

# EAST EXPRESS

Newsletter of the Vestavia Hills Elementary East PTO

Providing Parent Support to the Students & Teachers  
of Vestavia Hills Elementary East

## THIS ISSUE:

Note from Dr. Richardson

Thank you Dr. Richardson!

PTO President Message

Spotlights:

Recent Happenings

Reminders / Upcoming Dates

Community & Family Partners

THANK YOU  
SO MUCH

DR. RICHARDSON!

## A FINAL NOTE FROM OUR PRINCIPAL



Dr. Mark Richardson

Dear Parents,

I would like to express my appreciation for all the notes, cards, and expressions of love and congratulations that I've received since I announced my retirement. Thank you...and why are you making this so hard for me? :) Seriously, this sort of support is why I've been here so long, and I will always, from the bottom of my heart, love the people of East Elementary and Vestavia Hills because of the caring heart of all of our community.

I'm far from the only person departing East this year, and I'd like to acknowledge a whole bunch of incredible faculty members who are also moving on. All of these great folks are leaving us to retire, or pursue an opportunity that is best for their family:

**Carol Johnston** has been at East longer than I have (not many can say that), having taught 1st grade for close to 30 years. After watching Carol teach her kiddos 25 years ago, I told her that I have not seen a more engaging, challenging teacher. After watching Carol teach last month, I can say the same thing. Carol loves her students and still has such enthusiasm for the craft of teaching.

**Dedra Wade** was one of my earliest recommendations to come on board as a teacher at East. I have loved watching Dedra grow from being an enthusiastic 1st grade teacher when she arrived 20 years ago, learning from more experienced peers, to a master teacher, sharing her own practices with others. I also loved that Dedra taught my own son, so I know how well she works with parents.

**Brenda Evans** has served in our lunchroom for about 20 years, first as a Child Nutrition Program Associate, and for the past 14 years as our Lunchroom Manager. I don't know of anyone who strives for excellence more than Brenda does. She is not happy to receive a score of 99 from the Health Department. She wants a lunchroom that serves delicious, child-friendly food that meets her high standards.

**Lee Carol Meads** has been a rock at East since joining our 2nd grade team 19 years ago. About 5 years into her work with us, Lee Carol became our Reading Coach, which means she became a teacher of teachers. As Reading Coach, not only does Lee Carol help teachers with best practices of reading instruction, but she also keeps up with the learning progress of every student in our school. That's a daunting task that Lee Carol has made look easy.

**Steffayne Giardina** arrived at East 15 years ago after a distinguished early teaching career in Homewood. She has been such a steady teacher since her arrival. She loves making the 1st grade experience more engaging for her students, and the relationships she forges with them are always so strong. Steffayne also has a gift to be able to work with students with a wide variety of needs.

**Jennifer McCord** started at East 18 years ago as a 3rd grade teacher, stepped aside for her family for a few years, and then returned to teach Kindergarten and then 2nd grade. She has been with us for about 15 years. Jennifer is one of the most passionate, gifted classroom teachers we've ever had. She pours her heart and soul into her job, as any of her former students and parents can attest.

**Grace Beasley** has worked at East as a speech teacher for the past 10 years. I have sat in on more meetings with Grace and parents than I can count, and I'm always impressed with how well she communicates with parents, reassuring and empathizing with them. The students she serves love her, and are invariably sad when they eventually no longer have to come to speech because of Grace's great work.

**Shae Harrell** is another teacher who came to us from Homewood and has been at East for the past 9 years. Shae came to us as an established master teacher, and she continued her expert work here. I have seen Mrs. Harrell take her kids so far so fast academically, socially, and emotionally. She has such a compassionate concern for each and every one of her students and families.

There are so many parents I could write paragraphs about, but I'd like to focus especially on **Lauren Cater**, who has served as PTO President with such a positive spirit and great energy. Lauren has supported our school in so many ways during her time as our parent leader. Whether it was in finishing the very ambitious turf project or helping make sure that our teachers got a nice lunch at a summer meeting, Lauren has always been approachable and happy to help.

Thank you, Lauren. You epitomize the incredible PTO leadership that I have worked with year in and year out.

I've got to give a quick kudos to **Sarah Stevens** and **Beth Anne Loudermilk**. Sarah has done an exceptional work on our *East Express* each month, and Beth Anne has made sure that weekly announcements go out to all our parents.

They have been the masters of communication, and I appreciate them so much for that.

Finally, I've got to take some time to tell all of you who have more time at East what you are in for. You are in for dynamic leadership that will provide a happy, vibrant environment; effective, engaging instruction; and a continuing desire to improve as a school. The added bonus is that this will be an easy transition. I am ecstatic that **Cindy Echols** will succeed me as principal. Cindy has for all practical purposes served as co-principal for the past 12 years at East. She knows and loves this school and community so much, and I know that East will only become a better school under her guidance. I plan to continue to stay in touch with her, to be a listening ear, but also to find out the great things that are going on under her watch. The response from the community has been phenomenal after she was officially approved and announced at a Board meeting, so I know you will support her, pray for her, and continue to do all the wonderful things you do to make East such a happy place.

Thank you for providing that same support and those same prayers for me all these years.

I've Had a Wonderful Time at School!





## Thank you Dr. Richardson!

As we bid farewell to Dr. Richardson, we extend our heartfelt gratitude for his unwavering dedication and exceptional leadership. Throughout his tenure, his love for our students and his nurturing nature have created an environment where every child feels valued and inspired to succeed.

Beyond his role as an educational leader, Dr. Richardson's impact extended far beyond the confines of administrative duties. He effortlessly infused an extra dose of fun into the school atmosphere, making each day a joyous adventure for our kids. Whether it was dressing up for themed events, organizing exciting activities, or simply sharing a laugh in the hallway, Dr. Richardson's infectious enthusiasm created lasting memories for our students and staff alike.

As Dr. Richardson embarks on this new chapter of his life, we are profoundly grateful for the indelible mark he has left on our school community. His legacy of love, compassion, and dedication will continue to resonate within these walls for years to come. Please join us in extending our heartfelt thanks and warmest wishes to Dr. Richardson as he embraces a well-deserved retirement. Although he may be stepping away from his role as principal, his spirit will forever remain an integral part of our school's identity.

With full hearts,  
your PTO





## A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Lauren Cater VHEE PTO President

Hello East Eagles!

May is here! It is hard to believe the end of this school year is upon us. It has truly been a wonderful year because of each of you! Your time, support and willingness to help with anything and everything have been such a gift to our amazing school.

While there are only a few weeks left, they are packed full of fun times and celebration! Our last House Meeting will be May 14. Thank you to Kingsley Buitron and Paige Price for all their work supporting the teachers and making each of the meetings this year a success.

Lots of celebrating is planned for our 5th graders, and thank you to Morgan Choat, Katie Howell, and Ashley Groves for planning an exciting send-off for them as they prepare to move on to Pizitz.

One of the students' favorite days, May Day Play Day, will be Monday, May 20! Lauren Kiser and Lindsay Booth have so much fun planned, so be on the lookout for ways you can help!

We will also have our last Feast for East coming up, with pick-up on May Day Play Day. Lauren Jones has done an awesome job again this year organizing this easy way to support our school.

I want to take a moment to give out some **BIG THANKS!**

**THANK YOU, 2023-24 Executive Board.** I want to give huge praise to Cassie Thompson, Katie Bushby, Mandy Bailey, Catherine Dempsey, Lizzy Jones, Angela Stevens, Sarah Stevens, Beth Anne Loudermilk and Ashley Groves. Each of you worked tirelessly all year. Thank you for serving our school and students with your time and talents. I am beyond thankful for each one of you and for your support this year!

**THANK YOU, Committee Chairs.** This year's success is also accredited to each of the hard-working committee chairs. Each committee brought new ideas and joy to their positions. The PTO is nothing without your leadership and commitment.

**THANK YOU, Administration & Staff.** Mark Richardson and Cindy Echols, you are such a gift to me, my family and the entire East community. I've truly appreciated your leadership and treating me and the PTO as partners in the success of this school year. You both are such a source of knowledge and inspiration to me and your team. Also, there are not enough thank yous in the world for Meredith Cashio, Brittany Brantley and Laura Sheppard for all their help this year!

**THANK YOU, East Parents.** You have generously supported our school with your time, money, and love. Thanks to you, East's future continues to be bright.

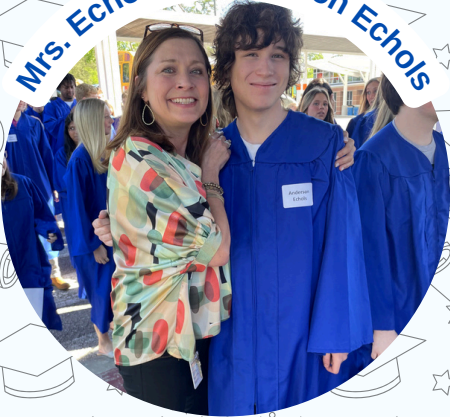
May moves fast, but I hope each of you will try to savor these last few weeks and all the end-of-the-year experiences that are coming! Wishing you all lots of fun summer adventures!

Lauren Cater  
VHEE PTO President, 2023-2024



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Mrs. Echols & Anderson Echols



Andrew Bentley & Mrs. Bentley



Robert Dennis & Mrs. Dennis



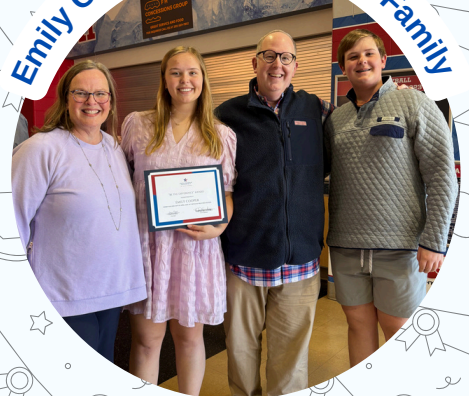
Bobby Balough & Mrs. Balough



Gentry Sharp & Mrs. Sharp



Emily Cooper, Mr. Cooper & Family



FORMER EAST STUDENTS IN THE VHHS 2024 GRADUATING CLASS WITH THEIR FACULTY PARENT(S)





### VHEE Spirit Day!

May 7th from 1 - 8 pm



\*10% of sales goes to VHEE PTO

### Feast for East

Pick up May 20th from 4 - 5 pm



Place your order between 5/1 - 5/15

# UPCOMING DATES

- **5/1 - 5/15** Feast for East orders open (Tasty Town)
- **5/7** Sunshine Creamery Spirit Day (1-8pm)
- **5/9** Dr. Richardson's Retirement Reception (3:30-5:30 pm)
- **5/14** Last House Meeting -ALL OUT COLORS
- **5/16** Honors Assembly (1:15pm)
- **5/20** May Day Play Day
- **5/20** Feast for East pick up (4-5pm)
- **5/23** Last Day of School (2 hr. early dismissal)



### Are You Missing Something?!

Did your child forget a sweatshirt outside? Or maybe they left a water bottle in the hallway? No promises that those precious squeeze mates are found, but there are lots of missing items in the Lost and Found that need to find their way home.

Please take time to come look through the racks and bins of items. **Starting the week of May 6th, there will be tables of items outside underneath the breezeway. After this week, all items will be donated.**



## HELPFUL LINKS

[VHEE Calendar](#)

[VHEE Website](#)

Membership Toolkit App

[Apple App](#) [Google Play](#)

[Cafeteria Menu](#)

# Follow Us on Social Media



Get Connected for Our Latest News & Updates

@vheepo



 Exciting News Alert! 

We're thrilled to announce that **Morgan Noto** and **Carissa Hughey** are stepping into the roles of our new Fundraising and Community Partners Chairs! As we gear up for the upcoming year, they're here to remind everyone about the fantastic opportunities to get involved and make a difference. Whether you're considering becoming a Family Partner or your business wants to join as a Community Partner, now is the perfect time to get involved. Plus, if you're keen on seeing your name on car tags or bag tags, we'd love to collaborate with you!

Your support means the world to us, and our school truly appreciates every partnership. Ready to make a difference? Reach out to Morgan or Carissa, or drop us an email at [vheecommunitypartners@gmail.com](mailto:vheecommunitypartners@gmail.com).

Let's make this year unforgettable, together! 



# THIS MONTH'S FEATURED BRONZE SPONSORS

VHEE IS GRATEFUL FOR YOU!

## Community Sponsors



## Family Sponsors

Mandy & Matt Bailey  
Anne & Steven Corhern  
Kelly & Bentley Nelson  
Taylor & Rivers Price  
Nicole & Ryan Schreiner

VHEE PTO is so appreciative of your (tax-deductible) financial support, which goes directly back into our school via the additional benefits, incentives, experiences, and classroom enhancements that the PTO is able to provide to our amazing faculty and precious students. A huge THANK YOU to the many Family Partners who have already donated to our school this year!

\*If you want to become a Family or Community Partner, we are grateful and happy to help! Please contact Catherine Dempsey, Lizzy Jones, or email [vheecommunitypartners@gmail.com](mailto:vheecommunitypartners@gmail.com)