

# Life!

THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2026 SECTION B



RMF ENGINEERING

Duke Health researchers have found artificial intelligence tools that can locate the risk of children developing ADHD before a traditional diagnosis.

## AI detects ADHD in children ahead of typical diagnosis

By Herbert L. White  
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AI tool can detect ADHD before children are diagnosed

Duke Health researchers have found artificial intelligence tools that can analyze health records to estimate the risk of developing attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder before a traditional diagnosis.

The research, published in Nature Mental Health on April 27, cites how information collected during regular health care visits can support early decision making by primary care providers. ADHD affects millions of children, but many go years without diagnosis, thus missing a chance for early support that can change long-term outcomes.

"We have this incredibly rich source of information sitting in electronic health records," said Elliot Hill, lead author of the study and data scientist in the Department of Biostatistics & Bioinformatics at Duke University School of Medicine. "The idea was to see whether patterns hidden in that data could help us predict which children might later be diagnosed with ADHD, well before that diagnosis usually happens."

By reviewing patterns in everyday medical data,  
Please see **AI** | 2B

## Make America Healthy Again forces come for hospital food

By Stephanie Armour  
KFF HEALTH NEWS

Hospital food rarely draws rave reviews. But efforts by the Trump administration to get hospitals to ditch unhealthy fare are facing criticism for going too far.

The Department of Health and Human Services sent notices to hospitals asking them to align their food purchases with the administration's 2025-30 dietary guidelines to ensure continued eligibility for Medicaid and Medicare payments. "We commend the many hospitals who have made commitments to improve their food offerings, and expect every hospital system to do so," HHS spokesperson Andrew Nixon said.

Top Kennedy adviser Calley Means took to social media to explain the initiative, urging the public to report hospitals that don't comply with the guidance. The comment included a link to an HHS webpage with a toll-free number for reporting complaints typically used for medical bills.

The warnings drew sharp rebukes from critics who said the directive fails to consider that the specific dietary needs of patients are often different from those of the rest of the population.

"It's always a struggle to get people to eat. Losing weight in the hospital raises the risk of mortality," said Mary Talley Bowden, a sleep medicine specialist, who has often sided with Make America Healthy

Please see **MAKE** | 2B

### « RIDES »

## Lexus hybrid power makes for economical transportation with NX 450+ SUV

By Winfred Cross  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Lexus has been one of my favorite companies since its inception in 1989 with the masterfully done LS 400.

It has released many vehicles since, and most have been successful. Like most car companies, Lexus has moved toward SUVs and crossovers to fill its offerings. The NX, the middle child of its smaller SUVs, offers a lot of amenities but they will cost.

The NX is one size down from the RX models that started the crossover craze in America. It's big enough for five, but four will have the most fun - if those in the back are not too big. It

comes in three models: 350, 350h and 450h+. The 350 is front-wheel drive, while the 350h and 450h+ are AWD. You can get AWD on the 350.

My test vehicle was the 450h+ which is a plug-in hybrid that can run as an electric vehicle for 37 miles while fully charged. That's enough to get you around town. Charging the vehicle each night could keep you away from the gas pump if you are doing short trips. The hybrid engine will get you 34 miles to the gallon, which is great for a SUV with 304 horsepower.

The NX 450h+'s horsepower comes from a 2.5-liter hybrid engine combine with a large bat-

tery and two electric motors. The power is sent to all wheels via a continuously variable transmission. This is done smoothly and efficiently, making the NX feel very responsive. When you need a burst of speed to pass, power comes quickly. Getting to that offramp or surging past the slow-poke driving under the speed limit will not be a problem.

The NX's compact size makes it feel surprisingly nimble. There is some body roll while cornering but otherwise the vehicle feels composed while engaging in sporty driving. The cabin is sealed tight. Not much wind or engine noise makes it inside.

The NX's four-wheel independent suspension soaks up most of the bad stuff before reaching the cabin. The ride is firm and at times a bit jiggly but on most surfaces the vehicle's road manners are impeccable.

The vehicle does have a sore spot, however. Some of the controls for certain functions don't appear until you place your hand over keypads on the steering wheel. This is a bit confusing and distracting, but I think I could get adjusted if I owned the vehicle.

Some of this is due to how tight the NX feels. I detected no squeaks or rattles. All the switches and knobs felt expensive, as



LEXUS

The 2026 Lexus NX 450h+ is a smaller SUV with plug-in hybrid engine that runs 37 miles on an electric charge.

well they should for the asking price.

The 450h+ has a body-colored grille that looks better than the silver ver-

sion. The look has been around since 2022 when the car got a full redesign. All models have the same Please see **LEXUS** | 2B



RAY WALLACE

Ray Wallace (left), who was born with a shortened femur that resulted in amputation of his right leg, empowers peers who've lost limbs as leader of Queen City Amputees.

## Advocacy for amputees drives ambitious mission

Ray Wallace embraces leadership with Queen City Amputees

By Cameron Williams  
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Ray Wallace's mission is to provide empower and support people without limbs.

He's spent his life without a right leg, which inspired him to lead a normal life and help people living with similar challenges overcome them.

"I was born with a birth defect that left my femur shortened," said Wallace, leader of the non-profit Queen City Amputees. "I almost didn't have one. My knee was practically connected to my hip when I was born, so before I was 3 [years old] I had a knee fusion, and I had my foot amputated so that I could fit into my prosthe-

sis."

Wallace said in a way, growing up without the leg helped because he didn't know what he would do later in life without it like several individuals in the support group.

"One thing I like to say about myself is that I am very ambitious and very stubborn," Wallace said with a chuckle. "I used to skateboard a lot. I remember one day I was playing with some kids in the neighborhood, and my father came out the door running and yelling, 'Ray, no, don't do that. You are going to get hurt.' I thought to myself like, 'Oh yeah, I have to do this now.' Since he said I couldn't, now I have to prove to

myself that I can."

Fast forward several years and Wallace got a job in high school working in a movie theater.

The first thing he bought was a skateboard.

"When I got my first couple of paychecks I went and bought a skateboard from Walmart," Wallace said. "If you know anything about skateboards from Walmart, they are like skateboards with bricks for wheels. They are terrible ... but I would skate all the time. Eventually there was a group of kids I started hanging out with who skated and they embraced me. They would always help out if I needed help getting stable [on

Please see **ADVOCACY** | 2B

## Tighter budgets change travel plans

By Tiffany Miller  
ALG VACATIONS

The flight search is open, but many travelers are pausing before they book. Prices feel higher than last year, headlines are heavy and budgets are tighter.

Still, the question isn't whether to take a vacation, but how to make it work.

A November 2025 survey from ALG Vacations of U.S. adults planning to travel in 2026 shows that financial pressure is reshaping how people approach vacations, not whether they take them. While 81% say they have at least some concern about their household finances in the months ahead, 92% say they would still travel even if tighter finances required scaling back.

**Finances shape decisions**  
That shift shows up in the small moments of planning. Travelers are taking longer to compare prices, reconsidering timing and adjusting expecta-



SHUTTERSTOCK

The economy is forcing more Americans to tighten their belts for travel, but they're not ready to walk away from making getaway plans.

tions before they book. Inflation and rising prices top the list of concerns, cited by 61% of respondents, reinforcing why travelers are rethinking destinations, trip length and overall costs.

Concerns about global events and safety follow at

39%, with broader political and economic instability close behind at 38%.

Still, those worries rarely lead travelers to walk away from travel altogether. Instead, many describe pulling back in measured ways, scaling down plans, rethinking details and

making trade-offs that keep a trip possible, even if it looks different than originally imagined.

Experience changes how travelers move from planning to booking

Not all travelers navigate

Please see **TIGHTER** | 2B

## Advocacy for amputees drives ambitious mission

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the board] again. I could stay on the board fine but with no ankle I couldn't do too many tricks. ... But I could hold a camera, so I became their cameraman."

It sparked Wallace's love for film-making. He made a short fictional film about a veteran returning home with post-amputation depression. He eventually became a superhero.

"That film involved me making a cage for my prosthesis," Wallace said. "I remember I was going to get my current prosthesis worked on, and I was showing my prosthetist. I was like, 'Look at what I built.' And he's like, 'Let me show this to the guys in the back.' And knowing what I know now, I know that he took that to the back to show the technicians, and they probably laughed their asses off, man... It was so bad. It looked like it was made from toothpicks and gum, because I can't remember what I used. It looked bad, but it had lights on it. It wasn't horrible. It showed some imagination."

That experience led to Wallace learning how to make prosthetics, which he built for three years. Wallace worked for the Hanger Clinic where he met a man who started a patient-based support group.

"I would go and attend because my boss was a little weird," Wallace said. "He's like, 'Somebody needs to stay in lockup afterwards.' We'd have after-hours. He's like, 'I don't feel right as an able-bodied person, like I'd be intruding.' And I was like, 'Bro, if you don't want to go just say it.' So I would go, and I would stay and get involved in the group. It was a really cool thing."

When the founder was no longer able to run the group, Wallace stepped up.

"The gentleman once had cancer and his cancer returned," Wallace said, "and he let us know that he was no longer able to facilitate the group because he didn't have the energy. He had to focus on himself, which is unfortunate. ... And then he asked me if I wanted to take it up. So, I took up the group, and I ran it for, I think, about two years, and in that time, I realized that we have a lot of resources medically for amputees."

Three years later, Wallace is still running Queen City Amputees.

"I think the biggest thing that I've learned is that the mind is the most powerful thing that a human being can have," he said. "I know so many people who are living with limb indifference or limb loss, and the range is insane. I know people who I went to see them prior to having their amputation done. And then I saw them a couple days after, and they were sitting in the hospital bed smiling."

Wallace said there are cases where amputees suffer mentally because they feel they can't move forward or are a different person afterwards.

"That is simply not true," he said. "You are what your heart says you are. That is what makes you whole. It isn't about the limitations you may have. I know a woman who is a quad amputee ... and she has the most heart of them all. Life is going to throw you challenges. I don't mean to sound like Rocky, but it isn't about how many times you get knocked down but how many times you can get back up. ... I'll tell you I am blessed to have the opportunity that I have."



HEIDI DE MARCO | KFF HEALTH NEWS

The federal Department of Health and Human Services can withhold or threaten the loss of federal funding if hospitals violate mandatory health and safety standards, including for food.

## Make America Healthy Again forces come for hospital food

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Again causes but criticized the administration's call to report violations on X, posting: "Give me a break Calley. A hospital snitch line for soda?"

"It's a little tyrannical," she said in an interview.

HHS can withhold or threaten federal funding if hospitals violate mandatory minimum health and safety standards set by the agency. The standards stipulate that hospitals must protect patient privacy, for example, and uphold infection control.

The standards do address hospital food, but they don't explicitly refer to the

2025-30 dietary guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Rather, the standards require that "individual patient nutritional needs must be met in accordance with recognized dietary practices," and list other requirements for hospitals, such as having access to a qualified dietitian.

HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. "doesn't have a legal basis to do this, but hospitals and nursing homes can't afford to ignore it altogether because of what it signals about potential enforcement action," said Nicholas Bagley, a University of Michigan law professor.

## AI can detect ADHD in children ahead of traditional diagnosis

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the approach could help identify children who could benefit from earlier evaluation.

A team of five researchers analyzed electronic health records from more than 140,000 children, with and without ADHD. They trained a specialized AI model to look at medical history from birth to early childhood that learned to recognize combinations of developmental, behavioral, and clinical events that appeared years before an ADHD diagnosis.

The model was accurate at estimating future risk in children age 5 and older, with consistent performance across sex, race, ethnicity, and insurance status.

The tool doesn't make a diagnosis; rather it identifies children who may benefit from closer attention by their health care provider or an earlier referral for ADHD assessment by a specialist.

"This is not an AI doctor," said Matthew Engelhard, M.D., Ph.D. senior author of the study and a doctor at Duke's Department of Biostatistics & Bioinformatics.

"It's a tool to help clinicians focus their time and resources, so kids who need help don't fall through the cracks or wait years for answers."

The researchers contend earlier identification for ADHD screening could lead to earlier diagnosis and earlier support as a result, which is linked to better academic, social, and health outcomes. They also emphasize the need for further studies before such tools are applied in clinical settings.

"Children with ADHD can really struggle when their needs aren't understood and adequate supports are not in place," said study author, Naomi Davis, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. "Connecting families with timely, evidence-based interventions is essential for helping them achieve their goals and laying a foundation for future success."

The study was supported by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health and National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences.

## Tighter budgets require change in Americans' travel plans

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those trade-offs the same way. For some, uncertainty slows the process. For others, familiarity helps clear the final hurdle.

Among respondents who have previously booked a packaged vacation through a major vacation brand, 80% say they plan to take an international trip in the next year, compared with 46% of those without that experience.

That confidence carries into spending decisions as well. Sixty-seven percent of packaged-vacation travelers expect to spend more than \$2,500 on their next trip, compared with 47% of those who have never booked a packaged vacation.

Taken together, the find-

ings point to a confidence gap, with prior experience linked to greater comfort committing to international travel and higher spending.

**When planning gets complex**  
For many travelers, planning no longer stops at picking dates and destinations. Rising prices, shifting availability and higher expectations have turned vacation planning into a series of decisions that feel harder to navigate alone.

That complexity shows up most clearly among travelers with prior packaged-vacation experience. Ninety-four percent say they plan to use a travel advisor, compared with 81% of those without prior packaged-vacation experience.

The gap suggests that familiarity with structured travel planning often leads travelers to seek expert guidance. As trips become more layered, getting the details right matters as much as the destination itself.

**Travel remains a priority**  
The findings suggest that travel is still very much on the table, even as decisions take longer to make. Travelers are weighing trade-offs, seeking guidance and leaning on experience as they plan, rather than walking away altogether.

The flight search may stay open a little longer this year. But for many Americans, the trip is still happening.

## Lexus hybrid power makes for winning with NX 450+ SUV

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standard equipment and are available with premium, luxury and F-Sport packages.

Major standard equipment includes, roof rails, moonroof, heated steering wheel, heated, cooled, ventilated power front seats, leather interior, folding rear seats, all-wheel drive, wireless Apple CarPlay and Google Android Auto, Lexus 3.0 Safety suite and Sirius/XM.

My vehicle was a luxury model which included triple-beam LED headlamps, head-up display, 20-inch

wheels, digital rearview mirror and cornering lamps.

If that satisfies you, pay \$61,740 and you are out the door. My test car came with extras like the wonderful Mark Levinson audio system, upgraded panoramic moonroof, panoramic camera system, remote parking, puddle lamps and a digital key feature. With destination, the as-tested price came to \$67,289.

This is a lot for a compact vehicle. Still, Lexus still has a great reputation for resale, longevity and excel-

lent service so you do get what you pay for. You can step up to the RX if you need more room or if you want something cozier there is the smaller UX.

**Pros:**  
· Peppy hybrid engine  
· Plug-in for 37 miles of EV range  
· Excellent build quality  
· Lots of standard equipment  
· Adroit handling  
**Cons:**  
· Some controls are confusing  
· A tad expensive

## NC schools try youth suicide prevention

By Karen Zhu

UNC MEDIA HUB

Rotisha Halls recalls a particular sixth grader who would come to school every day angry - so angry that she reminded Halls of Angry Bird.

And every morning, as the school day began, Halls would greet the student by saying, "Good morning, how you doing today?"

The student's response: "I hate it here. I don't want to be here."

For Halls, now a counselor at Green Magnet Elementary School in Raleigh, being a figure who listens and truly cares when asking, "How are you?" and then helping students sort through their emotions, is an important part of her job.

Yet as anxiety and depression among children and adolescents have escalated in recent years, there's a statewide shortage of counselors along with other mental health professionals like therapists and psychologists in schools.

To address this, the Wake County Public Schools System where Halls works as a counselor piloted a school-based mental health program in 2022. The program has made it easier for students to access therapy by partnering with local mental health agencies to have their therapists come on campus to hold therapy sessions. However, federal education funding cuts have made it difficult to expand the program to more schools.

School-based mental health programs like the one in WCPSS can serve as a front-line of youth suicide prevention. A 2023 study has found that investing in school-based mental health services can help increase access to care and reduce youth suicide attempts.

Counselors, social workers, principals, and therapists work together in this program to create a streamlined framework for students to seek help and for educators to identify and offer help to students who show signs of mental distress.

At Green Magnet Elementary, Halls regularly checks in on several students throughout the week to stay posted on how they're doing.

She meets with students one-on-one, pops in the classroom to see how they're doing in class, talks with teachers about anything they've observed about a student, and visits students during their social hours like at recess or lunchtime.

"My day-to-day is about being visible and making sure students see who I am

and I'm there to support them throughout the day," Halls said.

Halls has a mailbox outside her office where students can drop off letters to her. A letter may say: "Mrs. Halls, I need to see you because I'm having a problem with a peer in my class," or "Mrs. Halls, I need to talk to you about family stuff."

Parents have called, emailed, or sent messages to Halls through TalkingPoints, an app used by many school districts across the country to communicate with families, asking her to speak with their child. Teachers also refer students to her when they notice a student is not being their usual self, Halls said.

Some students do not open up about themselves to Halls as easily as others. Nor does she press them to open up.

Instead, Halls spends time playing games with students, throwing some basketball shots with them at the gym, or walking with them during recess. Doing activities together helps students to become more comfortable in talking about themselves.

Inside Halls' office, there are plush stuffed animals, a wooden marble maze board, expandable balls, and Pop-It fidget toys. Hung on her walls are posters showing illustrations of faces expressing different emotions. The word for the emotion is labeled next to each face.

Elementary students often struggle to find words to convey how they feel and tend to express it physically, such as via self-harm. Much of her counseling with young children is to teach them coping skills like breathing techniques and how to reflect rather than react to their emotions, Halls said.

As part of the school-based mental health program, students with more serious mental health conditions for which school counseling won't suffice can receive referrals to outside agencies for more intensive therapy.

Huma Hasan, who specializes in therapy for elementary school students, is a therapist at Horizon Integrated Wellness Group. Horizon, which has locations in Raleigh, Cary, and Holly Springs, has a contract with Wake County's school-based mental health program to provide therapy services to referred students.

Challenges at home affect behavior, sleep, appetite, and academics, Hasan said. She listens to students talk about changes in these factors during their ses-

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The Creatives:  
A podcast about  
Charlotte's most  
creative people

On SoundCloud, Apple  
Podcasts and Spotify

# NC schools frontline to youth suicide prevention

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sions. In addition, she frequently uses play-based therapy to understand what children are going through in their lives.

"A child struggling with separation between parents will show frustration when they are having a hard time playing Connect 4," Hasan said.

Hasan has noticed that whenever a child has anything going on at home and struggles in school, confidence and self-esteem are the first two aspects affected.

"They start feeling that they do not belong, they feel like, 'People don't like me. I'm not good enough,'" Hasan said.

When she worked with a student who was frequently suspended from school, Hasan saw little progress in helping the student until she began noticing his merits rather than his faults.

"I don't pay attention to what he's doing wrong, I compliment on what he's doing right," Hasan said.

After he did a favor for her one day, Hasan told the student he was "such a gentleman."

"And he looked at me and was so surprised that somebody complimented him in a way that was not, I guess, familiar for him before that," she said. Since then, the student has been called less to the principal's office.

Small affirmations make big differences.

The school-based mental health program provides an avenue for youths to reach out to someone who will notice, listen and care.

Teens especially just want to have someone who listens to them, said Haley Spurlins, a licensed clinical mental health counselor and the director of Horizon's school-based mental health partnership.

Spurlins, Horizon's school-based therapist for Cary High School, has counseled teens with anxiety, depression, ADHD and autism. During therapy, teens often seek help on navigating interpersonal relationships, such as friend dynamics or family dynamics, she said.

The school-based mental health program allows students to directly find a professional to talk about what's going on in their lives.

"Something that I really appreciate about the school-based mental health program is the way that it can eliminate barriers to care for families," Spurlins said.

Many of the students Spurlins works with would not have been able to get therapy otherwise. Transportation and the limited time window to schedule therapy after parents' work hours makes access to therapy difficult. Having providers come to schools through the school-based mental health program allows students to access therapy onsite.

In this school year, Horizon has received over 80 referrals, even though it has only been a school-based mental health provider since September 2025. They were able to fulfill 70 of those referrals.

Although Wake County has allocated funding for its school-based mental health program, it is only available in 150 of the county's 200-plus schools. Schools in rural counties, especially in the western and eastern parts of the state, have even less mental health funding.

The shortage of available mental health resources in rural counties leaves youths at risk of suicide more likely to go unnoticed. In rural regions, youth suicide rates are nearly double that of urban regions.

According to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, the statewide suicide rates among youth ages 10-17 almost doubled from 2.6 per 100,000 (2006-2010) to 4.8 (2019-2023). In Chatham County, a historically rural area, the rate spiked to 13.9 per

100,000.

"Not all school districts in North Carolina have the staff support yet to ensure that kids are getting all the preventative care that they need," said Ashtin Crawford, data analyst for NC Child, an organization that advocates for policies to improve the lives of children in North Carolina.

In North Carolina schools, the mental health workforce does not meet the scale of students' mental health needs.

The student-to-school psychologist ratio is 1,924:1, and the student-to-social worker ratio is 995:1 — far higher than the Whole Child North Carolina Advisory Committee's recommended ratios of 500:1 and 250:1, respectively.

"Which in turn leads school districts to go into more of a crisis response situation than preventative mental health care," Crawford said.

That is, when kids resort to going to the ER.

When children in a mental health crisis are admitted to emergency departments, they often wait for days in the ER before finally receiving psychiatric care. There has long been a shortage of hospital psychiatric beds across the country. In North Carolina, 1 in 5 youths who go to the ER are stuck waiting three or more days for a psychiatric bed.

A child may come to the emergency department severely depressed and suicidal. The hectic bustle of emergency departments exacerbates their mental state, making the ER a less-than-ideal first line of mental health support.

School-based mental health programs can prevent a child from arriving at severe mental states, such as feeling suicidal, which helps to avoid an ER visit in the first place.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among teens. In North Carolina, reporting of major depressive episodes among adolescents ages 12-17 increased from 15.1% (2018-2019) to 19.1% (2022-2023).

Even when there are available mental health resources, access remains difficult.

When it comes to trying to access therapy through clinics, "I think the No. 1 barrier is insurance," said Lindsay Ray, a licensed clinical social worker and the director of Hope Services, another mental health agency in contract with WCPSS.

Hope Services began with only accepting Medicaid and has now expanded to accepting all private insurance. The expansion comes with a need for more graduates entering the mental health field, but the pipeline is small.

After four years of school, then about two

years of graduate school, and having attained a license, it is discouraging for therapists to see their low salary rates, Ray said.

At agencies like Hope Services that mainly take in Medicaid patients, therapists are paid Medicaid reimbursement rates, which are much lower than private insurance rates.

Families that do have private insurance have restricted options of providers to choose from.

Not all clinics take every insurance. For school social workers trying to refer students to agencies for therapy, figuring out a family's insurance plan and finding a clinic who will take their insurance is a long process that delays care.

Britanni Bass began her career as a social worker in schools across eastern Wake County, and she saw firsthand how inefficiency in connecting students to providers posed a barrier to care access.

She wanted to take her work to a greater and more efficient scale, so she applied immediately when she saw that Wake County was hiring a coordinator for their school-based mental health program.

Bass is responsible for enrolling providers with the school-based mental health program and then connecting them with individual schools.

She is the person school counselors, social workers, and at times principals contact when they need assistance in finding providers or help initiating conversations with families about addressing their child's mental health.

For larger cases, Bass coordinates the involvement of counselors, social workers, principals and therapists to help a family. Currently, she is helping a family with three kids, all of whom need mental health support. This is one of those cases where it made sense to bring the entire team on board, Bass said.

Emails flood her inbox every day, and she does her best to quickly respond to all inquiries. But there is only one of her.

"We would love it if we had more of my position because it's a lot for one person," Bass said. For school districts with a mental health program like Wake County, sustaining the program and trying to meet all the care requests remains challenging.

WCPSS' plan for new hires stalled in 2025 when Wake County lost \$14.1 million to expand its school-based mental health program because of the Trump administration's \$1 billion cut in school mental health grants.

The money was also intended to hire more social workers and onsite therapists at schools. Using funds to hire onsite thera-

pists would help bypass the insurance and cost barriers.

"Some families have insurance, but there's a high deductible. Agencies can't see a student pro bono because they'll be in violation of their insurance contract," Bass said.

Meanwhile, some insurance plans are harder to find providers for. "So, I think we're just stuck," Bass said.

But hiring onsite therapists using the grant money would have allowed kids to get therapy at school without families having to go through insurance to find a therapist elsewhere.

Despite the \$14.1 million funding cut, WCPSS still hopes to expand its mental health program, Bass said.

For now, Bass is working to maintain the program's ties with existing local agencies and to enroll more agencies into contracts with its school-based mental health program. Having more clinics enrolled means a bigger pool of providers to choose from for students.

Still, connecting students with therapists from contracted agencies requires insurance.

WCPSS can circumvent the insurance hurdle if its school-based mental health program directly employed therapists.

Just like how school counselors are permanently staffed, having therapists at school every day would help the program reach more students, Halls said. The lost funding could have made that possible, expanding the sui-

cide prevention safety net.

The Journal of the American Medical Association recently published a study that reported a disproportionately higher use of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline among adolescents and young adults.

Schools can serve as lifelines.

Whether it's through contracts with agencies or through school counselors, embedding mental health resources within schools allows educators and parents to meet students where they are — to offer needed supports and services, and sometimes, just an opportunity for students to be seen.

That sixth grader who reminded Halls of Angry Bird? Through counseling

with Halls as she progressed through middle school, her anger began to dissipate, and she began looking forward to each day.

Now a freshman in high school, she would often email Halls to update on how well she is doing and how much she loves school.

Beyond just lending an ear to understand why students feel the way they do, "I also try to give them encouragement," Halls said. "You are beautiful. You are smart," she would tell them. She wants her students to realize that they are strong and capable of overcoming their challenges, and that they have a wonderful life waiting ahead of them.



UNC MEDIA HUB

With a statewide shortage of school counselors, North Carolina public schools are turning to campus-based mental health programs.

## « BLACK BRILLIANCE »

# Suzanne de Passe opened new doors in entertainment

By Herbert L. White

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Suzanne De Passe is a trailblazing media executive who pushed Motown Records beyond its music roots into television.

DePasse was directly responsible for over \$2 billion in entertainment revenue and discovered some of the biggest Black music acts of the 20th century for the Motown label: Michael Jackson and the Jackson Five, Lionel Richie and the Commodores, Rick James, DeBarge and Teena Marie.

De Passe was born in 1946 in New York City to a mother of Jamaican descent and a father of Haitian and French descent. She attended Manhattan High School and Syracuse University. De Passe began her career in the entertainment industry at the Cheetah nightclub in New York and through her friendship with Supremes singer Cindy Birdsong, went to work at Motown as a creative assistant to label founder Berry Gordy.

Early in her career, De Passe developed The Jackson 5's wardrobe and the acts they took on the road and was instrumental in bringing Motown to television, in-

cluding and highly rated specials, the miniseries "Lonesome Dove" and the award-winning "Motown 25: Yesterday, Today, Forever," which was produced while she was president of Motown Productions.

When Motown was sold, she partnered with Gordy to create Gordy/de Passe Productions and launched de Passe Entertainment in 1992. Her association with Gordy was featured in Vanity Fair magazine in the 2008 article "Motown the Untold Story, The Label's Greatest Legends, In Their Own Words."

In 2002, de Passe was named Time Warner Visiting Professor to the Department of Radio, Television, and Film at Howard University's John H. Johnson School of Communications, a post she held for three years. In 2006, de Passe received an honorary doctorate in the humanities from the HBCU.

From 2002-08, de Passe was executive producer of "Showtime at the Apollo," a nationally syndicated weekly variety program. In 2005 and 2006, she co-created, wrote, and executive-produced the Black Movie Awards for TNT.

In 2024, de Passe was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame with the Ahmet Ertegun Award category for non-performers.



De Passe

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# Classifieds

To Place An Ad:  
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Classified Deadline: Monday at noon, prior to Thursday's edition

## BIDS

### ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

**ALEXANDER COUNTY WATER DISTRICT**  
621 LILEDOWN ROAD  
TAYLORSVILLE, NC 28681

**General Notice**

Alexander County (Owner) is requesting Bids for the construction of the following Project:

**Sterling Road Upgrades Project**  
**CDBG-NG**

Bids for the construction of the Project will be received at the Alexander County Administration Building in the downstairs Conference Room, located at 621 Liledoun Rd, Suite 1; Taylorsville, NC 28681 until Monday, June 1, 2026, at 2:00 PM local time. At that time the Bids received will be publicly opened and read.

The Project includes the following Work:

Approximately 820 LF of grading and asphalt paving, storm drain boxes and pipes, erosion control, and appurtenances.

The Project has an expected duration until August 10, 2026.

The Issuing Office for the Bidding Documents is West Consultants, PLLC; 405 South Sterling Street; Morganton, NC 28655, the contact person is Kathy Jordan, phone: (828) 522-4725, email: kjordan@west-consultants.com. Prospective Bidders may examine the Bidding Documents at the Issuing Office on Mondays through Fridays between the hours of 8 AM and 5 PM and may obtain copies of the Bidding Documents from the Issuing Office as described below.

Bidding Documents also may be examined at:

- ConstructConnect**— online at [www.iSqFt.com](http://www.iSqFt.com); [www.cmdgroup.com](http://www.cmdgroup.com); [www.bidclerk.com](http://www.bidclerk.com); [www.cdcnews.com](http://www.cdcnews.com); [www.constructconnect.com](http://www.constructconnect.com)
- McGraw-Hill Construction/Dodge** — online at [www.construction.com/dodge](http://www.construction.com/dodge)
- **Builders Exchange of Tennessee** — online at [www.bxtn.org](http://www.bxtn.org)

Bidding Documents may be obtained from the Issuing Office during the hours indicated above. Bidding Documents are available on compact disc (as portable document format (PDF) files) for a non-refundable charge of \$50 including shipping via overnight express service. Alternatively, printed Bidding Documents may be obtained from the Issuing Office either via in-person pick-up or via mail, upon Issuing Office's receipt of payment for the Bidding Documents. The non-refundable cost of printed Bidding Documents is \$300 per set, payable to "West Consultants, PLLC". Upon Issuing Office's receipt of payment, printed Bidding Documents will be sent via the Issuing Office's delivery method of choice. An additional charge will be required for special shipping services requested by a Prospective Bidder. The date that the Bidding Documents are transmitted by the Issuing Office will be considered the prospective Bidder's date of receipt of the Bidding Documents. Partial sets of Bidding Documents will not be available from the Issuing Office. Neither Owner nor Engineer will be responsible for full or partial sets of Bidding Documents, including Addenda if any, obtained from sources other than the Issuing Office.

Bidders must hold a valid North Carolina General Contractors license with a classification of "Highway" or "Unclassified".

**Pre-bid Conference**  
No pre-bid conference will be held.

**Instructions to Bidders**  
For all further requirements regarding bid submittal, qualifications, procedures, and contract award, refer to the Instructions to Bidders that are included in the Bidding Documents.

Alexander County encourages small, minority, female, and local contractors to bid on this project. The County is an equal opportunity employer and encourages others to provide equal employment opportunities.

This Advertisement is issued by:

Owner: Alexander County  
By: Josh Mitchell  
Title: Public Works/Facilities Director  
Date: May 8, 2025



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## BIDS

### NOTICE TO BIDDERS

Sealed proposals will be received until 2:00 p.m., on **June 23, 2026**, in the office of **Mecklenburg County Asset & Facility Management Department, 3205 Freedom Drive, Suite 6000, Charlotte, North Carolina 28208**, for the construction of the **Sam Billings Center - Equipment Replacement and Courtyard Modification** at which time and place Bids from North Carolina Licensed General Contractors will be opened and read aloud. Single-prime, lump sum bids from North Carolina Licensed General Contractors will be taken for construction as indicated in the bidding documents. Proposals must be made on standard forms furnished by the County. The project is located at **429 Billingsley Road, Charlotte, North Carolina 28211**.

The Contractor can obtain the Bid Documents digitally at **no cost** from the County's **Authorized Design Consultant**:

**Little Diversified Architectural Consulting**  
615 South College Street – Suite 1600  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28202  
Contact: **William Mumford I**  
[William.mumford@littleonline.com](mailto:William.mumford@littleonline.com) (704) 561-7572

All North Carolina Licensed General Contractors wishing to submit a bid for this project must request the bid documents from the County's **authorized Design Consultant** (listed above) in order to be placed on the official Bidders List for automatic distribution of potential addenda, and to be offered consideration by the County as a responsive bidder. **Bids submitted by Contractors that have not contacted the County's authorized Design Consultant to ensure inclusion on official Bidders List may be considered non-responsive.** All Bidders are responsible for monitoring the NC E-Procurement website throughout the entire bidding period to ensure receipt of all addenda related to this project.

Plans and Specifications shall also be digitally provided to: Charlotte Association of General Contractors (AGC) – *Partnered with iSqFt.com*  
Dodge Data & Analytics (McGraw-Hill Construction)  
Metrolina Minority Contractors Association  
Hispanic Contractors Association of the Carolinas  
Mecklenburg County Business Diversity & Inclusion (BDI) Program

A mandatory pre-bid meeting shall be held at **9:00 a.m., on May 26, 2026, at Sam Billings Center, 429 Billingsley Road, Charlotte, North Carolina 28211.**

Bid, Performance, and Payment & Material bonds shall be required for this project. The laws of North Carolina and applicable regulations of various Licensing Boards and BDI provisions will be observed in receiving bids and awarding contracts. Mecklenburg County reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and to waive informalities or technicalities, as it may deem to be in its best interest. Upon request, this information will be made available in an alternative format for persons with disabilities. Please call 704-561-7572 for assistance.

## EMPLOYMENT

Lead Cybersecurity needed by AT&T SERVICES, INC. in Charlotte, NC to *Test, proof of concept and support for various cyber related projects.* Apply at <http://att.jobs/>, select JOB SEARCH and APPLY and select Search by Requisition Number at the left bottom of the page and enter Job Number: R-108469.

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THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2026 PAGE 5B

« ON THE MARQUEE »

# Symphony gets into Wakanda

By Herbert L. White  
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

The latest events, productions and exhibits in Charlotte and beyond:

**May 15-16**

Charlotte Symphony Orchestra presents Copland & Kahane at Knight Theater.

The season concludes with a deeply personal and poignant reflection on the meaning of home led by Grammy-winning music director Kwamé Ryan.

**May 16**

*Smooth: The Music of D'Angelo* at Carolina Theatre. A symphonic celebration of the singer's catalog, scored, arranged, and curated by Harvey Cummings II. On the playlist are favorites "Brown Sugar," "Voodoo," and "Black Messiah."

Tickets: [www.thecarolina.com](http://www.thecarolina.com).

**Through May 21**

*SouthPark After 5*, a free evening entertainment series, is at Symphony Park at the corner of Barclay Downs Drive and Carnegie Boulevard, adjacent to SouthPark Mall.

Live music and free community events run from 5-9 p.m.

• May 7 - *On the Border Ultimate Eagles Tribute* with Ryan & Woody and the United States Navy Band.

• May 14 - *Landslide* tribute to Fleetwood Mac with Square Roots.

• May 21 - *Captain Mike & The Shipwrecked* with Drew Nathan Duo.

**May 22-23**

*Gerald Albright*, Middle C Jazz, 300 S. Brevard St. Nine-time Grammy-nominated saxophonist plays some of his greatest hits. Tickets at [www.middlec-jazz.com](http://www.middlec-jazz.com).

*Alex Bugnon*, Middle C Jazz, 300 S. Brevard St. World-renowned pianist plays Charlotte. Tickets at [www.middlec-jazz.com](http://www.middlec-jazz.com).

**June 5-6**

Charlotte Symphony Orchestra presents "Black Panther in Concert," Belk Theater, 130 N Tryon St.

T'Challa becomes king and battles Killmonger in the 2018 Marvel film that introduced the cinematic world to Wakanda. Ryan Coogler's feature-length film goes on the big screen as conductor Anthony Parnter and Charlotte Symphony performs Ludwig Göransson's Oscar and Grammy-winning score live on stage.

Tickets range from \$39.15 to \$172.93 at [tix.blumenthalarts.org](http://tix.blumenthalarts.org).

**June 6**

Grammy-nominated R&B singer Ari Lennox brings her North American tour to Skyla Credit Union Amphitheatre. The show is in support of her third studio album *Vacancy*.

Tickets at [livenation.com](http://livenation.com).

**June 18**

*Trouble So Hard - Song & Stories of Slavery, Freedom, & Civil Rights*, a live performance at Tyvola Senior Citizen Center, 2225 Tyvola Road. In late October, *Trouble So Hard* was awarded a Mecklenburg County Culture Block Grant by Arts & Science Council.

Performances are free, but registration is required at [troublesohard.com/reserve](http://troublesohard.com/reserve).

**June 19**

*Juneteenth Art Fest*, 4-8 p.m., Shoppes at University Place 8931 JM Keynes Drive.

Second annual Juneteenth Art Fest celebrates the vibrant culture and history of Juneteenth with art, music, and community. The family-friendly event is free and features local artists, live music, dance performances, and a marketplace showcasing small, minority-owned business.

**July 17-18**

*Usher and Chris Brown*, Bank of America Stadium.

Grammy winners Chris Brown and Usher have a pair of Charlotte dates on their North American stadium tour. The tour follows record-breaking accomplishments for both artists. At the end of 2024, the North American leg of Usher: Past, Present, Future sold over 1.1 million tickets.

In October, Brown's *Breezy Bowl XX World Tour* was his highest-grossing and the highest-grossing tour ever by a solo Black American male, earning nearly \$300 million and drawing 2 million fans in North America, Europe, and the United Kingdom.

Tickets: [raymondandbrowntour.com](http://raymondandbrowntour.com).

**Aug. 12**

*P.J. Morton*, Carolina Theatre, 7:30 p.m.

New Orleans-based Morton is a soul singer, songwriter, performer and producer who has earned six Grammy awards and 22 nominations while selling out venues around the world.

Tickets are \$82-\$135 and available at [thecharolina.com](http://thecharolina.com).



THEATRE CHARLOTTE

The cast of Theatre Charlotte's production of "The Color Purple," through May 24 at 501 Queens Road.

# Stage production of 'The Color Purple' still has juice

Pulitzer Prize-winning novel adapted into musical at Theatre Charlotte

By Nikya Hightower

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

"The Color Purple" still resonates.

Theatre Charlotte is bringing Pulitzer Prize-winning to the stage May 8-24 at 501 Queens Road. Tickets are \$34 for adults, \$28 for seniors and \$20 for students, with some performances already sold out. Showtimes, special events and tickets are available at [theatrecharlotte.org/purple](http://theatrecharlotte.org/purple).

In this production, director Corey Mitchell focuses on the interpersonal relationships in Alice Walker's novel. In this musical adaptation, Mitchell's approach is about respecting the text.

"The original tagline on the show was a musical about love and looking around in this environment right now I could definitely say that we need a lot more love going on," Mitchell said. "To explore these relationships and to come back to this story that's about resilience, joy and culture, it's done my soul well."

In "The Color Purple," the audience follows Celie, who finds her voice and becomes liberated to escape an oppressive life filled with abuse and discrimination. For Mitchell,

portraying the story with honesty means seeing the Black experience more fully.

"I would parallel that a lot with things within my own family and ask them about how these things translate within their families," he said. "Who the caretakers are, how that came to be and what are the family secrets which was the whole reason why Alice Walker wrote this book to begin with."

Mitchell said putting stories like this on stage is important because it reminds audiences about the connection between the past and present.

"This is not something our ancestors

have not seen," Mitchell said. "The love of God, the love of community and the love of helping each other, just love in general. That is the thing that will always endure and that will help us get through."

The director wanted to pay tribute to the original source material and hopes audiences will appreciate the theater's attention to detail, especially fans of the novel, who may notice Easter eggs throughout the performance.

Mitchell shared that working with a team of Black multigenerational professionals is about appreciating and presenting something bigger than themselves to the city.

"This isn't just another musical," he said. "This is a cultural touchstone for a lot of Black folks."



Mitchell

Mitchell said putting stories like this on stage is important because it reminds audiences about the connection between the past and present.

"This is not something our ancestors



This isn't just another musical. This is a cultural touchstone for a lot of Black folks.

COREY MITCHELL, director of Theatre Charlotte's production of 'The Color Purple'



# 'These private eyes have wool over their eyes

By Dwight Brown

BLACK PRESS USA

The Sheep Detectives

2 stars

Maybe out of fear of putting filmgoers to sleep, the sheep has not been much of a mainstay at the movies.

There's Charles Burnett's lyrical classic "Killer of Sheep." You could get creative and cite Chris Farley's "Black Sheep." But really, this is the domain of "Shaun the Sheep," the uber-charming Aardman Animation about the wordless but wise guardian of Mossy Bottom Farm.

Joining this small flock of films now is "The Sheep Detectives," which, like "Shaun the Sheep," takes place in the verdant English countryside and concerns barnyard animals with higher-than-usual IQs. Every night, shepherd George Hardy (Hugh Jackman) reads murder mysteries as bedtime stories for his hillside of grass grazers.

They listen intently and bleat the bad guys. Only while talking amongst themselves afterward do they reveal their hidden powers of deduction.

So, when George turns up dead, the sheep are on the case. Led by the particularly keen Lily (voiced by Julia Louis-Dreyfus), they prove remarkably adept private eyes despite the wool over their eyes.

But if such an ewe-dunit premise has you expecting a lightly funny caper, "The Sheep Detectives" is too gentle and strenuously poignant to turn its silly tale into all that much fun. As devoid as I was previously of opinions on sheep detective movies, I do think they ought to be funny. There are undoubtedly a few decent gags here — the cleverest trick is to make the MGM lion baa, not roar, at the start — but "The Sheep Detectives" is too mild to stand out from the herd of mysteries, even as a strictly family-friendly variety.

"Shears Out," we could call it. "The Sheep Detectives" is adapted from Leonie Swann's 2005 book, "Three Bags Full," and it has tried to find some middle ground between the novel and "Babe." While such a tone might have



AMAZON MGM STUDIOS

This image by Amazon MGM Studios shows characters Mopple (voiced by Chris O'Dowd) and Lily (Julia-Louis Dreyfus) in a scene from "The Sheep Detectives."

been catnip from someone like "Paddington" don Paul King, it's a little elusive for director Kyle Balda ("Despicable Me 3") and screenwriter Craig Mazin, creator of "Chernobyl" and "The Last of Us."

Neither of those, the last time I checked, feature anything like cute little lambs.

Still, that unlikely genesis also gives "The Sheep Detectives" a sweet backdrop. Who wouldn't want to take refuge for a little while from mushroom zombies and nuclear disaster, plus everything else in the world, with some gumshoes in hooves?

But "The Sheep Detectives" makes a rickety ark. The sheep are strictly CGI — inevitable, perhaps and technically unblemished, but still limiting considering they're really the movie's real main characters. Aside from Lily, there's Mopple (Chris O'Dowd), the sole sheep with a sharp memory; an elderly ram named Sir Richfield (Patrick Stewart); Sebastian (Bryan Cranston); the fluffy Cloud (Regina King); and a pair of rams named Reggie and Ronnie (both Brett Goldstein).

After the murder, the dimwitted local police officer Derry (an endearingly dopey Nicholas Braun, in his best post-"Succession" role yet) bumbles his way

through clues that lead him to the arrest of George's daughter, Rebecca (Molly Gordon). Hong Chau is here as a local innkeeper. And Emma Thompson, queen of heartrending rural British tales, drops in as George's lawyer. Her reading of the will sets off new suspicions.

The sheep stealthily surround the human characters, nudging them along in the case. But "The Sheep Detectives" largely eschews anthropomorphized hijinks for more tender lessons. All but Mopple in the flock have the ability to sweep anything from their memory. That willful refusal of any uncomfortable thought has led them to believe sheep don't die; they turn into clouds.

That a movie called "The Sheep Detectives" tries to impart lessons of morality and mindfulness is, of course, laudable. A wide swath of entertainment aimed at children makes no such attempt. But "The Sheep Detectives" could have used more slapstick and less CGI sincerity. In the end, it's not even close. Shaun the Sheep still rules the roost.

"The Sheep Detectives," an Amazon MGM release, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association for thematic material, some violent content and brief language. Running time: 110 minutes.

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