

‘Alternative facts’ aren’t a reason to skip vaccines

By Elisabeth Rosenthal
KFF HEALTH NEWS

President Donald Trump’s administrations have been notorious for an array of “alternative facts” — ranging from the relatively minor (the size of inaugural crowds) to threats to U.S. democracy, such as who really won the 2020 election.

And over the past six months, the stakes have been life or death: Trump’s health officials have been endorsing alternative facts in science to impose policies that contradict modern medical knowledge.

It is an undeniable fact — true science — that vaccines have been miraculous in preventing terrible diseases from polio to tetanus to measles. Numerous studies have shown they do not cause autism. That is accepted by the scientific community.

Yet Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has no medical background or scientific training, doesn’t believe all that. The consequences of such misinformation have already been deadly.

For decades, the vast majority Americans willingly got their shots — even if a significant slice of parents had misgivings. A 2015 survey found that 25% of parents believed that the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine could cause autism. A 1998 study that suggested the connection has been thoroughly discredited. Despite that concern, just 2% of children entering kindergarten were exempted from vaccinations for religious or philosophical objections. Kids got their shots.

But more recently, poor government science communication and online purveyors of misinformation have tilled the soil for alternative facts to grow like weeds. In the 2024-25 school year, rates of full vaccination for those entering kindergarten dropped to just over 92%. In more than a dozen states, the rate

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Heart disease still the leading cause of death in America

FAMILY FEATURES

While medical advances have helped people live longer with cardiovascular diseases, many of the risk factors that lead to these diseases continue to grow.

Fueled by ongoing increases in high blood pressure, obesity and other major risk factors, heart disease continues to kill more people in the U.S. than any other cause, according to the American Heart Association’s 2025 Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update. In fact, cardiovascular diseases including heart disease and stroke claim more lives than all forms of cancer and accidental deaths — the No. 2 and No. 3 causes of death — combined.

According to the update, nearly 47% of U.S. adults have high blood pressure, more than 72% are at an unhealthy weight, nearly 42% are obese and more than half have Type 2 diabetes or prediabetes.

The annual report published in “Circulation,” the peer-reviewed, flagship journal of the American Heart Association, shows the prevalence of cardiovascular risk factors are projected to worsen over the coming decades.

“Although we have made a lot of progress against cardiovascular disease in the past few decades, there is a lot more work that remains to be done,” said Dhruv S. Kazi, M.D., M.Sc., M.S., FAHA, head of health economics and associated director of the Richard A. and Susan F. Smith Center for Outcomes Research in Cardiology at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and associate professor at Harvard Medical School.

“If recent trends continue, hypertension and obesity will each affect more than 180 million U.S. adults by 2050, whereas the prevalence of diabetes will

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«RIDES

Wagon? SUV? Subaru’s Outback ages gracefully with the 2025 Touring XT

By Winfred Cross
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Subaru’s current Outback is the sixth generation that debuted in 2020.

Twenty-five years before that the first Outback was born when Subaru spruced up a Legacy station wagon with SUV trappings. That’s why I revel in calling Outback the best station wagon money can buy.

All that changes this fall when the seventh generation Outback becomes boxier and looks more like an SUV. For now, the 2025 still appeals to me because of its car-like manner and easy to drive nature.

The Outback is Subaru’s second largest vehicle, living between the Forester

and the Ascent. It seats five and has enough cargo space to carry most occupants’ junk. My test vehicle was the Touring XT which has a lot of standard equipment and a fairly powerful engine. This trim lie gets a 2.4-liter turbo-charged four-cylinder that makes 260 horsepower and 277 pounds-feet of torque. These are significant power upgrades from the base 2.5-liter engine. A continuously variable transmission sends power to all four wheels.

The Outback is a handsome vehicle that has a wide stance and family friendly looks. It’s easy to exit and enter and has a very comfortable loading

height. The Outback’s interior is showing its age but still a nice place to sit. The gauge cluster is recessed under a hood that keeps glare away. To the right is a vertical touch screen that is sharp and clear but needs a graphic’s update. You get a volume and tuning knob but not much else. The screen’s response is quick but finding what you are looking for may be a bit challenging.

The front seats are comfortable and supportive. The driver’s seat can be adjusted to find most any driver’s “just-right” position. The driving position offers a panoramic view of the road, almost rendering



SUBARU

Subaru’s 2025 Outback Touring XT sends the sixth generation vehicle out gracefully.

the blindspot detection system useless — almost.

There is plenty of hip, head and leg room in the

rear for three adults. The rear seat can be lowered to carry even more stuff.

The Outback is designed

to be taken off-road but the Wilderness version may be best suited for that. This

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M/I HOMES

Alan Beulah is president of M/I Homes Charlotte division, continuing a career built on construction and real estate. He is the second person of color to hold such a position in company history.

Selling the American dream a home at a time

M/I Homes Charlotte division chief Alan Beulah taps into energy

By Charles K. Harris
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

When Alan Beulah was asked by long-time friend George Schulmeyer if he was willing to step into Schulmeyer’s role as M/I Homes Charlotte division president, he was reluctant.

“I was really happy doing what I was doing,” said Beulah, who was Charlotte vice president of sales and marketing at the time.

However, when Beulah considered the productive office energy that Schulmeyer created, he reconsidered.

“Only because it’s here,” Beulah recalled, expecting a gradual transition.

It didn’t happen.

Schulmeyer died suddenly in February, and Beulah stepped into the role.

Founded in 1976 in Ohio, M/I Homes is a nationally recognized residential home builder, specializing in family-friendly com-

munity developments in 17 U.S. markets. Generally, the communities contain between 70 and 300 single family homes and M/I Homes offers buyers multiple services under one umbrella including financing, design and construction.

According to CompaniesMarket-Cap.com, M/I Homes grossed just over \$4.5 billion in the U.S. last year.

While it is a company Beulah’s career path equipped him for, he admits home construction and real estate were not even on his radar as a young person.

Born in Cambridgeshire, England, where his father, a non-commissioned Air Force officer, was stationed, Beulah spent his early years in Europe. Once the family returned to the U.S., they moved frequently but Beulah doesn’t lament the itinerant lifestyle.

“I loved the travelling. [I think] you are more well-rounded,” he

said. “It broadens your horizons.”

Eventually Beulah, his parents, and three younger siblings settled at Andrews Air Force Base in Camp Springs, Maryland. Upon graduating high school in 1977, he attended Frostburg State University, where he earned an undergraduate degree in psychology and a master’s in business administration. Beulah also began working as the university’s assistant director of admissions and minority recruiter — job in which he flourished.

“I enjoyed interacting with people,” he says.

Later, Beulah took a job as special assistant to the regional administrator at the General Services Administration in Washington, D.C.

After earning his real estate license, Beulah started selling real estate as a side hustle.

His sales skills and personable

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Medical school diversity data still missing

By Michelle Crouch

CHARLOTTE LEDGER

Mecklenburg County commissioners chair Mark Jerrell said he is confident that Atrium Health will share data with him on the racial and ethnic makeup of the first class on the Wake Forest University School of Medicine’s Charlotte campus — but he doesn’t have the numbers yet and doesn’t know if they will be made public.

When hospital leaders announced the new school in 2021, they said they wanted the class to be “one of the most diverse learner bodies in the country.” But as The Charlotte Ledger/NC Health News previously reported, the city’s first four-year medical school has so far declined to release the data, despite a request from Jerrell.

Jerrell, who was quoted saying he would have a problem if Atrium withheld the data, said he subsequently had a long conversation with a top Atrium Health executive.



ATRIUM HEALTH

Atrium Health has yet to publicly share data on the racial and ethnic makeup of the first class of students at the new medical school in Charlotte.

“They wanted to make sure that I got their perspective,” Jerrell said about his conversation with the Atrium executive, whom he did not name. “And I’m not speaking for Atrium, but it is very reasonable in my mind that if you put out that data in this political

climate, to be concerned that the administration will challenge that.”

Over the past year, institutions nationwide have faced public backlash related to their diversity efforts amid heightened national scrutiny and the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2023

decision banning race-conscious admissions. The number of medical students from underrepresented groups has dropped significantly, even as some data show better outcomes in underrepresented patient pop-

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M/I Homes Charlotte chief leads with energy

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nature had efficacious results.

“Within 90 days I handed in my resignation [at GSA],” he said, in favor of work as a realtor in the Washington market before transitioning to new home sales with a small local builder. After that, he went on to work with National Builders in Fort Myers and Tampa, Florida, Atlanta and Charlotte.

In 2015, Beulah joined M/I Homes. A few years later, Schulmeyer joined, and the Charlotte division as well as their friendship blossomed.

“We had a lot of commonality,” said Beulah, who complimented Schu-leyer’s tight-knit, people-centric management style.

“He was very inclusive,” Beulah recounted. “He always involved his senior staff in making decisions. He laid good groundwork.”

Beulah has endeavored to maintain that atmosphere since taking the helm.

“I don’t view it as taking over,” he said. “I view it as continuing to carry the torch. And I want to take that torch higher.”

Beulah also hopes his appointment as president, only the second of a minority in company history, will send positive messages beyond his office.

“This is my chance to say, ‘Hey, it is indeed possible.’ It opens doors,” he said. “This is a viable career choice. This isn’t just building,” adding the corporation has separate sales, finance, construction, purchasing and customer care departments.

“This is a big industry,” Beulah adds. “It provides a needed service and that

will never change.”

According to Beulah some 90 people in the Charlotte region are employed by M/I and the industry isn’t slowing down.

[Charlotte-Mecklenburg] is a very competitive market,” Beulah said. “Most major builders are here, have been here or are trying to get here.”

People just starting to chart a career path aren’t the only ones Beulah encourages to prepare for future success. His hope is to see more people groups become homeowners although there are substantial racial disparities.

U.S. Census statistics reported by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis show white ownership rates at 74% compared to the Black rate just under 44%. The gap is higher than in 1960, when race-based discrimination was still technically legal.

“I think it’s getting educated about the benefits of home ownership,” Beulah said, adding that a broader understanding of finances in general would better equip potential homeowners.

“[I’d say first] talk with a lender to get an understanding of where you stand. Come up with a plan. If you don’t have a lot of money saved, improve your credit. Have a plan and work on a plan.”

Beulah emphasizes the struggle toward homeownership is worth it, pointing out it builds financial stability and economic freedom.

“Home ownership is a great steppingstone,” he said. “You are paying for more than just a home, you are investing in your future.”

Heart disease still leading cause of death in America

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climb to more than 80 million. Over the same time period, we expect to see a 300% increase in health care costs related to cardiovascular disease.”

Prevalence for major risk factors varies across sex and race:

- Black women had the highest rate of obesity at 57.9%, compared to the lowest rate of 14.5% among Asian women.

- Hispanic men had the highest rate of diabetes at 14.5%, compared to the lowest rate of 7.7% among

white women.

- Black women had the highest rate of high blood pressure at 58.4%, compared to the lowest rate of 35.3% among Hispanic women.

The prevalence of these risk factors – obesity in particular – is growing among young people globally. As many as 40% of U.S. children have an unhealthy weight with 20% having obesity. Nearly 60% of adults globally have an unhealthy weight.

Long considered one of the leading preventable

causes of death in the U.S. and worldwide, tobacco use is also trending down. Smoking rates have steadily declined among both adults and youth since the U.S. Surgeon General’s first report on the dangers of smoking from 51% of men and 34% of women in 1965 to 15.6% and 12%, respectively, in 2018.

To find the full report and more advice for healthy living, visit heart.org.

Subaru Outback turns the page

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Touring XT trim level is more for urban settings. Put the Outback on the highway and you see why it’s a buyer’s favorite. The engine has the right amount of power to move the vehicle with authority. Getting in and out of traffic isn’t a problem.

The engine is relatively smooth even if you press it hard. The all-wheel drive system provides plenty of grip in the rain and while cornering on dry pavement.

Outback’s road manners are excellent. Whisking around twisty roads is kinda fun and just rolling down straight stretches of road is fairly satisfying. The four-wheel independent suspension soaks up most road imperfections with ease. The ride is very comfortable but not cushy. There isn’t a whole lot of road or wind noise, so the car remains quiet even if you are traveling more than 70 mile per hour.

The Touring XT model comes with a lot of standard equipment which includes: 2.4-liter turbo engine, heated front and

rear seats, hands free entry, adaptive cruise control, electric power steering, dual zone climate control, heated steering wheel, power tilt and slide sunroof, descent control, 576 watt 12-speaker audio system, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, reclining rear seats, lane keeping assist, rear cross traffic alert and self-levelling head lights.

The starting price for the Touring XT is \$44,730. You can go higher with option packages and accessories, but the standard equipment model will be enough for most.

Pros:

- All-wheel drive
- Turbo engine
- Four-wheel independent suspension
- Excellent interior space
- Fairly quiet ride
- Smooth, comfortable ride
- Looks like a station wagon

Cons:

- Dated looks
- Touch screen dated graphics

‘Alternative facts’ argument is no reason to skip vaccination

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was under 90%, and in Idaho it was under 80%. And now we have a stream of measles cases, more than 1,300 from a disease declared extinct in the U.S. a quarter-century ago.

It’s easy to see how both push and pull factors led to the acceptance of bad science on vaccines.

The number of recommended vaccines has ballooned this century, overwhelming patients and parents. That is, in large part, because the clinical science of vaccinology has boomed (that’s good). And in part because vaccines, which historically sold for pennies, now often sell for hundreds of dollars, becoming a source of big profits for drugmakers.

In 1986, a typical child was recommended to receive 11 vaccine doses — seven injections and four oral. Today, that number has risen to between 50 and 54 doses by age 18.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, which renders judgments on vaccines, makes a scientific risk-benefit assessment: that the harm of getting the disease is greater than the risk of side effects. That does not mean that all vaccines are equally effective, and health officials have done a lackluster job of fostering public understanding of that fact.

Older vaccines — think polio and measles — are essentially 100% effective; diseases that parents dreaded were wiped off the map. Many newer vaccines, though recommended and useful (and often heavily advertised), don’t carry the same emotional or medical punch.

Parents of the current generation haven’t experienced how sick a child could be with measles or whooping cough, also called pertussis. Mothers didn’t really worry about hepatitis B, a virus generally transmitted through sex or intravenous drug use, infecting their child.

That lack of understanding spawned skeptics. For example, since 2010, the vaccine for influenza, which had been around for decades, has been recommended annually for all Americans at least six months old.

In the 2024-25 season, the rate of flu vaccination was only between 36% and 54% in adults; in other years, it has been lower than that. “I got the flu vaccine, and I still got the flu” has been a common refrain of skeptics.

“Pre-covid, there were people who took everything but flu,” said Rupali Limaye, an associate professor at Johns Hopkins University’s Bloomberg School of Public Health, who studies vaccine demand and acceptance. “Then it became everything but covid. Now it’s everything — including MMR and polio.”

Even as the first Trump administration’s Operation Warp Speed helped develop covid vaccines, conservative media

outlets created doubts that the shots were needed: doubts that mRNA technology had been sufficiently tested; doubts that covid-19 was bad enough to merit a shot; concerns that the vaccines could cause infertility or autism.

Trump did little to correct these dangerous misperceptions and got booed by supporters when he said that he’d been vaccinated. Once vaccine mandates came into play, Trump strongly opposed them, reframing belief in the vaccine as a question of personal liberty. And if the government couldn’t mandate the covid shot for school, it followed that officials shouldn’t — couldn’t — mandate others.

Thus 100 years of research proving the virtues of vaccination got dropped into a stew of alternative facts. You were either pro- or anti-vaccine, and that signaled your politics. Suddenly, the anti-vax crowd was not a small fringe of liberal parents, but a much larger group of conservative stalwarts who believed that being forced to vaccinate their kids to enter school violated their individual rights.

Even within the Trump administration, there have been some who (at least partly) decried the trend. While Marty Makary, the Food and Drug Administration commissioner, defended Kennedy’s decision to roll back the recommendation that all Americans get annual covid boosters — saying the benefits were unproven — he noted it should not be a signal to stop taking other shots.

As “public trust in vaccination in general has declined,” he wrote, the reluctance to vaccinate had harmed “vital immunization programs such as that for measles-mumps-rubella vaccination, which has been clearly established as safe and highly effective.”

Nonetheless, Makary’s boss, Kennedy, continued to promote bad science about vaccines broadly, even as he sometimes grudgingly acknowledged their utility in cases like a measles outbreak. He has funded new research on the already disproven link between MMR shots and autism. He has halted \$500 million in grants for developing vaccines using mRNA technology, the novel production method used for the first covid vaccines and a technique scientists believe holds great promise for preventing deaths from other infectious diseases.

In my 10 years practicing as a physician, I never saw a case of measles. Now there are cases in 40 states. More than 150 people have been hospitalized, and three, all unvaccinated, have died.

Alternative facts have formed what David Scales, a physician and sociologist at Weill Cornell Medical College who studies misinformation, calls “an unhealthy information system.” It is an alternative scientific universe in which too many Americans live. And some die.



UNSPASH

The Trump administration has canceled millions of dollars in school mental health grants across the United States, which also impacts four North Carolina programs.

Trump cancels millions in school mental health grants

By Taylor Knopf

NORTH CAROLINA HEALTH NEWS

In April, the federal Department of Education canceled hundreds of millions of dollars in grant funding that put additional mental health workers and services in schools, including four grants in North Carolina.

The schools were notified by vague, boilerplate letters that said their funding — which was supposed to be doled out over a five-year period — would end in December. The termination letters say that the grants are ultimately not “in the best interest of the Federal Government.”

Recipients of the canceled grants in North Carolina said they appealed the decision and asked the Department of Education to restore their grant funding, but they have not heard back.

As the fall semester fast approaches, school leaders are faced with tough decisions. Those that are several years into their grant funding may have to let employees go who were hired as part of the grant. More recent grant recipients will not be able to fully launch their projects on only one year of funding.

All this means North Carolina students will lose out on much needed mental health services.

These programs helped meet a huge need in North Carolina; the state is far behind the recommended ratios of students per mental

health worker. In North Carolina schools, there is an average of one social worker for every 995 students. The recommended ratio is one for every 250.

And the need is only increasing. The latest data shows that nearly 40% of high school students report experiencing persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness, and 29% said they experienced poor mental health, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The biannual survey also found that 20 percent of students said they seriously considered attempting suicide, and 10 percent said they attempted it.

These school-based mental health grants came from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which was passed in 2022 after the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, where an 18-year-old shot and killed 19 students and two teachers at Robb Elementary School. The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the first significant piece of gun violence prevention legislation to make it through Congress in 30 years, included \$1 billion for two grant programs that would increase mental health services offered to students while they’re in school.

Cuts in North Carolina

U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis, a Republican, was a big supporter of the bill and held a one-year anniversary event

in Raleigh to celebrate its passage. At the event in 2023, Tillis said he was “semi-obsessed with making sure North Carolina becomes the nation’s best practice on the implementation of all the behavioral health provisions” in the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.

Guilford County Schools, Iredell-Statesville Schools, Surry County Schools and Wake County Schools were selected to take part in the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program, which provides five years of funding for the school districts to hire more social workers and psychologists to serve students. Guilford and Wake Counties received letters on April 29 terminating their grants.

The N.C. Department of Public Instruction, North Carolina State University and the University of North Carolina were selected to take part in the Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant Program. The program was supposed to provide five years of funding to place mental health professionals in high-need school districts as part of their training, while also providing services to students. Both universities had their grants canceled by the Department of Education.

Meanwhile, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, Iredell-Statesville Schools and Surry County Schools told NC Health News that they did not re-

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Medical school diversity

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ulations when their physicians come from a similar background.

Atrium Health did not respond to a request Tuesday asking about the ethnic and racial backgrounds of its first class. Previously, the hospital shared only geographic data when asked for demographic details.

Transparency at ECU

The Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University recently updated a matriculants dashboard that includes demographic data about its first-year class, a spokesman said.

The dashboard shows that 10 percent of its incoming class of 91 students self-reported as Black or African American, and 7 percent self-reported as Hispanic. All of the incoming students are residents of North Carolina, and seven are first-generation college students.

In 2024, ECU boasted one of the highest rates of Black medical students among non-HBCU schools, according to a U.S. News & World Report analysis.

Alan Wolf, a spokesman for the UNC School of Medicine, previously said that the school would release the ethnic and racial data of its first-year class once they matriculated. He said the information would not be available until September because the medical school relies on the main campus census, which includes undergraduates, for its demographics.

Diversity stats disappear

The Duke University School of Medicine also did not provide data in time for publication.

"We'll see what we can do," a spokeswoman wrote in an email.

A 2025 class profile page lists only the number of applicants, interviewees and matriculants. An archived version of the page from November 2024 shows it included the percentage of students from backgrounds underrepresented in medicine.

The Wake Forest School of Medicine also previously included that category on its class profile page, according to an archived version of the site. It has since been removed.

A look at several medical school websites nationwide shows that many have yet to post 2025 class demographics. The medical schools at Harvard and Johns Hopkins still list the percentage of incoming students from backgrounds underrepresented

in medicine on their 2024 class profile sites. Other schools, such as Emory and the Medical University of South Carolina, don't include that data.

Other Charlotte elected officials expect to see data

The new campus of the Wake Forest University School of Medicine is Charlotte's first four-year medical school. Operated by Atrium Health in partnership with Wake Forest, it opened in July with an inaugural class of 49 students.

In 2021, city and county leaders in Charlotte approved \$75 million in public funding for the \$1.5 billion medical innovation district where the medical school is located.

In addition to Jarrell, three other county commissioners — Arthur Griffin, Laura Meier and George Dunlap — told the Ledger/NC Health News they expect Atrium to release data about the school's demographics, especially given the public investment.

Jerrell said he planned to ask Atrium about the data again this week. He said he didn't know if Atrium would share the data publicly: "That's a good question. That will be step two that I have to solve. I know we'll have conversations about the public being able to have that information."

At a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Hospital Authority board meeting last week, Atrium Health reported \$6.9 billion in net operating revenue for the first half of 2025. Its net income for the period — which some would call profit — was \$426 million.

The hospital authority operates as Atrium Health, which is the division of Advocate Health that does business in the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama.

Felicia Hall Allen, one of two hospital authority board members who voted against a recent change that scrubbed DEI language from the board's bylaws, told the Ledger/NC Health News that she didn't have any information about whether Atrium would release additional demographic data.

She said Advocate Health CEO Gene Woods has honored his commitments in the past.

"What I will tell you is that I trust that Gene Woods stands by his words," she said. "I have never known him not to, and so I trust his intentions, and he always does the right thing."

Trump cancels millions in school mental health grants

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ceive a termination letter and their programs will continue.

Many have expressed confusion about why some of this much-needed grant funding has been canceled. The services provided with these funds led to significant decreases in suicide risk, fewer absentee days and fewer behavior problems in the classroom.

Nationally, Republicans and Democrats in Congress are demanding answers from the Department of Education. Meanwhile, more than a dozen state attorneys general have sued the department to restore the funds.

Why some grants were canceled

Though it's not stated in the termination letters, Department of Education representatives have told news media outlets that language about diversity, equity and inclusion included in the grant proposals contributed to the department canceling their funding.

The Department of Education told CBS News that it found "grant recipients used the funding to implement race-based actions like recruiting quotas." The department told the education reporting outlet Chalkbeat that one grant recipient planned to hire 24 new school counselors and set a goal for eight of them to be people of color. Another example the department deemed problematic was that one grant recipient said they would train therapists to address racial trauma, Chalkbeat reported.

The Department of Education didn't respond to NC Health News' questions in time for publication.

A department spokesperson defended the cuts to Education Week, saying: "Under the deeply flawed priorities of the Biden Administration, grant recipients used the funding to implement race-based actions like recruiting quotas in ways that have nothing to do with mental health and could hurt the very students the grants are supposed to help."

The mental health workforce has been predominantly white for a long time, and research has shown that matching providers with patients from similar backgrounds leads to higher patient satisfaction and better effectiveness of treatment. There's also a long history of discrimination and barriers to mental health treatment for marginalized communities, which is why the previous administration encouraged grant applicants to consider addressing these issues in their applications.

The identical letters of termination sent to grant recipients list four possible rea-

sons why their funding was canceled, including that they "violate the letter or purpose of Federal civil rights law; conflict with the Department's policy of prioritizing merit, fairness, and excellence in education; undermine the well-being of the students these programs are intended to help; or constitute an inappropriate use of federal funds."

A lawsuit filed in July by attorneys general from 16 states said "the Department issued these boilerplate notices [...] providing little to no insight into the basis for the discontinuance, yet destroying projects years in the making."

"To this day, Plaintiffs do not know which of the four theoretical reasons apply to their grants or why the Department discontinued their grants but not Program grants to other states that had been awarded using the same priorities and selection criteria."

North Carolina Attorney General Jeff Jackson did not join this lawsuit. A spokesperson for his office said they are monitoring the case and assessing its potential impact for students in North Carolina. This mental health grant funding is separate from nearly \$7 billion in education funding that was withheld by the federal government, which Jackson and other state attorneys general sued over last month and successfully restored.

The lawsuit says that if grant recipients are being "punished" for following Congress' directive that school funds be distributed in a way that ensures equitable access to services, the department is in violation of the Constitution's separation of powers.

The attorneys general claim that the department cannot "discontinue a multi-year grant based on newly sprung priorities." They also note that the "boilerplate notices do not mention grantee performance."

'These programs work'

The lawsuit also included some notable statistics from grant programs, including a 50 percent reduction in suicide risk at high-need schools and an 80 percent reduction in student wait time for mental health services.

"By all markers, these programs work," the lawsuit states.

Schools are where children spend the majority of their time, and for many, it's the only place they will ever encounter mental health care, explained Eric Rossen, executive director of the National Association of School Psychologists, in a letter to members of Congress urging them to intervene to restore the grant funding.



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BIDS

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Mecklenburg County is requesting a Statement-of-Qualifications (SOQ) from qualified General Contractors for Construction Manager @ Risk services for Tuckaseegee Recreation Center and Park.

The Firm selected must be licensed in North Carolina, qualified & have experience providing General Contracting Construction Services utilizing CM@Risk methodology.

A copy of the complete RFQ may be obtained beginning August 25, 2025, by sending an official Notification-of-Interest via mail or email to: Steven Wallace, Mecklenburg County Asset & Facility Management, 3205 Freedom Drive, Suite 6000, Charlotte, NC 28208 or: AFM.RFQ@mecklenburgcountync.gov

Submittals must be received by September 30, 2025, at 2:00pm.

Upon request, this information will be made available in an alternate format for persons with disabilities by calling 980-314-2500.

NOTICE TO BIDDERS

Sealed proposals will be received until **2 pm, on Tuesday, September 23, 2025, in the office of Mecklenburg County Asset & Facility Management Department, 3205 Freedom Drive, Suite 6000, Charlotte, NC 28208**, for the construction of the **Mecklenburg County Courthouse 8th Floor Interior Finishes Updates Project** at which time and place Bids will be opened and read aloud. Single-prime, lump sum bids 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 832 E 4th St, Charlotte, NC 28202.

The Contractor can obtain the Bid Documents digitally at **no cost** from the County's **authorized Design Consultant: Progressive Companies**. Contact Gary Runions via email at

Prime Contractors wishing to submit a bid for this project must provide a **MANDATORY** written, Letter-of-Interest to the **authorized Design Consultant** at least 48 hours in advance of the bid opening in order to be placed on the official Bidders List for automatic distribution of potential addenda and offered consideration by the County as a responsive bidder. **Bids submitted by Prime NC Licensed General Contractors that have not provided a Letter-of-Interest may be considered non-responsive.**

A mandatory pre-bid meeting shall be held at 7 am on Tuesday, **August 26, 2025, at the Mecklenburg County Courthouse located at 832 E 4th St, Charlotte, NC 28202**. Bidders will have to go through security screening at the Courthouse entrances prior to entering the Mecklenburg County Courthouse. All interested parties shall meet in the first-floor lobby beside the escalator after going through security.

Performance & Payment and Materials Bonds and a Bid Bond shall be required for this project. The laws of North Carolina and applicable regulations of various Licensing Boards and Mecklenburg County 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 980-314-2432 for assistance.

MBE/WBE/ BUSINESS ENTERPRISES

General Contractor seeking certified Sub-contractors and suppliers for the following project:

Startown Fire Station for: Newton Fire Department
City of Newton Newton, Catawba County, NC

Contract documents, complete plans and specifications are available for non-refundable purchase at the office of – Accent Images, 725 11th Ave Blvd. SE, Hickory, NC **OR** request them from one of the General Contractors Bidding the project.

Matthews Construction Co., Inc., in Conover, NC (and our online plan room through ISQFT.com with an ITB request).

Bids: Must be received by Tuesday, September 16th @ noon

Contact: Matthews Construction Co., Inc. 210 First Avenue South, Conover, NC 28613 Contact: David Workman

PHONE: (828) 464-7325
FAX: (828) 466-2068



LEGAL NOTICES



2026-2035 Draft Transportation Improvement Program, 2050
Metropolitan Transportation Plan Amendments and The Air
Quality Conformity Determination Report

Have a Voice in Transportation Needs

The Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO) will start a public comment period for its 2026-2035 Draft Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Amendments and The Air Quality Conformity Determination Report on Thursday, August 21, 2025.

The documents are available on CRTPO’s 2026-2035 TIP Development website: <https://tinyurl.com/CRTPO2026-2035TIP> . Comments may be sent to email@crtpo.org. Written or verbal comments can be provided during the September 24 and October 15 CRTPO Board meetings.

The TIP identifies projects NCDOT plans to undertake over the next 10 years. All projects receiving federal funding must be in the TIP. The air quality conformity determination report demonstrates that the total emissions projected for the TIP are within the emissions limits established by the State Implementation Plan (SIP).

The Program of Projects required by 49 USC 5307 is a subset of the TIP and the public review and comment solicited for this TIP is intended to include and satisfy the public review and comment required under 49 USC 5307 (c) (1) through (7) for Urbanized Area Formula Program.

The CRTPO is the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Charlotte urbanized area which includes Iredell, Mecklenburg and Union counties. For more information, visit www.crtpo.org.

The 30-day public comment period ends Friday, September 19, 2025 at 5:00 p.m.

MISCELLANEOUS

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Will White is the VIP designer for the 2025 ArtPop Upcycled Fashion Show on Sept. 6.

ArtPop gives new life to fashion from recycling

By Nikya Hightower
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

ArtPop turns billboards into fashion. ArtPop’s annual Upcycled Fashion Show and fundraiser will be held Sept. 6 from 6-9 p.m. at Blume Studios, 904 Post St. Tickets are \$161.90, or \$215.26 for VIP.

Upcycled fashion reduces waste by repurposing discarded materials and turning them into sustainable pieces. ArtPop Street Gallery does it by taking material used on billboards to highlight local artists and their businesses and giving it to designers to create unique pieces of fashion.

“We want to kind of make fashion more cyclical than it is because we only have one earth, we have to be kind to it right and so a lot of the fashion waste that’s been happening because of fashion becoming a thing has really affected our globe in not the greatest of ways,” said designer Will White, this year’s VIP designer.

“There is a concerted effort to make sure that we are not just throwing things out and casting them to the way-

Please see **ARTPOP** | 6B

«BOOK REVIEW

Family ties complicate mystery

By Bruce DeSilva
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Joe Green is serving time for killing his ex-wife’s divorce lawyer, but he claims he didn’t do it.

Nick Carelli, the Chicago homicide detective who put him away, figures that’s what they all say.

Meanwhile, Annalisa Vega’s business is short on customers. It seems people with problems that need investigating are loathe to hire a private detective who is visibly pregnant.

So when Green reaches out to Annalisa for help, she reluctantly takes his case. Initially, the only thing she has to go on is an anonymous letter sent to Green that claims the eyewitness who testified against him was lying.

“Gone in the Night” is Joanna Schaffhausen’s fifth novel featuring Annalisa, and fans of the series already know that the protagonist’s family life is complicated. Among other things, her brother is in prison, her extended family can’t quite forgive her for putting him there, and she’s trying to make a go of it again with Nick after kicking him to curb for his rampant infidelity. When she suggests that Nick got the Joe Green case wrong, her life gets even more complicated.

While Annalisa tries to figure out who killed the divorce lawyer, Nick investigates a series of new murders in which men are bludgeoned or stabbed and dumped into Lake Michigan.

Their investigations lead both Annalisa and Nick to a women’s shelter where they find the staff secretive and misleading — perhaps because they are fiercely protective of the women they serve or perhaps because they have something to hide.

As the story unfolds at a torrid pace, Annalisa and Nick soon find themselves in danger. Suspense builds, and plot twists abound. While the story is certainly entertaining, the author also has a serious purpose, illustrating how difficult it can be for abused women to find either help or justice.

Bruce DeSilva, winner of the Mystery Writers of America’s Edgar Award, is the author of the Mulligan crime novels including “The Dread Line.”



A scene from “Immediate Family,” Paul Oakley Stovall’s semiautobiographical take on the dynamic of family, racial and sexual identity. The play runs through Sept. 7 at Blumenthal Arts.

See yourself and next of kin in ‘Immediate Family’

Cast and crew dish on the production during its Blumenthal Arts run

By Nikya Hightower
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

One family’s story reveals universal truths.

“Immediate Family” invites the audience to see their own relatives and themselves in the characters. The production, which takes the stage at Blumenthal Arts through Sept. 7, tackles subjects such as race, religion, sexuality and most of all navigating that within a family.

Although there were so many moments that felt uniquely Black, viewers from all backgrounds were able to find someone they recognized on stage. This is exactly what playwright Paul Stovall intended.

The cast shows a tangible connection with their characters and each other. Elijah Jones, who plays Jesse, added why it is important to stand in truth in moments when it would be easier to hide.

“As we grow and we go out into the world, and we start to learn more about ourselves,” he said. “We then have to wrestle with, do we still agree with those things, or are we ready to actually buy into something else? I think that for me is what really resonates.”

The production balances the tough conversations with comedy without undercutting those moments.

“It’s about having someone that is not judging you,” said Kai Almeda Heath, who plays Nina. “I think sometimes the comedy is like, I see you, but it don’t matter. I’m gonna still say

what I got to say. I think the relationship between Jesse and I, there’s trust in there.”

Director Phylicia Rashad said, “We are all people. So, we’re looking at the specificity of an experience within one family and just as surely as we become specific about the truth, the truth of each character, the truth of their relationships, we can touch a universal chord.”

The play tells the story of putting superficial differences aside and putting love first.

“Culture is rich and beautiful, and to be embraced, yes. But who a person is, is much more than their culture,” Rashad said.

“Culture is rich and beautiful, and to be embraced, yes.”
“Immediate Family” director **PHYLICIA RASHAD**

LL Cool J takes the mic for 2025 MTV VMAs

By Itzel Luna
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — LL Cool J has snagged wins, co-hosted and performed atop the MTV Video Music Awards stage.

Now, the Grammy-winning rapper-actor-author is going solo to host the 2025 awards ceremony.

He’s retaking the stage, this time without Nicki Minaj and Jack Harlow, with whom he co-hosted in 2022, the VMAs

announced last week.

He’s also up for the best hip hop award for his single “Murdergram Deux” featuring Eminem. The single is part of his most recent album, “THE FORCE,” which released in September and was his first album in 11 years.

LL Cool J is a longtime champion of the VMAs, having won his first Moon Person in 1991. He became the first rapper to receive the Video

Vanguard Award, in 1997. He also performed in an all-star tribute to hip-hop’s 50th anniversary in 2023 and a celebration for Def Jam Records’ 40th anniversary last year.

Here’s everything you need to know about this year’s MTV VMAs, so far.

When are MTV Video Music Awards?

The 2025 VMAs will air on Sept. 7 at 8 p.m. Eastern, live from the UBS Arena on New York’s Long Island.

Can I stream the VMAs?

Yes, the show will be broadcast by CBS for the first time, and also simulcast on MTV and available for streaming on Paramount+ in the United States.

Who’s nominated for the VMAs?

Lady Gaga is leading this year’s awards with 12 nominations, including artist of the year. The “Mayhem” singer was nearly tied with Bruno Mars.

Please see **LL COOL J** | 8A

«MOVIE REVIEW

‘Highest 2 Lowest’ a unique crime thriller

By Dwight Brown
BLACK PRESS USA

Highest 2 Lowest
3 stars

“Oh, what a beautiful mornin’, Oh what a beautiful day. I’ve got a beautiful feelin’,

Everything’s goin’ my way.”

Well, no. Maybe everything’s not going your way my brother.

As shots of the downtown Brooklyn skyline come into view and a booming baritone voice sings the most famous song from the 1943 groundbreaking musical “Oklahoma!,” the words portend a wonderful day is on its way. But that’s not the case. At least not in this film’s source material, the 1963 police procedural crime thriller “High and Low” by legendary Japanese director Akira Kurosawa.

And that movie was based on the 1959 American novel, “King’s Ransom: An 87th Precinct Mystery” (by Evan Hunter). Logline: A wealthy businessman thinks his son has been kidnapped and is being held for ransom. But learns that his chauffeur’s son was abducted. Not his.

Fast forward 62 years. Screenwriter Alan Fox has turned the gist of that story into a 21st century urban fable. Filmmaker Spike Lee hops aboard as director/executive producer. He Spikeanizes this age-old tale and turns it into an entertaining, though uneven twist on today’s rich and famous, their woes and the generation gap.

David King (Denzel Washington), a veteran record executive is at a crossroads. His company Stackin’ Hits Records is on the verge of a merger he doesn’t want. He schemes to buy out his partners. That may mean selling all he has, lining up backers and throwing



Denzel Washington and Ifenesh Hadera, in “Highest 2 Lowest.”

all his chips on the table. Rich man problems. The kind ambitious, narcissistic entrepreneurs love. Save your sympathy. He’s cocksure of his goals. He’ll manage. However, his more conservative wife Pam (Ifenesh Hadera, “Godfather of Harlem”) is reluctant to give up her lush life for a dream. Now add marital strife to his stress.

If life wasn’t complicated enough; King gets a phone call. A voice on the other line claims he’s holding King’s son Trey (Aubrey Joseph) hostage. The only way the record mogul will see his offspring again is if he hands over \$17.5 million in ransom money. In Swiss francs, to be exact. King is alarmed: “Somebody’s got Trey!” Family and friends support him. The NYPD launches an investigation, spear

headed by pushy cops (Dean Winters, LaChanze and John Douglas Thompson). Turns out the crooks got the wrong kid. Instead, they’re mistakenly holding the son (Eligah Wright) of King’s chauffeur and buddy Paul (Jeffrey Wright, “American Fiction”). Uh oh.

This paradoxical allegory is ripe for exploration, and the script takes that premise in several directions. King has to decide to save a life or his fortune. It’s only a moral dilemma if you’re a materialist. He is, and hence the developing quandary. Though in his defense, \$17.5 million is a lot of bank.

Add in an ensuing criminal investigation and the plotline is fully capable of sustaining forward momentum. The kind that will keeps audiences in-

Please see **HIGHEST** | 6B



CHARLES SYKES | INVISION

LL Cool J presents the award for video of the year during the MTV Video Music Awards, Sept. 12, 2023, at the Prudential Center in Newark, N.J.

LL Cool J to host VMAs

Continued from page 5B
Mars, who has 11 nods. The pair's duet, "Die with a Smile," is up for four awards, including song of the year.

Gaga's plethora of nominations dethrones Taylor Swift, who held the top spot for two years. This time around, Swift received one artist of the year nomination. The two are accompanied by Bad Bunny, Beyoncé, Kendrick Lamar, Morgan Wallen and The Weeknd in that category.

Gaga and Mars are followed by Kendrick Lamar with 10 nominations, ROSÉ and Sabrina Carpenter with eight each, Ariana Grande and The Weeknd with seven each and Billie Eilish with six.

Charli XCX also received

love with five nominations for her "Brat" Summer success "Guess," featuring Eilish.

Bad Bunny, Doechii, Ed Sheeran, Jelly Roll, Miley Cyrus and Tate McRae have four nominations each.

How can I vote for the VMAs?

Fan voting across the 19 categories is live now on the VMAs website. Voting closes on Sept. 5 at 6 p.m. Eastern, except for the best new artist category, which will accept votes into the live show. The public can vote up to 10 times a day until voting closes.

Who will be at the VMAs?

Performers, presenters, special guests and the recipient of the Video Vanguard Award have not been announced yet.

The Video Vanguard

Award was given to Katy Perry last year. Previous recipients include Shakira, Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj and Madonna.

ArtPop fashion and upcycling

Continued from page 5B

side but being able to creatively reuse these things to live a longer life and really get the most out of the textiles that we create."

White shares that unconventional material like billboard vinyl creates a test of design skill.

"You watch shows like 'Project Runway' and you see the unconventional challenge," he said. "I feel like what it does is it presents us with a challenge that we might not have normally walked into, but you learn certain skill sets and qualities about your practice that you can then relay into your other commission work."

The show is in its fifth year but the inspiration behind it started 12 years ago. During a class hosted by ArtPop, artist Flavia Lavatelli made the first upcycled dress out of her own billboard.

"The first time I saw it, I said one day that is going to be what we do for a fundraiser and we're going to have a fashion show," said Wendy Hickey,

founder of ArtPop Street Gallery. "It took a while, but now we're in our fifth year."

The show has grown since debuting at the Innovation Barn with just 100 people to selling out shows with 400 people in the hangar at Charlotte Douglas International Airport.

"It was modest, and it was lovely, but you could see the people interacting with the models and the designers and we knew we were creating something special," Hickey said.

ArtPop's mission is to give local artists a platform to express themselves and be seen.

"We hope what comes out of that is our community wants to hire these designers, wants to create fashion with these designers," Hickey said. "Charlotte regional artists can do anything. I want to make sure that our community sees these people and doesn't hire from other cities. There is no reason to go outside of our own backyard because these artists can get it done."

'Highest 2 Lowest' a unique crime thriller

Continued from page 5B

trigued until the culprits are captured or escape.

What's striking in the first act of the film is the lack of a clear tone and style. What's on view doesn't mimic the tight, tense approach to New York crime thrillers like director Sidney Lumet's work on "Before the Devils Knows You're Dead." Nor the gritty rhythmic, perfectly staged patterns of TV's "Law & Order," a decades-old formula audiences love.

What viewers see and experience is the shallow grandness of King's penthouse, his bourgie leanings, pretentious conversations and fancy record company offices with the depth of a throw-away Tyler Perry movie. Not usually Lee's brand. A bombastic score, by Howard Drosin, is more fit for a 1950s-'60s soap opera than modern metropolitan Black life.

It further compounds an unsettled feeling. Just as it seems direction, script and acting in the film will never gel, the footage hits a different gear.

In the second act, during a sting operation, chase scenes and fights are artfully interspersed with a Puerto Rican Day Parade and a music festival gathering in the Bronx. Legendary jazz/salsa musician Eddie Palmieri, who just passed (RIP), is the main act. He's introduced by Rosie Perez and Anthony Ramos. It's a wondrous view of Latin culture, music and dancing, smartly juxtaposed by criminal activity.

This is one of the most brilliantly filmed segments in any Lee movie, on par with the iconic New York action scenes in "The French Connection." The sequence is edited by Barry Alexander Brown and Allyson C. Johnson who display the precision of a surgeon. The rhythm is perfect. The dazzling cinematography (Matthew Libatique, "Black Swan" and "Pi") aptly captures the spirit of the festivities. A sea of red and white summer costumes (Francine Jamison-Tanchuck) makes the people look even more vibrant. It's all so ingeniously crafted you wish it wouldn't end. More than making up for the first act.

The third and final act infuses drama into the action scenes. Tough conversations add a new intensity. Arguments between a selfish man trying to be more humane and a misguided soul named Yung Felon (A\$AP Rocky), who lacks a basic humanity, are explosive. The push and pull, between the older, cushy man and the younger jealous rhymers, is fiery.

Yung: "You ain't god no more, n---a. I am!"

Philosophies about choosing art over business and being pulled into the mire of social media are exchanged and heady. This is where Fox's script redeems all that came before with intelligent, enlightening thoughts about present day life and the clash between old and new mores.


Forget the over-dialogued and stagnant opening scenes. The previous awkward staging of supporting actors and extras. Now scenes are tight as a drum. The pacing is kinetic.

The overambitious musical score heightens emotions. Vibrant R&B (James Brown's "The Payback") and rap music kick in. Fear, anger, campy hip hop joy and resolve blend together. Prison scenes, music videos clips and a Star Search audition are mixed in. It's an odd mishmash that builds to a satiating ending. It all works. It clicks.

Washington and Wright are fine in their roles, though they've both shined brighter in other films. Can't deny their infectious comradery: Paul pulls a gun out and David questions what it's for. Paul, "Insurance. That's Jake from State Farm." A\$AP Rocky as the misguided rapper milks the blood out of his character. Hurt inside, projecting negativity and doing ill-conceived things. He's so good, so authentic a franchise could be built around him. A "The Fast and Furious" action film. A "Creed" sports movie. He's got that "it" factor.

This ain't your granddaddy's crime thriller. Hard to put it in a box. It's got weak and strong elements. But once it ends, the overall feeling that remains is that you've just been entertained. So much so, you may leave the theater humming, "Everything's going my way."

Visit film critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com.

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