Several Birmingham City Schools will receive much needed upgrades and additions in a five-year road map for capital improvements approved by the Board of Education on Dec. 8. School districts are required to submit their plans to address current and future needs in their districts. Changes can be made to the plans as the years progress, depending on school system needs, said Dr. Matthew Alexander, Operations Officer for BCS.

“These plans are in keeping with the needs in the district and the wishes of the communities we serve,” Alexander said. “Although this is a five-year plan, we are looking to begin preliminary work on some of these projects right away.”

Major projects in the plan include a new football stadium and field house at Woodlawn High School. The historic school has produced many outstanding student-athletes over the years, but they have had to play home games at other locations, because the facilities are not designed to accommodate competitive athletics.

In addition, Huffman Middle School will receive some major renovations – including a new gymnasium and an expanded cafeteria.

Other schools on the list for a variety upgrades and improvements include Barrett Elementary, Smith Middle School, Minor Elementary, Ramsay High School, Phillips Academy, Wenonah High School, Carver High School, South Hampton Elementary, Avondale Elementary, West End Academy, Glen Iris Elementary, Central Park Elementary, Princeton Elementary, Norwood Elementary, Bush Hills STEAM Academy, W.J. Christian and Ossie Ware Mitchell Middle School.
In just a couple of weeks, we’ll ring in a new year and leave 2020 behind.

This year truly has been one with lots of lessons and learning – and not just for our scholars.

We’ve all learned to adjust and adapt because of this global pandemic. Although none of us wished for the challenges we have faced, they have made us stronger.

They have shown us different approaches for reaching our goals.

At the end of the day, we want our scholars to learn and grow to their full academic potential. We want all of our faculty and staff to be safe and healthy as they propel the school system with their energy and creativity.

Most of all, we want every student and every employee to experience a sense of accomplishment every day.

Our scholars, parents, faculty and staff have risen to the occasion. They have embraced technology. They have made sacrifices, AND they have certainly been flexible.

As Birmingham City Schools superintendent, I am thankful to all of you. I find great joy in reflecting on the hard work we’ve seen this school year on every front.

In just a matter of months, we were able to get thousands of electronic devices in the hands of all our scholars.

When we began offering blended learning, an abundance of personal protective equipment was available and distributed to students, teachers and support staff.

Our transportation department and our child nutrition staff worked together to ensure our scholars had access to hot meals and a continental breakfast every school day.

That’s teamwork in action! It’s just another example of how we collaborate for our scholars in Birmingham City Schools.

As you reflect on this holiday season, I hope you share a sense pride in the accomplishments we have made together, as well as the ingenuity and strength we have employed personally and collectively in 2020. Let us join together in hope that the pandemic’s end is near. Meanwhile, stay safe, wear your masks and wash your hands frequently.

I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! Together, we are BCS STRONG!

Dr. Mark Sullivan
Barrett Elementary Receives Web Cams

Christmas came early for Barrett Elementary School. On Dec. 2, Truist Financial Corporation member Jared Henderson and his team donated web cams for each classroom teacher’s desktop computer and extra adapters, along with voice amplifiers.

The much-needed gifts are part of the company’s Lighthouse Project program. The Lighthouse Project is a long-standing BB&T now Truist tradition that allows teammates to support local nonprofit organizations on projects to address critical community needs.

Birmingham Fire and Rescue members delivered the items, and they were received by Principal Tikki Hines and Media Specialist Lavinia Starks-Smith. “We are very grateful to Mr. Henderson and Truist for all the donations,” Hines said.

“My team works for Truist across the Alabama-Florida market,” Henderson said. “We have 19 members on our team and we each had $75 and 8 hours of volunteer time to give in November for the Lighthouse Project and we selected Barrett,” he said. “And a special thank you for the amazing support from the fire department that delivered the wish list items.”

Since 2009, BB&T (now Truist) teammates have completed more than 12,000 community service projects, serving more than 700,000 volunteer hours and impacting the lives of more than 18 million people.

Other items Barrett received included: rolling carts for the library and technology department, candy, fidget toys, and LED bracelets. “These will be used for the PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) Store,” Smith said. The PBIS Store is used to improve our school safety and promote positive behavior.
HELP FOR ETHAN'S HEART

Ethan Hill, a fifth-grade honor student at Phillips Academy, continues to think of others, especially during this holiday season. He is the founder of “Ethan’s Heart,” a mission to help support the homeless population in Birmingham.

“It’s just hard for everyone this year and we are just doing the best we can,” Ethan said in an interview this week.

For four years, Ethan, 10, has collected items and donations to provide care packages, sleeping bags, snacks and hygiene items to the homeless during winter months. “Ethan started his mission after seeing so many homeless on his way to school. It really bothered him,” his gifted teacher, Tamara King-Sharpe said.

This week, Academy Sports in Trussville presented Ethan with a $5,000 check to assist him in obtaining more essential items.

“Ethan Hill receives $5,000 from Trussville Academy Sports store for essential items for homeless.

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“Ethan’s Heart” is a mission to help support the homeless population in Birmingham.

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BCS ATHLETES SIGN NATIONAL INTENT LETTERS

Ramsay High School
Tim Keenan III
University of Alabama

Ramsay High School
Jeremiah Williams
University of Florida

Ramsay High School
Kam Thomas
Austin Peay State University

Parker High School
Jekovan Rhetta
University of Alabama

Parker High School
Demarcus Smith
Ole Miss
WOODLAWN SENIOR FIRST IN CLASS AND JUNIOR AT UAB

Destiny Nelson-Miles has not allowed challenges to stop her from reaching her goals. The Woodlawn senior is graduating as class valedictorian with a 4.3 GPA and she’s well on her way to completing college at The University of Alabama at Birmingham.

As a member of the Woodlawn High School Early College Program Destiny, 17, has earned 49 hours of college credit from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and has a 3.81 grade point average at the university. An accomplishment like this take dedications even when challenges arise and Destiny, the youngest of five siblings, know this first-hand.

“Hardships have taught me to value every opportunity that I encounter because I may not be presented with that chance again,” she said. “For instance, I started by obtaining my driver’s license to ensure I have transportation and ranked number one in my class every year so that I qualify for scholarships. I complete minor steps to achieve major milestones.”

Destiny plans to major in Business Finance with hopes to become a financial adviser. “I would like to open a business that specializes in helping people overcome poverty. I strive to do this because if others around me are not succeeding, then I have also failed.

People can learn to escape hardship by being motivated, encouraged, and willing to be pushed towards greatness, Destiny said.

Mrs. Dana Wright-Marshall, Woodlawn’s Early College Program Coordinator, said Destiny is hardworking and studious. “She is mature and dedicated to the pursuit of excellence. The greatest challenge in describing Destiny is the feeling that I am under describing her character, ambition, and academic prowess. She is kind, compassionate, and enthusiastic. She has a clear sense of purpose and direction.”

Destiny began the Early College program as a 9th-grader. She will enter UAB classified as a junior. Additionally, Destiny represents Woodlawn as a member of the cheer squad, Youth Leadership Forum and National Honor Society. She was recently recognized as a Rising Star on WBRC Fox 6 and will compete for the related scholarship.

Other accolades include serving as a senior farmer and intern at Jones Valley Teaching Farm and winning first-place in the Birmingham City Schools’ District STEM Fair.

In addition to the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and with a 27 ACT score, Destiny has been accepted to: the University of Alabama in Huntsville, University of South Alabama, University of Dayton and the University of Alabama.
COVID-19 has challenged educators across the county and forced most to move beyond traditional classrooms to virtual spaces. Mellina Singleton, a first-grade teacher at West End Academy, found just the right space – at home.

Singleton, in her 33rd year of teaching, has converted her home’s two-car garage into her virtual classroom. Her teaching space is outfitted with all the makings of an in-person classroom. It’s creative, colorful and engaging. There’s even an old-school student desk and a lime green sofa.

Singleton has earned high marks from colleagues, friends and even her neighbors. She’s tapped into her creative juices and letting them flow.

“I want my babies to feel like it is ‘school at home’ because our classroom is their home away from home,” she said. “I don’t need all the technology, but I use it. I can teach anywhere, -- all I need is a blackboard and some chalk. I would rather be in the classroom, but we can’t, so this is the best I can do.”

Singleton said she always wants her classroom to be fun and energetic and the pandemic won’t stop that.

“I’m just old-school and I love to write,” she said as a display of colorful charts and oversized post-it notes dangle on her garage walls. As she covers the day’s lesson on wild and tamed animals, she turns to her screen, and calls on students one-by-one. As they give answers, she turns and writes them down on her makeshift board.

“We have a lot of grandparents who are helping daily with my students because parents are working. I just try to make it enjoyable. We are in class and we are making the best of it,” she said.

Singleton got her start in Vestavia after earning her second bachelor’s degree at Miles College. She earned a business administration degree from Alabama A&M and her master’s from Alabama State. “I love our HBCUs and I am a proud product of three of them,” she said.
Students from all seven Birmingham City high schools make up the first Birmingham Promise class of freshmen at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The scholarship program provided 68 students with the opportunity to pursue their bachelor’s degree with a full-tuition scholarship through a partnership with Birmingham Promise, Inc., at UAB.

More than 50 percent of the Birmingham Promise scholars self-identify as first-generation college students and receive supportive services through the program to help them achieve a four-year degree.

“Education is the path to prosperity,” said UAB President Ray L. Watts. “So we are working alongside Birmingham Promise scholars every day to help them navigate obstacles and provide the tools they need to accomplish their goals. I have been touched to see the state to become partners of Birmingham Promise, which is now a standalone nonprofit.”

Morgan Rankin-Taylor, a Ramsay High School graduate, began her freshman year at UAB as an engineering major with hopes to be a materials engineer. The full-tuition Birmingham Promise scholarship allows Rankin-Taylor to focus on her studies.

“When Mayor Woodfin announced the scholarship program, my mother and I saw opportunities and doors open that we never imagined,” Rankin-Taylor said. “Receiving this scholarship shows the commitment the city has to our generation’s future. It is an opportunity for my dreams to come true. With the help of the scholarship, I can stress less about money and focus on the schoolwork.”

Read the full article here.
Christmas Comes to Hemphill Elementary

The gym at R.C. Hemphill Elementary School looked more like Santa’s workshop earlier this month. Bicycles and bags filled with toys were spread about the floor, and the faculty and staff carried arm loads of goods to awaiting parents.

Several community partners fulfilled the Christmas wishes of more than 300 scholars at Hemphill, said Principal Kristin Booker. The partners providing toys this year included Urban Ministries, Temple Emanu-El, and Trinity United Methodist Church.

The Pi Upsilon Sigma Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity also donated more than 100 coats.

Classroom teachers, parents and guardians worked together to develop lists of needs and wants for the scholars. On Dec. 9, parents pulled up to the gym during the Christmas Drive-thru.

“It was heart-warming to see the response from the families,” Booker said. “They all were very appreciative of our partners. We are blessed to have great support for our Hemphill scholars.”

Huffman Vikings Apparel at Publix Clay-Chalkville

Shoppers at the Publix supermarket in Clay-Chalkville who follow the Huffman High School Vikings can now support their school while shopping.

Publix recently began carrying the orange and green paraphernalia of Huffman High, thanks to an arrangement negotiated by Dr. Douglas Ragland, the District 1 representative on the Birmingham Board of Education. Ragland discussed a relationship between the supermarket and Huffman during a recent Echo Highlands Neighborhood Association meeting.

“We are proud of Huffman High School,” Ragland said. “The store carries merchandise promoting other schools in the area, and we thought it would be good to also include Huffman.” Ragland spoke with the store’s leadership and a supplier and they moved forward with stocking the store with Huffman items, he said.

A portion of the proceeds from sales of merchandise will go to Huffman, and Ragland also was able to negotiate a higher percentage for the school. The sales are reviewed quarterly, and the school will receive 17 percent of the proceeds, based on orders for gear such as hooded sweatshirts, caps, socks and sweatpants, Ragland said.

“So far, the merchandise is selling well,” Ragland said. “We want our community to continue supporting Huffman.”
Phillips Assistant Principal Gets Board Certification

Congratulations to John Herbert Phillips Academy Assistant Principal Raynetta Wiggins on attaining her National Board Certified status. “National Board Certification is a voluntary, advanced teaching credential that goes beyond state licensure. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certifies teachers who successfully complete its rigorous certification process.” Wiggins also has served as a math teacher, math instructional coach and curriculum coach at JHPA. She holds a degree in middle grades mathematics and graduate degrees in secondary mathematics education and instructional leadership.

Barrett Names Teacher of the Year

Mrs. Della Sheehan is the collaborative special education teacher for 4th- and 5th-grades and the technology teacher at Barrett Elementary. She is in her eighth year at Barrett. She graduated from Jacksonville State University in May 2014 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Collaborative Education. She also has an associate degree in Computer Programming from Jefferson State Community College and is currently working on her National Board Certification in Literacy.

Submit your good news to cseaborn@bhm.k12.al.us.

Huffman Robotics Program Wins AMSTI Grant

Congratulations to Huffman High School’s Terence L. Marzette, department chair of the Academy of Architecture & Construction.

Marzette recently was awarded a $1,500 AMSTI Robotics grant to benefit his school’s program. Huffman was the only BCS school selected. The funds will be used to help the program host a Robotics Tournament/Competition in order to expand its program. The competition will be designed to challenge the cognitive and analytical skills for students to complete tasks and challenges. The participating grades will be 10th - 12th. The subject areas will be architecture, drafting, engineering and robotics. There will be a total of 7 teachers participating and 50 students will be directly impacted.