

cms foundation

partnership impact report | 2024–25

Charlotte Executive Leadership Council &
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

CELC
Charlotte Executive Leadership Council

cms
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools



executive messages

CELC Chair 2024-2025

I'm honored to serve on CELC and work alongside Charlotte's business leaders to build a true partnership with CMS — one that delivers real results for our children and our community. From Executives in Residence sharing expertise, to teacher housing initiatives, to Atrium Health bringing medical care directly into schools so students can stay healthy and learning, CELC has stood shoulder to shoulder with educators to help students thrive. This collaboration empowers us to create measurable outcomes for every child in Mecklenburg County who dreams of a brighter future. And the 2024-25 school year results speak volumes: 156 schools—nearly 90%—met or exceeded growth expectations, and 123 schools achieved the largest single-year improvement in grades in CMS history. Simply put, when our kids succeed, Charlotte succeeds.



Gene Woods
CEO, Advocate Health

As CELC celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2025, its impact reflects a decade of sustained commitment to Charlotte-Mecklenburg. In addition to its partnership with CMS, CELC has helped lead other transformational community efforts, including passage of the landmark transportation bill, major investments in affordable housing, workforce pathways, racial equity, and digital access, and the mobilization of more than $400 million in private capital across critical priorities such as Universal Pre-K, CMS bonds, workforce pathways, and COVID response. Through these efforts—and ongoing convening of public, private, and nonprofit leaders—CELC has played a central role in strengthening systems that support students, families, and the long-term vitality of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community.

CMS Foundation Executive Director

The CMS Foundation invests in innovation to address big challenges and create opportunities within Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. The partnership between CMS and the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council is an example of the innovation we seek to create and support.

Many corporate partners have relationships with individual schools and support them by volunteering, collecting school supplies and celebrating students and teachers. But this collaboration is different.

This partnership focuses on strategic district-wide initiatives that impact essential systems and processes. CMS leaders review their annual plans and identify where support would be beneficial. The CMS Foundation then works with the CELC to identify resources to help meet the needs. Their businesses are very different than CMS, but this engagement highlights opportunities to share in areas that are similar (finance, process improvement, technology) in any large organization.

This model is a new way for corporate and higher education partners to support Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. I feel fortunate to live in a community where business leaders are willing to share their talent, assets and resources. It is a recognition of CMS as an institution worthy of investment and an acknowledgement of the connection between a strong public school district and a great community. The CMS Foundation is proud to have led the development of this model and to continue facilitating this unique partnership.



Sonja Gantt
Executive Director

CMS Superintendent

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is deeply grateful for the partnership we have built with the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (CELC). The talent, assets and resources shared through this engagement are valued and appreciated. I have been especially grateful for the extraordinary leaders who have served as Executives-in-Residence within our school district through this partnership. Their engagement has been nothing short of transformative.

By embedding CELC leaders into our organization, we have gained access to a wealth of business expertise and strategic thinking that has elevated how we approach our work. These executives have introduced innovative practices, sharpened our focus on operational excellence, and helped us think differently about how to deliver on our mission to students and families. Their unique perspectives have challenged us to reimagine processes, strengthen collaboration and embrace solutions that drive measurable impact.

During the 2024-25 school year, CELC members also shared resources that enhanced the leadership journey of our assistant principals, the recognition of our teachers-of-the-year and the celebration of our students who will be enrolled, enlisted or employed after graduation. This partnership has not only enhanced our internal capacity but also underscores the vital connection between education and the broader community. The investment of time and and resources from the CELC reflects a commitment to ensuring that every child in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools receives a world-class education.

On behalf of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, I offer my sincere appreciation to the CELC for the partnership.



Dr. Crystal Hill
CMS Superintendent

about this partnership

In 2022, the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (CELC), CMS Foundation, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) formed an innovative public-private partnership to harness the talent, resources, and commitment of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's corporate and higher education communities in support of our public schools.

Initially launched to address challenges following pandemic-related disruptions, the partnership quickly resulted in significant impacts. Building on this success, the three organizations collaborated to develop a model to sustain and expand engagement.

The CMS Foundation manages this partnership, which includes immersive residency experiences, project consulting, leadership advisories, resource sharing, and financial contributions.

CELC Member Reflections



"I can't imagine anything more important to the future of our workforce than a strong public education system. It's been an honor to partner with Dr. Hill and her team, and we are gratified to continue to support such incredible progress."

Mary Mack, Executive Champion, CELC-CMS Partnership
Retired CEO of Consumer & Small Business Banking, Wells Fargo



"I've been part of the CELC since its inception in 2015. I chose to partner with CMS because strong public schools are essential to a strong economy.

Partnering with dedicated leadership at the CMS Foundation and CMS allows us to contribute in a meaningful, sustained way with trusted stewards who can align investments, innovation, and community partnerships to make a real difference.

By leaning in to support Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools with business expertise, we help accelerate solutions, bring additional capacity to the district, and support efforts that improve academic outcomes—especially for students who need it most."

Mike Lamach, Retired Executive Chair & CEO, Trane Technologies

About The Organizations

Charlotte Executive Leadership Council

The Charlotte Executive Leadership Council unites CEOs and business leaders from the Charlotte area's leading businesses and colleges/universities to advocate for impactful solutions that improve Charlotte's economic vitality, equitable opportunity and quality of life for all.

All council members share a deep desire to give back and help strengthen our community by working together to share their perspectives on the issues and opportunities facing Charlotte and by bringing together the right talent and partners to strengthen our community for the benefit of everyone.

CELC
Charlotte Executive Leadership Council

CMS Foundation

The CMS Foundation invests in innovation to help Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools address big challenges and expand opportunities for our students and educators. As the nonprofit fundraising partner for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the foundation harnesses the power of philanthropy to seed innovative ideas and accelerate system-wide transformation.

A great community must have a great public school system. We believe that by working together, we can make Charlotte-Mecklenburg a national leader in public education, where teaching is an iconic profession and opportunity abounds for every child.

cms foundation

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) strives to create an innovative, inclusive, student-centered environment that supports the development of independent learners. CMS leads the community in educational excellence, inspiring intellectual curiosity, creativity and achievement so that all students reach their full potential (C-M Board of Education, 2018).

CMS is the 16th-largest school district in the nation, providing academic instruction, rigor and support each school day for nearly 140,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The district operates 186 schools throughout Mecklenburg County.

cms
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

executive support & impact

Executives In Residence

The **Executives in Residence (EnR)** program gives corporate and higher education leaders a unique experience to apply their expertise to high-impact areas of opportunity within Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. During their residency, executives immerse themselves in the district, helping expand senior leadership capacity and launch key initiatives while gaining insight into public education and sharpening their own professional skills.

During the 2024-25 school year, eight business leaders served as EnRs and worked within multiple district divisions, including Finance; Strategy; Partnerships; Student Services; and Recruitment, Retention, and Talent Development. Since launching in 2022, 18 business leaders have supported CMS through this program.

The EnR Program Model

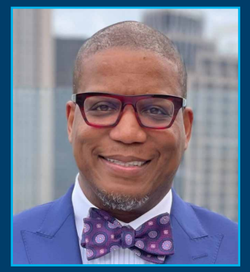
On-loan Model:
Residents remain employed by their company and retain their positions and salaries while completing their residency.

Full Immersion:
Residents are fully embedded in the district, typically working in CMS for terms of 12 months or longer. Residency roles can be full-time or part-time.

Cohort Experience:
Residents meet as a group on a regular basis to share experiences, leverage group expertise, and build community.

Skills-based Alignment:
Residents are matched with roles that align with their skills and expertise. Areas of support typically include process improvement, program and project management, strategic and financial planning, systems optimization, data management, and communications.

Executives in Residence Reflections



"I very quickly realized that we had awesome educators, subject matter experts in their own right. So our opportunity to come in and bring our spheres of expertise–whether that's strategy, human resources or financial services–really afforded us an opportunity if we could authentically engage and earn the trust of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools leaders."

Raki McGregor, SYDKIMYL, Lead EnR



"Being a collaborative partner with district leaders has been personally and professionally fulfilling and very inspiring. This experience allowed me to leverage my leadership experience, sharpen my influence, and apply transferable skills to champion district-wide change. We incorporated process improvement strategies in day-to-day operations and applied an executive coaching approach that is collaborative rather than forced. Our approach created a partnership with the school district that positioned me to have success and build trust with the leadership team."

Kinsey Evans, Associate Vice President, Patient Health, Atrium Health



"I've had a chance to work with a number of the different division chiefs and the superintendent to help them think through how they manage the business of education. In the business world, we are trained in managing large projects and efforts. In the world of education, the focus is on kids and education. I've spent a lot of time helping to create more consistent management practices top to bottom in order to speed communication and make it more intentional, transparent and responsive."

John Schleck, Senior Vice President, Operations, Bank of America

2024-25 EnR Sponsoring Organizations

Atrium Health

BANK OF AMERICA

DUKE ENERGY®

cms Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

talent recruitment & retention

At Home In CMS

During the 2023–24 school year, EnRs **Raki McGregor (SYDKIMYL)**, **LaShauna Lowry (Ally)**, and **John Schleck (Bank of America)** worked with CMS leaders to strengthen recruitment and retention by addressing teachers' housing needs. Raki and LaShauna developed a phased roadmap that included rental assistance, home-buying support, and plans for building dedicated teacher housing. Leveraging his mortgage industry expertise, John joined them and the district's Recruitment, Retention, and Talent Development team to implement these strategies.

In 2024–25, Raki and John advanced the roadmap, helping CMS launch At Home in CMS—a suite of programs designed to support employees in navigating the housing market and accessing resources.

EnR Impact

Rising housing costs in Charlotte-Mecklenburg are making it challenging for many educators to afford living in the area. Raki McGregor and John Schleck were instrumental in creating new opportunities for CMS employees through At Home in CMS. With their leadership and support, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools:

Launched CMS Housing Fairs impacting 1,000+ employees.

Facilitated coordination between local governments to plan teacher housing communities.

Created Housing Webinar Series with 12 sessions on topics like mortgages, credit, budgeting, home maintenance, and affordable rentals.

Partnered with the CMS Foundation to create home-buying cost reduction and down payment support programs.

Teacher Housing Grants

Making Homeownership A Reality

During the 2023-24 school year, EnR **Raki McGregor** facilitated a partnership with the **Truist Charitable Fund**, home builder **True Homes**, and affordable housing nonprofit **DreamKey Partners** to make homeownership a reality for some CMS teachers.

True Homes annually designates 10% of its home builds to sell at cost, and through this partnership, a subset is reserved exclusively for CMS educators.

A $350,000 grant from Truist Charitable enabled the CMS Foundation to create its Teacher Housing Grant Program, offering up to $30,000 in downpayment assistance for qualifying teachers who commit to six years of employment with CMS.

Part of At Home in CMS, the program strengthens teacher recruitment and retention.



financial management & continuous improvement

Finance



In 2023-24, EnR **Carl Council (Duke Energy, Retired)** partnered with **Kelly Kluttz (CMS Chief Financial Officer)** and her team to increase efficiency and strengthen Finance division processes. Leveraging his expertise in forecasting, accounting, and cost management, Carl advised on creating a structured close and reporting process, reducing time to close monthly books by ten days. He also developed a five-year financial model to support budget forecasting for the district's new Strategic Plan.

Carl continued supporting strategic financial planning in the 2024-25 school year and expanded his role to help formalize documentation and assess core accounting processes. The Finance division has improved institutional knowledge, increased process rigor, accelerated reporting cycles, and established a foundation for scalable, sustainable financial management.

Executives in Residence Reflections



Carl Council,
Retired Executive,
Duke Energy

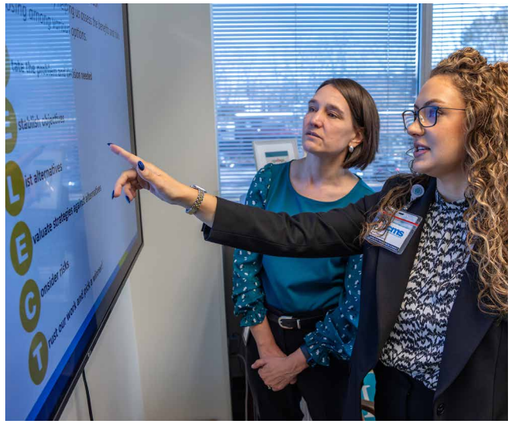
"I think the biggest thing that I've had to adjust to is the stricter requirements on how money is used within CMS. At a company like Duke Energy or Bank of America, you can make adjustments and shift spend in different places as needed. But in CMS, because of the way budgets are set with very prescribed targets and restrictions, that creates a little bit more structure that you have to be aware of each month. There is less flexibility and you have to track, report on and understand where you are in each of the restricted areas."

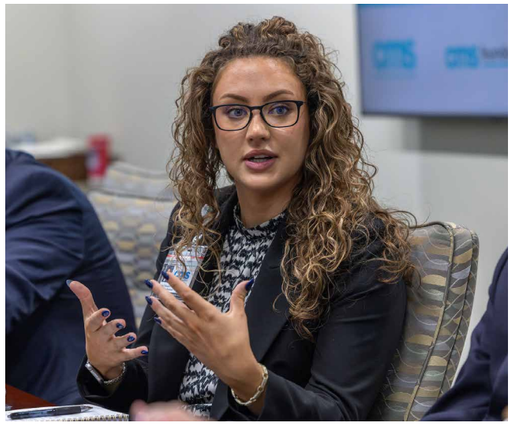
Organizational Excellence & Continuous Improvement

In the first year of the partnership with the CELC, three Executives in Residence (EnRs)—**Richard Miller and Vanessa Sencherey (Atrium Health)** and **Elizabeth Sterling (Ally)**—collaborated with CMS Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer Beth Thompson and the Office of Strategy Management (OSM) to design the district's Organizational Excellence Model, Annual Planning process, and executive-level Obeya sessions for monitoring high-impact, cross-functional initiatives.

In 2023–24, EnRs **Scott Pion and Kinsey Evans (Atrium Health)** and **John Schleck (Bank of America)** advanced this work by operationalizing the model and serving as OSM liaisons and advisors to divisions.

In January 2025, **Jenna Tishenkel (Atrium Health)** joined as an EnR to lead development of a five-year organizational excellence strategy, define a future-state Continuous Improvement model, and identify core competencies to support it. The new model introduced structured problem-solving at the school level, enabling school-based teams to plan, study, and adjust improvements tied to focus areas with coaching from the Strategy team. Jenna also introduced a phased rollout approach aligned to district capacity and coached leaders on early adoption. Leveraging her expertise in performance excellence, she strengthened executive leaders' systems thinking to break down silos and drive sustainable, repeatable results.





"My passion has always been building an army of effective problem solvers at every level of an organization—and this partnership with CMS allowed me to live that out in a powerful way. When I joined in January 2025, my goal was to understand how CMS achieved results and to strengthen the culture around problem-solving and organizational excellence. Together, we created a performance excellence model that empowers those closest to the work—teachers, principals, and staff—to lead meaningful change. By starting small and honoring the voices of school leaders, we've built trust and momentum toward a system that fosters ownership, engagement, and lasting improvement.

It's exciting to see CMS embrace a model proven in the private sector and adapt it to the unique challenges of public education. This work is transforming how we think, collaborate, and deliver excellence for our students and community."



Jenna Tishenkel,
Performance Excellence Consulting Manager,
Atrium Health

strategic plan: implementation & evaluation

Strategic Plan Implementation Support

Every five years, CMS launches a strategic plan. In 2023–24, **Peter Toomey (Duke Energy, Retired)** applied his expertise in organizational strategic planning to guide the development of the CMS Strategic Plan 2024–2029. Over several months, he facilitated staff work sessions, supported community engagement, and coached district leaders through the full planning process.

In 2024–25, Peter partnered with **Beth Thompson, Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer,** and her team to monitor the first year of implementation and prepare for the second year.

Additional EnRs—including **Carl Council (Duke Energy, Retired)**, **John Schleck (Bank of America),** and **Kinsey Evans (Atrium Health)**—supported strategic planning review sessions with Executive Cabinet members to prioritize needs and inform the 2025–26 budget development process.

Leader Reflections



Beth Thompson

Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

"I am beyond grateful for the opportunity to partner with our CELC Executives in Residence. Their sense of adventure has catalyzed understanding and collaboration. Their expertise has accelerated progress. Their perseverance has ensured results. Their commitment has fostered deeper partnership across organizations in the broader Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. Endless possibilities are indeed possible for the students of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools thanks to their heroic efforts."



Peter Toomey

Retired Executive Duke Energy

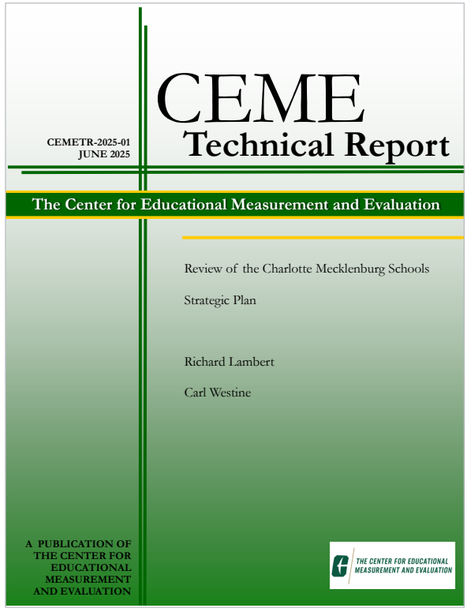
"Some of the similarities in strategic plan development across sectors include thinking through goals, objectives and the resources to achieve them. Those logical steps in planning are exactly the same no matter the industry. I think the environment, the nature of the challenges, the nature of the organizations and what they have to do is where all the differences come in. This work has really changed me. It's brought me more into the community where I've been living for 12 years. And I wouldn't trade that for anything."

Strategic Plan Evaluation

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA CHARLOTTE

CELC members heard the district's Strategic Plan and acknowledged its bold vision alongside the significant demands on district capacity. **Dr. Sharon Gaber, UNC Charlotte** Chancellor and CELC member, recognized the need for additional support to evaluate implementation and outcomes. She offered UNC Charlotte's resources, including seed funding and faculty expertise through the university's **Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation (CEME).**

While CMS has skilled research and data experts, the volume of data requests, reporting needs, and complex analyses required for extensive research and evaluation exceeded capacity. District leaders wanted guidance on which elements of the Strategic Plan should be prioritized for deeper research and evaluation by external resources. Leveraging expertise across the college, CEME conducted a comprehensive plan review and delivered a report with insights and actionable recommendations to strengthen implementation and ensure the plan's long-term success.

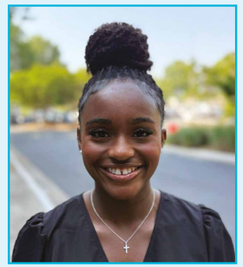


Davidson College Impact Fellowship

DAVIDSON COLLEGE

The Davidson Impact Fellowship (DIF) program connects graduating Davidson College students with one-year, post-graduate experience-based fellowships with organizations that have been awarded grants from the College. DIF empowers fellows to create and implement solutions to urgent problems, confronting society through direct engagement with thought leaders and community members.

Through the CELC partnership, CMS welcomed its first Davidson Impact Fellow, Bernice Saladin. Bernice worked in the Office of Strategy Management where she helped advance the district's strategic planning and continuous improvement initiatives.



Bernice Saladin,
Davidson Impact Fellow

communications strategy

Meaningful Medicine



Meaningful Medicine, funded by a $10 million grant from Bank of America to Atrium Health Foundation, integrates virtual health and emotional wellness access, workforce development, social health support, and suicide prevention to improve the well-being of Charlotte-Mecklenburg communities.

A key feature of the program is nearly 120 virtual health care clinics in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, primarily in underserved areas. Students and staff meet with a medical professional virtually when they are not feeling well at school, during school hours.

Recognizing the need to raise awareness of Meaningful Medicine to reduce absenteeism and expand healthcare access, the CMS Student Services team—led by **Dr. Jill Payne, Associate Superintendent of Student Services**—leveraged the expertise of EnR **Kelly Sapp (Bank of America)**. Kelly provided strategic communications expertise to develop a comprehensive communication plan, crafting stakeholder-specific messaging, identifying key milestones for promotion, and equipping the team to sustain future outreach efforts.

Meaningful Medicine by the Numbers:

120
School Based Virtual Care clinics

~11,000
students & staff served by School Based Virtual Care clinics since 2022

2,300
estimated days of school saved through program

32
School Based Virtual Therapy sites

~1,000
students supported through School Based Virtual Therapy

279
CMS students supported with healthcare career pathway opportunities at Atrium Health



Kelly Sapp, Senior Vice President, Strategic Communication Executive, Bank of America

Executive in Residence Reflections

"I am humbled by this opportunity and privileged to work with such outstanding educators and healthcare professionals leading in their fields. The Meaningful Medicine initiative is transforming the way we bring physical, emotional and behavioral wellness access, as well as career pathways in healthcare to the Charlotte community. Through a strategic communication strategy, defined tactics, and campaigns - we are raising awareness of the program and sharing key milestones, stories, and the innovative nature of this important initiative. A strong, healthy, and thriving public school system helps to shape the future of our community and drives economic opportunities."

Communications Leadership Support

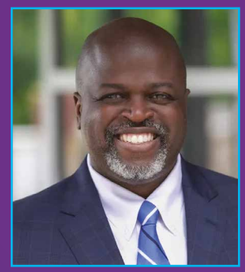
Kelly also supported the district's Communications division, working directly with the Chief Communications Officer and team members. She advised on talent and resource realignment, strategic planning, and helped launch the Communications Advisory Committee, serving as liaison between the committee and the division.

Communications Advisory Committee

In 2024–25, **CELC**-affiliated leaders partnered with the district's Communications division to pilot an executive advisory committee. The goal: connect diverse, highly-skilled professionals with **CMS** leaders as thought partners, offering guidance, fresh perspectives, and industry expertise to advance the district's mission. In addition to EnR **Kelly Sapp**, three local industry veterans helped establish the committee: **Jennifer Appleby (Retired President & Chief Creative Officer, Wray Ward), Greg Johnson (Founder & Managing Director, Orbital Socket),** and **Lauren Wooden (SVP of Branding, Marketing & Communications, Bright Hope Capital & its subsidiaries)**.



Jennifer Appleby
Retired President & Chief Creative Officer, Wray Ward



Greg Johnson
Co-Founder & Managing Director, Orbital Socket



Lauren Wooden
Senior Vice President, Branding, Marketing & Communications, Bright Hope Capital & its subsidiaries*

*Subsidiaries: R.J. Leeper Construction, Big Prime Hauling, and CleanSite Solutions

strategic partnerships: school support

Community Partnerships

Community partnerships are essential to CMS, addressing diverse needs for students, staff, schools, and families. The CELC began supporting the district's Strategic Partnerships team in 2022–23, with Executives in Residence **Moses Fox III (formerly Central Piedmont Community College)** and **Peter Toomey (Duke Energy, Retired)** helping define partnership management needs, review team structure, and survey schools to establish a baseline of active partnerships.

In 2023–24, the team collected data from 184 schools and identified the priority areas for partner support: High-Dosage Tutoring, Teacher Appreciation and Wellness, Newcomer Support Services, and Mentorship and Student Engagement.

In fall 2024, EnR **Emily Cantrell (Atrium Health)** helped organize four working groups aligned to these priorities. The working groups were asked to inventory current partnerships and develop evidence-based strategies for 2025–26. Each group included a designated leader, partner organizations, and a CMS subject-matter expert. The groups began meeting in January 2025 and presented recommendations at the Partnership Summit in May 2025.



Strengthening Partnership Management

During the 2023–24 school year, EnR **Matt Agner (Rodgers Builders)** partnered with the district's Director of Strategic Partnerships to create the "Partnerships Hub," a Power BI dashboard. This tool consolidated data from multiple sources to show active partners by school, highlight unmet needs by location, and suggest potential matches for schools requiring support.



While the Hub improved visibility and resource allocation, CMS needed a more comprehensive solution. During the 2024-25 school year, the CELC invested $50,000 to develop a customized Salesforce-based CRM to streamline communication, centralize partnership, and measure impact.



Photos: CMS Partnerships staff with community partners

Executive In Residence Reflections



"I was incredibly humbled and honored to be considered as someone who could lend valuable expertise to an organization such as CMS. It was a world I wasn't that familiar with, even though I have children in grade school, and the gift of understanding K-12 education was beneficial for me. Success often depends on the partners alongside you, so my goal was to strengthen the existing partner ecosystem; ensure that the partners and the school district were aligned on goals, strategies, and resources; then develop systems to manage those relationships with a clearer understanding of what partners were looking to achieve."

Emily Cantrell, Manager, Workforce Initiatives and Grants, Atrium Health

student experiences

Expanding Career Opportunities

In October 2023, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education established new five-year, student outcome-focused goals and guardrails for 2024–2029. One goal aims to ensure every CMS graduate is prepared for life after high school—whether through enrollment in higher education, enlistment in military service, or employment.

EnR **Raki McGregor** advanced this vision by forging partnerships with local companies and organizations to expand career connections and enhance the recognition and celebration of students. He was instrumental in expanding the **"Education 2 Employment" (E2E) program**, a partnership between CMS and the City of Charlotte connecting graduating seniors to entry-level positions within city departments, providing competitive pay, benefits and long-term career opportunities.

EnRs and CELC companies supported additional workforce readiness initiatives. **AvidXChange** hosted the CMS Career and Technical Education (CTE) Futures Fair, where nearly 300 high school seniors connected with 40 local employers offering career opportunities—some hiring students at the event.



City of Charlotte 2025 "Education 2 Employment" program signing day

2025 CMS Career & Technical Education Futures Fair



















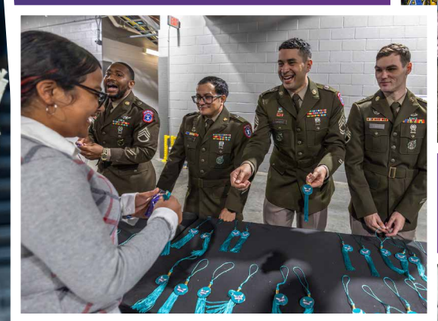
“what’s your e?”

Celebrating Enrolled, Enlisted, & Employed Graduating Seniors

In 2024, EnRs **Raki McGregor** and **LaShauna Lowry** coordinated the launch of the inaugural “What’s Your E: Enrolled, Enlisted, or Employed?” event to celebrate graduating seniors. More than 700 students from 30 high schools were honored at **Bank of America Stadium** for their post-graduation plans.

In 2025, the event expanded with support from the **Charlotte Hornets** and **Bank of America**. Over 1,200 students were celebrated at **Spectrum Center** during the 2nd Annual “What’s Your E?” event, recognizing their commitment to enrollment, enlistment, or employment after graduation.

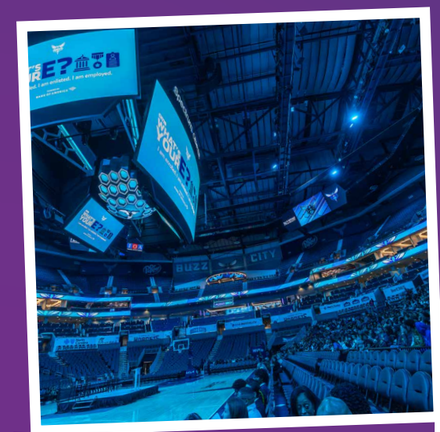




























school leader professional development

Truist Leadership Institute (TLI) provides programs that help leaders build self-awareness and strengthen leadership effectiveness. Its flagship program, **Mastering Leadership Dynamics (MLD)**, deepens understanding of personal drivers that shape decision-making, interactions, and leadership style. **Truist** offers a tailored MLD experience for school leaders, addressing the unique context and challenges of the principal role. In 2023–24, eight CMS principals completed this 4-day program at TLI's campus; participation grew to 14 principals in 2024–25.

In 2024–25, **Truist** expanded leadership development support to assistant principals through its **Discovering Conscious Leadership for Education Leaders** program. This two-day program focuses on self-awareness, belief and behavior patterns, relationship-building, and communication strategies for key leadership interactions. Twenty-five assistant principals from the district's Principal Ready Cohort (PRC) initiative completed the program, and Truist will continue partnering with CMS to integrate it into the PRC professional development curriculum.



$255,750

Total 2024-25 Leadership Development Investment by Truist

CELC Member Reflections

"The CELC's commitment to the success of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools aligns perfectly with our Truist purpose to inspire and better lives and communities. Everyone benefits from a strong school system, and that's at the core of the CELC and CMS Foundation's purposeful partnership. The CELC provides critical resources to help CMS prepare students for success, while CMS develops the talent essential for a thriving business community. It builds better lives by preparing students for success, better communities by providing the talent that fuels a robust economy, and a brighter future for generations. It's truly an inspiration.

I have always been impressed by how leaders here work together to build on the area's strengths, and I'm honored that Truist is part of the transformational work being done to support the youth and future of this vibrant community."



Bill Rogers, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Truist Financial

Truist Leadership Institute: 2024-25 Principal Participants

Fourteen principals were among the 39 school leaders who participated in leadership professional development experiences through the Truist Leadership Institute during the 2024-25 school year. Principals participated in the institute's flagship program, Mastering Leadership Dynamics.



Andrew Bell



Elizabeth Carrubba



Paula Cook



Nathan Currie



Rachelle Fink



Travares Hicks



Brenda Mills



Susan Nichols



Kyerra Oglesby



Sharrone Powell



Matthew Slota



Layla Stanley

Not shown: Casimir Bundrick and Kimberly King

celebrating educators

The Gem Awards

CMS seeks educators who are innovative, inclusive, inviting, and inspiring. When they find them, they know they've discovered true gems. The annual **Gem Awards** honors these exceptional teachers, celebrating finalists for **Teacher of the Year, Beginning Teacher of the Year**, and **Assistant Teacher of the Year**, and announcing winners in each category.

In spring 2025, CELC organizations helped elevate the event. **Central Piedmont Community College** hosted the celebration at its state-of-the-art Parr Center and Dale F. Halton Theater. **Hendrick Automotive** surprised Teacher of the Year winner Gregory Gabriel with a new car, while **Honeywell** treated Beginning Teacher of the Year Sean Bryant to a VIP experience at the 2025 PGA Championship at Quail Hollow. Truist invited all Teacher of the Year finalists to enjoy a **Charlotte Knights** game from a private luxury suite at **Truist Field.**









Central Piedmont Community College · Hendrick Automotive Group · Honeywell · Truist

CMS 2024-25 Teacher of the Year: Gregory Gabriel

Gregory Gabriel is a dedicated educator with 16 years of service in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Chosen from a distinguished group of 11 finalists for Teacher of the Year, he embodies the excellence, leadership, and commitment that define outstanding teaching in CMS.

Gregory is a National Board Certified mathematics teacher whose experience spans both elementary and middle school. He currently serves as a fifth grade teacher at Winterfield Elementary, where he is known for his instructional expertise, his ability to connect with students, and his commitment to building strong academic foundations. Beyond the walls of his own classroom, Gregory supports colleagues as they pursue National Board Certification. In his advanced teacher-leadership role, he is committed to expanding his reach and impact—ensuring that great teaching doesn't stop at his own door, but grows throughout the school and district.

His journey is one defined by service, scholarship, and heart—and now, by the honor of being named the CMS 2024-25 Teacher of the Year.



Gregory Gabriel, CMS Teacher of the Year

"Being celebrated as the CMS Teacher of the Year has been both humbling and deeply meaningful. Teaching has truly been the joy of my lifetime, and that recognition has served as a mirror: reflecting the brilliance of my students, the trust and partnership of their families, and the collective work of colleagues across CMS. The support of the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council during the GEM Awards highlighted why community acknowledgment matters. As our superintendent, Dr. Crystal Hill, often says, things don't just happen—people make them happen. When the business community takes time to recognize educators, it sends a powerful message that teachers and students are seen, valued, and supported by a wider village that believes in their potential."



what's ahead

What's New In 2025-2026?

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools proudly celebrated historic academic progress made by students during the 2024-25 school year. Data released in September 2025 from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction showed improvements across numerous metrics, including school performance and academic growth. Nearly 90% (156) of CMS schools met or exceeded growth – the highest in CMS history.

The CELC is continuing to expand support during the 2025-26 school year with a new cohort of Executives in Residence, additional consulting and advisory projects, and significant investments in career exploration and workforce development opportunities for students.

CELC Member Reflections



Bill Christensen, CEO, JELD-WEN Co-Council Lead, CELC Education Working Team

"I joined the **CELC** in 2023 to partner with a group of like-minded leaders focused on creating a better Charlotte. Where I grew up, equitable access to quality education wasn't a given, and I was fortunate to have people in my life who opened doors that shaped the path I'm on today. With corporate headquarters and two manufacturing facilities based in North Carolina, **JELD-WEN** relies on a strong talent pipeline to support a wide range of roles. High-quality public schools are the foundation of that pipeline, and we support systems that make opportunity possible."



Blair Stanford, Executive Director, CELC

"What gives me immense hope is the level of talent on both sides. The educators and corporate leaders are extremely intelligent and passionate and they both know their own worlds. The more we can marry the talent, create additional capacity for the school system, and show support and appreciation for the educators who are leading our school system every day the better."



Ashelyn James, Director, CMS Foundation

"I think we've only scratched the surface of the potential of this engagement and the power that is behind it. The ultimate vision is a place where our community supports innovation inside the school district and helps shape the future experience of our students. There's so much potential as we tap into different industries, companies, and leaders. This partnership can exceed our wildest dreams of transforming education in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, and I can't wait to see how it develops."

thank you to our CELC partners

ALBEMARLE
ally
Atrium Health
avidxchange
BANK OF AMERICA
bright hope CAPITAL
CAROLINA PANTHERS
CENTRAL PIEDMONT COMMUNITY COLLEGE
CHARLOTTE HORNETS
CHARLOTTE PIPE AND FOUNDRY COMPANY
Coca-Cola CONSOLIDATED
CRESCENT COMMUNITIES
DAVIDSON COLLEGE
Deloitte.
DUKE ENERGY
EY
Harris Teeter YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD MARKET
Hendrick AUTOMOTIVE GROUP
Honeywell
JELD-WEN
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TRANE TECHNOLOGIES
TRUIST
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA CHARLOTTE
WEISIGER
WELLS FARGO

A great community must have a great public school system. We believe that by working together, we can make Charlotte-Mecklenburg a national leader in public education, where teaching is an iconic profession and opportunity abounds for every child.













cms foundation

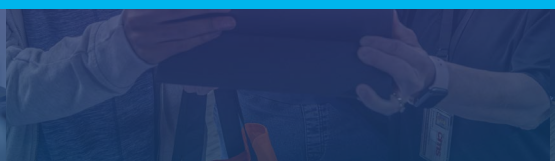
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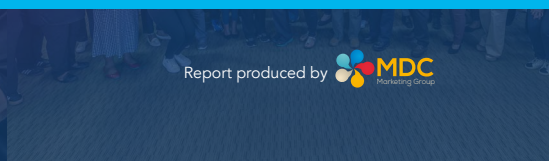












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