birmingham Board of Education made it official Tuesday, Oct. 26 – taking the oath office at Parker High School before an audience of about 300 relatives, friends and community members.

Several city leaders also attended, including Mayor Randall Woodfin, City Council President Wardine Alexander and President Pro Tem Crystal Smitherman.

Judge Carole Smithadministered the Oath of Office, and Alabama State Board of Education Representative Dr. Yvette Richardson was on hand to discuss the role of the board. Several students also participated, including the Parker High JROTC, Nicholas Anderson of Huffman High, Ja‘Marria McGaha of Ramsay and Alexsandrax Cardoza Barragan of G.W. Carver. Mya Blue, the Parker High senior class president, was the Mistress of Ceremony for the event.

Alexsandrax Cardozo Barragan of Carver read the Charge to the Board, challenging the members to serve as community ambassadors for Birmingham City Schools, and to work to advance the district’s reputation as the best choice for education in our area.

District 8 Representative Sonja Q. Smith responded, saying the board wants students to grow and be successful in BCS.

“We want you to reach unimaginable heights,” Smith said. “Most of all, we want you to be proud to have matriculated through and graduated from Birmingham City Schools.”

The first board meeting for the 2021-2025 representatives will be Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021.

The 2021-2025 members of the Board are:

District 1: Sherman Collins, Jr
District 2: Neontae Williams
District 3: Mary Boehm
District 4: Derrick Billups
District 5: James Sullivan
District 6: Leticia Watkins
District 7: Walter Wilson
District 8: Sonja Q. Smith
District 9: Jason Meadows
THE SUPERINTENDENT SPEAKS

This is an exciting time for Birmingham City Schools. For the next four years, we will be governed by a nine-member board that brings to us a mix of experience, backgrounds and abilities. I look forward to working with this board as we continue to progress and move forward.

Our main business in Birmingham City Schools is teaching and learning. I’ve had an opportunity to speak with our returning board members and those who are newly elected. I am proud to say they are all passionate about teaching and learning. Most of all – they want the best for our students and their families, as well as our employees.

I firmly believe that Birmingham City Schools is the best choice for education in our area. As superintendent, I am excited about the opportunity to partner with this board as we strengthen, support and grow our school district.

In Birmingham City Schools, learning happens in amazing ways every day. Our teachers, principals, and support staff are all committed to doing what’s best for our students. District 8 Board Representative Sonja Smith reiterated that point when she delivered the response to Charge from students, read by Alexandra Cardozo Barragan of Carver High School.

Over the past 18 months, Birmingham City Schools and school districts throughout the country have faced unimaginable challenges, brought on by the global pandemic. We have responded by focusing on health and safety while also developing strategic initiatives to enhance learning.

Becky Pringle, president of the National Education was in Birmingham Oct. 28-29. She encouraged students at Minor Elementary School to resist bullying. She also talked to the media about response to the pandemic and urban education. Pringle said it’s imperative that every child in America receive a quality education as we emerge from the pandemic and beyond.

This recovery will be an ongoing process. I am confident that our 2021-2025 Board of Education members will work to ensure BCS students, teachers and staff have the resources needed to excel.

We are BCS Strong.

- Dr. Mark Sullivan

District Dates

- BBOE Meeting – Nov. 9
- Veteran’s Day – Nov. 11
- BBOE Work Session – Nov. 23
- Thanksgiving Break – Nov. 22-26
Hemphill Elementary School kicked off its positive behavior program on Thursday, Oct. 21 in a major way with a little help from “Mario” and his friends.

The school selected Mario Bros. from the popular video game as their reward theme to “level up” positive behavior for its scholars.

“We are promoting positive behavior throughout the school year,” second-grade teacher Alganese Gatson said. “We will let students earn behavior points and redeem those points biweekly, or they can save up their points to get to the super, awesome level 5 which is worth 350 points.”

Scholars will have their own personal “debit cards” to cash out on “Redemption Day” to buy prizes from the reward room. Those prices include an array of goodies from Rubik’s Cubes to candy. The reward room is decorated in the Mario Bros. theme, complete with mushroom lamps.

Thanks to a grant, Hemphill is one of four schools piloting different approaches for promoting positive behavior in students.

Principal Kristin Booker and her team transformed into Mario Bros. characters for the day as classes took turns coming into the reward room for the kickoff. Newly elected District 6 School Board Member Leticia Watkins also was on hand for the fun event.

“We are excited for our students. It’s not just a single effort, it’s a team effort,” Booker said.
Breast Cancer Survivor: Katherine Lyons Bester

Martha Gaskins Elementary Counselor Katherine Lyons Bester is a Birmingham native and a dedicated professional. She’s a Jackson Olin High alum who brings breast cancer awareness to the classroom and gives back to her community at every opportunity.

As a woman who has always taken her health “a bit too serious,” a strange itch sent her to the doctor’s office. “This itch never ceased. The doctor said it was eczema and prescribed a topical cream,” she said. However, it was in May of 2016 that her life shifted completely.

“I got call from my doctor, telling me my tests results were in, and it was cancerous, while I was with my mom. We were on our way to visit a dying family member,” she said. However, it was in May of 2016 that her life shifted completely.

Bester says her doctor and the radiologist disagreed in the diagnosis at first. The radiologist did not think it was cancer. It took three tests, including two biopsies, for the medical team to give confirmation. “Me and the family, we wanted to take the version of the radiologist. We wanted to believe that it wasn’t cancer.”

When presented with treatment options, Bester opted for a double mastectomy and 30 rounds of radiation. Her oncologist, also a cancer survivor, asked that she take a year and half for her treatment, which included six months of chemo. “It’s a daily fight, chemo brain, chemo fog, the chemo pill . . . but I’m fortunate to have these daily fights,” she said.

Bester realized she needed all the support she could muster for this battle, so along with her husband and two daughters, she moved in with her mother, who is a nurse. She surrounded herself with a robust support system that included family, friends, church, and co-workers.

Bester said the Employee Sick Bank and staff support, not only from BCS, but also from the state helped too. “As I was running out of (sick) days, I wrote to the AEA Journal, and I was donated enough days to cover my salary for the next year and a half.” Speaking of faith and support, “when I had to shave my head, it became really real for me,” she said. “I was terrified so much so that there was a point where I decided that if I am going to make it through this is, that I have to give this completely to God. I relinquished it.”

Bester’s face lit up when speaking of her children. “My biggest gift and support during this time were my children, my daughters gave me a box filled with letters of encouragement for different moments, and there are letters that I have not opened.”

Nov. 30, 2018 is Bester’s new “birthdate.” She’s been cancer free for three years. She said every day is a difficult day for cancer survivors, but October is very difficult. “Let’s have grace with cancer patients, with cancer survivors, and the angels that have taken their battle to another place.”

Estela Tirado, BCS Media
Breast Cancer Survivor: Willie Lynette Giles

West End Academy Special Education Teacher Ms. Willie Lynette Giles is a Birmingham native and a dedicated teacher. Giles attended Finley Elementary and Phillips High School, which is her motivation to give back to younger generations.

In December of 2014, Giles’ life and purpose shifted. “I woke up with soreness around my left breast, tender to touch and laid down and felt a lump. I called my doctor.” Mrs. Giles went in for a check-up and the diagnosis was that the lump she felt was related to her menstrual cycle. “One year later, I had the same problem, but the soreness and tenderness was more intense.”

After a biopsy, Mrs. Giles was diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer. Two days after her diagnosis, she opted out of a mastectomy, had emergency surgery to remove the cancerous tissue from her breast, and had six rounds of chemotherapy and radiation.

“I was fortunate that my husband worked at the hospital, so he was able to pick who would be in the operating and recovery rooms with me”, she said. Giles says she opted to keep her journey private, since she believes that the less she spoke about it, the less she gave it power.

After being in remission for a year, Giles’ symptoms returned, but now in her right breast. This time it was stage 4 cancer that had spread to her ovaries. Treatment and recovery would now be more intense. She had five major surgeries in August and each time she went into the operating room she was reminded of her risk of facing death. “After the end of my invasive treatment and those five surgeries, I lost a whole person; I went from 389 pounds to 190 pounds.”

During her second diagnosis, she was more open about her journey, and making public appearances to motivate others to get examined. “During this time, I was learning on how I was going to share my story, how I was going to help the other person, because if I had not pushed, had I given up, I failed somebody because my story touched so many people,” she said.

Giles found motivation and inspiration in her students and her career. “During this second round, I was studying for my masters in health education . . . learning to help others.” Giles was declared cancer free in July 2020. “God left me here for a reason and that is to be there for my babies, to teach them, but also learn from them.”

Because of COVID-19, her doctor recommended she attend monthly check-ups and go back on her chemo pill. She keeps up with CDC advisories and recently got her booster shot.

For those who are hesitant of getting tested, Giles has a message: “Please, please start taking your annual mammograms, sometimes we are afraid of storms, but not all storms come to disrupt our life, some come to clear our path so we can continue to live life.”

Estela Tirado, BCS Media

Words you live by: Life is possible even in the impossible of winning.
CARVER STUDENT HONORED AS LLS’s ALABAMA STUDENT OF THE YEAR

The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society honored Carver student Gustavo Garcia Perez for raising $64,000. He was named Alabama Student of the Year on Sept. 30 for his outstanding efforts.

The LLS’s Student of the Year program is a 7-week competition to raise funds for LLS that helps highly motivated high school students advance their skills in entrepreneurship, marketing, and program management.

After being asked, why he decided to participate in this challenge, Gustavo said “Children are those that are most affected by blood cancer, and if I can help a child continue to live, I would do anything that I can.”

“I know he would pour his heart and energy into it, but did not even dream he would raise so much,” said Rebecca Blumenfeld, Gustavo’s teacher and one of his top supporters.

LLS’s mission is to cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin’s disease and myeloma, and improve the quality of life of patients and their families. Gustavo’s participation in this challenge is an example of community service and leadership that is developed and nurtured at Birmingham City Schools.

International Expo Fair at W.J. Christian K-8

On Sept. 30, during Hispanic Heritage Month, W.J. Christian K-8 hosted its first International Expo Fair. Close to 180 students from grades 5-8 researched, learned, and shared their knowledge of 21 countries from Latin America and the Caribbean. During the expo fair, judges scored participants according to presentation, facts, and knowledge of the country they presented. The morning was filled with cultural richness and learning.
Woodlawn, Wenonah Celebrate Senior Installations

Woodlawn 2021-22 class officers: Nicholas Boler- President, Jakyra Thomas- Vice President, Keyona Johnson- Secretary. Pastor Jamil Gilleylen, Church Of The Highlands was guest speaker.

Wenonah High School’s Senior Installation was held Wednesday, Sept. 8, 2021 in the school’s auditorium. Dr. Willie Goldsmith spoke to students about the three P’s: Have Purpose, Have a Plan, and Have Passion! He urged the senior students to make good decisions, always be mindful of the company you keep, and surround yourself with people going somewhere in life. Several senior students were also inducted into the National Honor Society. Lefarich Foy, an exceptionally talented musician, was on showcase with two selections on the saxophone.
BCS Sports Teams Shining This Fall

- Congratulations to our Birmingham City Middle School Volleyball Champions, the W. J. Christian Lady Chargers who completed an undefeated season by defeating Jackson-Olin Middle School Feeder in the title game.
- Ramsay Girls Volleyball made it to state, but fell in straight sets yesterday to Bayside.
- Woodlawn High School Cheer Squad won the Cheer and Dance for the Cure at Center Point High School. They finished first place overall.
- Three BCS schools, Parker, Ramsay, and Woodlawn, qualified for the AHSAA Volleyball Northern Super Regionals this year.
- Jackson-Olin Feeder Middle School won the Birmingham City Middle School Football Championship.

- Five BCS schools, Carver, Huffman, Jackson-Olin, Ramsay, and Wenonah, participated in the newest AHSAA sanctioned sport, Girls Flag Football. The Lady Rams of Carver High School won the Inaugural BCS High School Lady Flag Football Championship last week, defeating Wenonah. All five teams will compete in regional tournaments in hopes of qualifying for the state championship tournament.
- Jackson-Olin, Parker, and Ramsay varsity football teams have qualified for the AHSAA State Playoffs. Parker will host Boaz High School, Ramsay will travel to Guntersville, and Jackson-Olin is currently in a three-way tie to determine if they host or travel. All three teams will play on Friday, Nov. 5 at 7 p.m.

Ramsay Girls Win City Volleyball Championship

Congrats to Ramsay Girls and Head Coach Shauntae Lockett Lewis and Assistant Coaches LaToya Mims and Valynica Johnson on winning the city volleyball championship and making it to the state tournament. The team fell to Bayside in straight sets on Oct. 20. Players from right to left are: Amaria Woods, Asya Martin, Jakaila Bianco, Tatyonna Cohill, Lauren Canady, BeNaye Kyle. Right Photo: Julia Lewis, Kelsey Liptrot, Ayana Silmon, Laila Bell (holding trophy), Deja Sparks, Antonia Henderson. Head Coach Shauntae Lockett Lewis, Assistant Coaches LaToya Mims and Valynica Johnson.
Hundreds of Birmingham City Schools musicians, dance team and color guard members put on their best performance Sunday, Oct. 24, with great sounds, shiny horns and dazzling costumes at the Annual All-City Marching Band Festival at Carver High School. As an added treat, Tennessee State University’s Aristocrat of Bands was in town and showed why they are one of the best bands in the land. The current AOB includes more than 25 BCS graduates. At the conclusion of the TSU performance, all BCS band members and auxiliary units joined on the field to perform some of the music learned during this summer’s band camp.
Princeton Teacher Selected for the National STEM Certification Program

Congratulations to Ebony Porter, 3rd Grade Math/Science Teacher at Princeton Alternative Elementary School on her selection to participate in the National STEM Certification program sponsored by BCS. The National Certificate for STEM Teaching will allow teachers to engage in professional development that supports their attainment of teacher actions and skills essential to increasing student achievement in STEM education.

Employee Recognition Award Winners

ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

Stephen Wolfe

Shelia Williams

ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

Claudia Tucker

Tracey Goreed

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

To nominate a BCS employee, email communications@bhm.k12.al.us

The BCS Report will be distributed monthly. Submit story ideas to Nikki Seaborn (cseaborn@bhm.k12.al.us) by the 10th day of each month.

Scholarship details:

- Helps graduates of Birmingham City Schools pay for college.
- Covers tuition and mandatory fees that aren’t covered by other financial aid.
- Can be used at any of Alabama’s public two- and four-year colleges and universities.
- Available regardless of a student’s grades.*

* Grades may affect the colleges students are able to attend. Alabama’s two-year colleges have policies that allow student admission regardless of GPA.

Things you’ll need to get moving ahead:

- Completed Birmingham Promise application (Applications open January 1, 2022 and close June 1, 2022)
- Unofficial High school transcript (Must be a 2022 graduating senior of a Birmingham City High School)
- Complete 2022–2023 FAFSA (must submit Student Aid Report)
- Fall 2022 college acceptance letter

For more information scan the QR code: