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ADOBE STOCK

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police leadership have long defended violent interactions with civilians in isolation, but data on traffic stops, vehicle searches and use of force shows a disproportionate impact on Black people.

Data points to culture of racial disparities in police treatment

From vehicle stops to use of force, Black civilians are most likely to be impacted

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

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police have long insisted it doesn't have a race problem.

Data shows a different reality.

From deadly confrontations to texts peppered with racist language, the department has an uneven history with people of color. After years of proposed reforms and demands of accountability, change has been slow.

"I think when you pull back and look at it in context, it informs even more what is well established," said Charlotte attorney Jake Sussman, chief counsel for justice system reform at the Durham-based Southern Coalition for Social Justice. "It cannot even be called the worst-kept secret in Charlotte, which is that study after study, lived experience after lived experience, CMPD's policing practices have been marked by, infected by, race. We have all these studies that show stopping, searching, arresting, using force against Black people in Charlotte. The disparities are unexplainable."



Sussman



Patterson

The messages – uncovered last month during an unrelated state investigation – resulted in CMPD identifying seven officers linked to a multi-year group text thread that included messages of racist, sexist, and religious bigotry. Chief Estella Patterson, who is Black, responded by ordering an audit of department records, seeking revocation of the officers' certifications,

Please see **DATA** | 2A

The new political power dynamic

Democrats voted into control of NC House, referendums approved

By Herbert L. White
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North Carolina Democrats have returned from legislative exile.

Voters delivered a stunning rebuke of Republican control to flip the state House of Representatives to Democrats for the first time since 2010. They also elected former Governor Roy Cooper to the U.S. Senate, making him the first Democrat to hold a seat in the upper chamber since Kay Hagan was elected in 2008. Both results were part of a national Democratic wave in which voters opted to change the power dynamic from statehouses to Congress as a check on President Donald Trump.



Cooper

By flipping the state House – despite mid-decade GOP gerrymandering designed to expand the legislative map for Republican candidates – Democrats secured 70 of 120 seats and with it a critical lever of power over redistricting and election administration. It also gives Governor Josh Stein a working margin to sustain vetoes after two years of a one-vote hedge against a GOP supermajority in both chambers. Republicans still control the state Senate, but their advantage dwindled to 26 of 50 seats.

"After a decade of rigging maps in their favor and attacking civil rights, reproductive freedoms, and democracy itself—Republicans' unchecked power trip has come to an end," Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee President Heather Williams said in a statement. "Democrats will wield the

Please see **NC VOTERS** | 2A

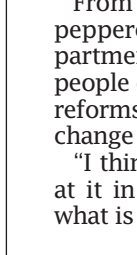
Pride magazine closing after first 2027 edition

By Herbert L. White
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Pride magazine is closing after 33 years.

The publication's January/February 2027 edition will be Pride's last with a "Legacy" commemoration of people, businesses, organizations and events that shaped Charlotte.

Pride, founded in 1993 as Community Pride by The Charlotte Observer, is a lifestyle and culture publication that highlights people and organizations that have shaped Charlotte as well as issues affecting Black people.



Dixon

Dee Dixon, an Observer sales executive when Pride launched, bought the publication in 2001 as the centerpiece to Pride Communication, which includes a public relations division.

"This is a bittersweet decision, filled with a mixture of emotions," publisher/CEO Dee Dixon said in a statement. "When I reflect on everything we have accomplished over the years, I feel an overwhelming sense of pride. Our mission has always been to honor achievement in the African American community, and we have done that and so much more."

Pride is the second Black-owned publication to cease operations this year, joining The County News, a weekly newspaper.

Throughout its history, Pride highlighted Black people of all walks of life from entrepreneurs, educators, and corporate leaders, physicians, artists and community advocates. The publication has celebrated accomplishments, brought important community issues into focus and documented people and organizations who have shaped Charlotte.

EMMY BENTON | UNC MEDIA HUB

Bryce Berryhill prepares his land for planting at his Person County, North Carolina farm. An artificial intelligence data center could soon be built in Person.

'Once it's gone, it's gone:' Impact of AI data centers on NC communities

By Emmy Benton
UNC MEDIA HUB

Bryce Berryhill understands tobacco farming.

His family has been doing it for generations in Person County, North Carolina and it just makes sense to him. What Berryhill says he doesn't understand, though, is how his livelihood will be affected by the development of AI data centers nearby.

"My life is built on agriculture," Berryhill said. "Personally, I don't know what I'd do without it at this point."

Berryhill's 300 acres of farmland and the surrounding area could soon be threatened by facilities that house IT infrastructure designed to power, train and run AI programming. In 2024, Microsoft acquired a 1,350-acre property in Person County, and

Please see **AI** | 4A

US eviction crisis also a public health emergency

By James E. Causey
CENTER FOR HEALTH JOURNALISM

For Sechita McNair, losing her Atlanta apartment was only the beginning of her family's housing problems.

McNair, a single mother of three, was evicted from her apartment in a gentrifying Atlanta neighborhood. As the Associated Press reported in November 2025, she and her children moved to Jonesboro, a suburb south of Atlanta, where the move complicated their daily lives and her efforts to keep her children connected to their former schools.

Finding another place to live wasn't easy. Having an eviction on her record made the search even harder.

McNair's eviction illustrates something often overlooked in discussions of America's housing affordability crisis. Losing a home can disrupt employment, children's education, family stability, and access to health care. Even after a family finds another place to live, the consequences can

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Please Recycle

Data points to racial bias in police treatment

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and requesting a federal civil rights review. Six officers have left the department, and termination proceedings were launched for the seventh. In addition, the texts revealed a competition to pull over Black drivers in addition to using force against civilians.

"Transparency and accountability will continue to guide every decision we make," Patterson said last month. "We have taken swift action since this information came to our attention, and we are committed to seeing the accountability process through. While the civil service process can be lengthy and complex, it will not diminish our responsibility to act. Our community deserves a police department worthy of its trust, and I am committed to earning and keeping that trust every single day."

CMPD response

Patterson has outlined a process for reviewing civilian complaints and determining accountability by the department. When a complaint is received by the Internal Affairs Division, an investigation is opened and findings are referred for evaluation and hearings through CMPD's chain-of-command board.

Afterward, cases may be forwarded to the Civil Service Board or the Citizens Review Board.

"I recognize that addressing these allegations is what our community needs to hear from me right now," Patterson said last month. "This moment is difficult, but it is also an opportunity to reaffirm who we are, what we stand for and the standards we expect from everyone who wears this badge. Every resident deserves to feel safe, respected and protected, and we will continue working to ensure our department lives up to that responsibility."



Atkinson

Said Sussman: "I think if you looked at them in isolation, it would be hard to conclude anything other than this is incredibly disturbing racism that appears to be driving their policing. When they talk about keeping score and they talk about use of force and they're doing that in the context of race and using racist terms, it can't be anything other than intentional racism that is not just mild banter."

The text incident, along with high-profile shooting deaths of Black civilians Keith Scott in Charlotte in 2016 and George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 2020, have led to public demands for change in how law enforcement interacts with communities of color. Although Black people control many of the political levers in Charlotte, racist policing endures.

"We have seen this in Charlotte, we've seen it in other police departments across North Carolina and policing across the United States," Sussman said. "The culture of policing – the combination of the badge, the gun, the power, the policy directives being handed down by city leaders – is what appears to be permitting that kind of, in this case, very explicit racism, and in other cases perhaps just ingrained cultural racism that is leading to a tremendous amount of distrust with policing.

"Race plays a factor on many levels, in the fact that the leadership of CMPD, the fact that our city leadership – we are a Black-led city and should be proud of that – and the fact that we have this race problem in the policing, those things aren't mutually exclusive."

Taking the wheel on flashpoints

Second Chance Federation, a Charlotte-based nonprofit that helps formerly incarcerated people transition to civil life, is lobbying CMPD to address the most likely interaction between police and civilians: traffic stops.

At the center is administrative stops for non-moving offenses like expired license plates, which Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office eliminated in 2022.

Deputies can charge drivers with offenses like driving without a valid license, lack of insurance, or outdated inspection only after stopping a vehicle for more serious or potentially hazardous violations.

Deputies still enforce stops for moving violations like speeding, running a red light and drunk driving.

"Exercising appropriate discretion in the enforcement of our laws is one of the greatest challenges and one of the greatest responsibilities of any law enforcement officer," Sheriff Garry McFadden said at the time. "It is the intention of this new policy to encourage Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Deputies to focus on the most serious and potentially dangerous traffic offenses, while treating all drivers in and through Mecklenburg County equally under the law."

According to Cop Watch, a web platform maintained by Forward Justice that tracks data on law enforcement stop, search, and use of force, Black people make up 33.7% of Charlotte's population but comprise 56.7% of stops as of 2026 compared to whites, who make up 38.7% of the population and 22.2% of stops.

"These data show significant racial disparity in regulatory and equipment stops by CMPD, which negatively impacts community trust and police legitimacy, with very little public safety benefit," said Second Chance Federation executive director Daryl Atkinson wrote last month in a letter to Patterson.

The disparity is wider when it comes to vehicle searchers, where Black drivers were 80.9% of the people searched (2,113) compared to white drivers, who were only 5.7% (150). Hispanic drivers made up 12.9% (336) of searches. When a stop turns physical, it often involves a Black drive. Since 2002, CMPD has reported using force in 543 stops, with Black drivers making up 78.6% of incidents (427), compared to 13.3% among white drivers.

In 2025, the most recent full year of data, 16 of the 18 people CMPD used force against were Black drivers, or 88.9%. In every year on record, CMPD officers more often used force on Black drivers than their white peers.

Collaboration for change

Civil lawsuits against CMPD and internal initiatives haven't led to long-term sustainable change in local policing, which Sussman contends is directly associated to a disconnect between civil control and law enforcement. A federal consent agreement is unlikely with a Justice Department that takes a hand-off approach to policing, so any meaningful change will be driven locally.

"It's really hard to find a solution together until we can all agree on what the problem is, and words in that respect matter," Sussman said. "It matters that the leadership in Charlotte look at this squarely in the eye and say, 'Yes, this is a problem.' This may be a few bad apples, but this is not the first time, and I would suspect this may just be a tip of the iceberg.

"We need to not look away and say we've solved it because the city has perhaps fired a couple of these people who got caught. The city really needs to engage with that, and they should ask for help, and they should enlist the community. They should enlist experts who have done this in other places to really try to root out the problem and call it what it is."



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Keyondra Nixon, a student at UNC Charlotte, shows off her "I Voted" sticker on Nov. 3, 2026, at the former University City Library polling site.

NC voters elect a new political pecking order

Continued from page 1A

Speaker's gavel for the first time in nearly two decades and will continue to fight on behalf of all North Carolinians for a brighter future."

Democrats also held onto the lone state Supreme Court seat contested this year when Associate Justice Anita Earls, the only Black justice on the panel, beat Republican Sarah Stevens, a former state representative. With multiple seats up for election in 2028, Democrats considered holding onto Earls' seat paramount to cutting into Republicans' 5-2 majority.



Earls

"It is the honor of my life to continue serving the people of North Carolina on the Supreme Court for another term," Earls said in a statement. "The cornerstone of a healthy democracy is an impartial and independent judiciary that aims to secure equal justice for all under the law. I will work every day to uphold the Constitution and protect the rights and freedoms of all North Carolinians."

Said former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, chairman of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee: "The lesson from North Carolina is that the people hold the power to make change in this country, in spite of efforts to silence their voices — and the people have put North Carolina on a path toward meaningful change and a representative democracy."

Three statewide referendums were approved by voters: capping the state income tax rate at 3.5%, a limit on counties' ability to raise property taxes and a voter ID requirement for all ballots cast – including those sent via mail.

In Charlotte, voters approved three bond referendums totaling $425 million for affordable housing, transportation and neighborhood improvements. The bonds won't require a property tax rate increase.

The measures provide:

· $125 million to preserve and create affordable housing through public, private and nonprofit partnerships;

· $280 million for resurfacing existing roadways and sidewalk connections, and

· $20 million for neighborhood improvement projects such as sidewalks, drainage, streets, lighting and public spaces.

"Charlotte voters sent a clear message that they believe in making sure this community continues to be a place where families can find housing they can afford, streets they can navigate safely, and the infrastructure required for a growing city," Mayor Rob Harrington said.

State public schools aim to boost enrollment in voucher landscape

By Kate Denning
CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction unveiled a five-year strategic plan in 2025 aimed at making the state's schools "the best in the nation."

Along with seeking to improve test scores, Advanced Placement performance and the high school graduation rate by 2030, the department also hopes to up the percentage of school-aged children enrolled in public schools to 89%.

One year in, there's yet to be a documented increase.

Private school enrollment has risen steadily since the 2014-15 academic year, when the state first implemented the Opportunity Scholarship Program, also known as private-school vouchers. The state legislature expanded the scholarship in 2023 by removing the income cap, allocating additional funding and no longer requiring new recipients to have previously attended public school.

Perception of traditional public schools in the state has taken a hit in the years since as North Carolina continually comes in at the bottom of lists ranking school funding and teacher pay across the country — though student performance and achievement metrics at the state's public schools are improving.

State lawmakers have been criticized by public school advocates for prioritizing private school vouchers over public school funding, which critics say is causing North Carolina public schools to struggle to keep up. The primary barrier to improving public schools, and making them more enticing for families, is funding, NCDPI said.

So in a state that is growing its spending of public dollars on private schools yearly, what other way is there to increase the percentage of families choosing public schools for their children?

Turning the tide on enrollment

NCDPI's Senior Director of Government Affairs and Strategy Geoff Coltrane said the department is grateful for the raise in teacher pay as part of the state budget this year. But that mostly went toward early-career teachers, not veterans.

"We know that the No. 1 factor impacting student learning is our teachers, and so we want the best and the brightest, and the best prepared, the best supported in our classrooms," Coltrane told Carolina Public Press.

"A lot of that starts with their pay. We've seen around funding that North Carolina still lags a lot behind our peer states. We're currently ranked 49th out of the 50 states in terms of per pupil spending, and so we have a lot of work to do there. … That continues to be a challenge. However, given those challenges, we still are seeing these amazing results."

North Carolina public high schools had their highest graduation rate in state history at 89% this past school year, higher than its 2026 target in the five-year plan.

There was also progress toward goals like increasing the percentage of 10th, 11th and 12th grade students who pass an Advanced Placement exam with a score of three, four or five, which typically allows the student to obtain college credit at a four-year university. The goal is 75% by 2030, and the current percentage rose from 65.4% in 2023–24 to 72.1% in 2024–25.

Though not part of the five-year plan, scores in the state's end-of-grade exam scores from 2025–26 were also the highest they've been in the past three years.

But public school enrollment did not improve between 2023–24 and 2024–25, and although NCDPI's dashboard is not updated for the 2025–26 year, raw data shows the percentage is nearly the same as it has been the past two years.

The data NCDPI uses for its calculations shows the total number of students attending local education agencies, meaning traditional public schools, decreased by about 36,000 students in 2025–26. But almost 5,000 more students attended charter and regional schools, which are also public but operate independently from county and city school districts, in the same timeframe.

According to data from the Department of Administration, which oversees nonpublic education, private school enrollment increased by a little over 7,000 in 2025–26. Homeschooled children, however, decreased by more than 12,000.

The enrollment decline in public schools could be chalked up to the current emphasis on school choice in the state, Coltrane said, but the student population is also getting smaller overall. That's reflected in the total enrollment of students, regardless of which type of school. The birth rate in the United States has been on a steady decline since peaking in 2007, so enrollment will likely continue to dropacross the board.

NCDPI is adapting to the changing landscape by leaning into school choice, too. Its Find Your Fit initiative uplifts public but nontraditional options like early colleges and magnet and charter schools for families looking for alternatives.

It also launched task forces on school accountability reform, which Coltrane said is analyzing how to reflect school performance outside of test scores, and educator licensure, intended to make the process more transparent and streamlined. The Attend NC program is also looking at how to decrease the amount of

Please see **STATE** | 3A

NC joins 'overcharging' lawsuit against retailer Dollar General

By Greg Childress
NC NEWSLINE

North Carolina Attorney General Jeff Jackson and 19 of his colleagues in other states announced last week they're suing Dollar General for overcharging customers. The bargain retailer is accused of raising prices for products at the register without updating sticker prices on shelves.

At a press conference, Jackson called Dollar General a habitual offender that has been "ripping people off," even after being told repeatedly to resolve the problem.

"They are illegally overcharging families and they have been, we believe, for years, so today, we're taking them to court to stop this behavior," Jackson said.

The lawsuit is part of a multi-state complaint against Dollar General that includes the Federal Trade Commission. In addition to North Carolina, Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah and Wisconsin also joined the lawsuit.

"Dollar General has betrayed the trust of millions of American consumers and imposed significant financial harm on communities and consumers who are already struggling to make their paychecks last," Christopher Mufarrige, director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, said in a statement.

Dollar General denied in a statement that it has "willfully disregarded the affordability needs of our customers."

"Nothing could be further from the truth," it said. "Our goal is 100% accuracy between shelf and register prices in every store."

The retailer acknowledged that price discrepancies do occur, but said "store teams are instructed, empowered, and expected to make things right for the customer" when mistakes happen.

However, Jackson said the NCDOJ, through its consumer protection division, has uncovered internal documents that

Please see **DOLLAR** | 4A

The eviction crisis is also public health emergency

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linger.

McNair was evicted in 2025, but she was hardly alone. Thousands of other Atlanta-area families faced the same threat as the region continued to struggle with one of the nation's most severe eviction crises.

During the 12 months ending in May 2026, landlords filed more than 142,000 eviction cases across five Atlanta-area counties, according to Princeton University's Eviction Lab. That's roughly one filing for every four renter households, the highest rate among the communities the organization tracks.

An eviction filing doesn't necessarily mean someone was removed from their home. Some renters face multiple filings, while others resolve their cases before being displaced. But even the threat of eviction can create uncertainty that affects nearly every aspect of family life.

Atlanta may be drawing national attention, but housing instability isn't confined to Georgia. Families in Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Milwaukee and other cities face similar challenges.

The larger story isn't simply about where people live. It's about what happens to their health when stable housing becomes harder to maintain.

Black renters face disproportionate risks

Black residents make up about 53% of renters in the Atlanta region but account for 69% of eviction filings, according to WABE's reporting on Eviction Lab data.

The disparity extends beyond Atlanta.

In a 2025 analysis covering 10 states and 38 cities, Eviction Lab found that Black renters made up 28% of the renter population but accounted for 39% of filings. White renters represented 45% of renters but 37% of filings.

Across communities researchers tracked, landlords filed more than 1.23 million eviction cases in 2025, down slightly from 1.25 million the previous year. Although filings declined, racial disparities remained.

In Atlanta, research also found that just 100 residential buildings accounted for about 15% of all eviction filings. That raises another question. Are some landlords using the threat of eviction to pressure tenants into paying overdue rent?

Milwaukee has long been central to the nation's understanding of eviction and poverty.

Sociologist Matthew Desmond documented the experiences of low-income Milwaukee families in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, "Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City". His research helped demonstrate that eviction isn't simply a consequence of poverty. It can also deepen it.

Years later, Milwaukee still struggles with the problem. According to Eviction Lab's tracking system, landlords filed approximately 11,930 eviction cases during a recent 12-month period, a filing rate of about 6%.

Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles face their own housing challenges, although differences in court reporting systems make direct comparisons difficult. Nationally, Eviction Lab estimates that landlords file approximately 3.6 million eviction cases in a typical year.

Eviction can affect children's health

The health consequences of eviction are becoming clearer as researchers examine what happens to families before and after they lose their home or apartment.

A 2023 systematic review in JAMA Network Open examined 11 studies investigating eviction and children's health. Researchers found associations between eviction exposure and adverse birth outcomes, including premature birth and low birth weight, along with developmental and other health risks among children.

Another 2025 JAMA Network Open study involving 36,000 children found that caregiver stress about eviction or housing loss was associated with greater odds of depression among children. These studies don't establish that every eviction causes illness, but they add to the evidence that housing instability is a key social determinant of health.

When families are forced to move, parents may miss work, children may have to change schools, and people managing chronic illnesses may struggle to keep medical appointments or access medications. For pregnant women, housing instability can add stress during a period when consistent prenatal care is especially important. And the consequences can begin long before a family moves. Not knowing where you'll live next month can become a source of chronic stress.

Federal housing decisions could affect families

The eviction crisis predates President Donald Trump's administration, but federal policy can determine whether families facing financial hardship receive assistance before losing their homes.

Trump's proposed fiscal 2027 budget would reduce Department of Housing and Urban Development funding by approximately $10.7 billion, or 13%, compared with fiscal 2026.

According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, the proposal would largely preserve funding for major existing rental assistance programs while shifting support to other housing and community development initiatives.

The administration says its approach would encourage self-sufficiency, expand housing opportunities and improve government efficiency. But proposed restrictions affecting new housing vouchers and changes to other assistance programs raise questions about whether some families could face additional barriers to housing stability.

These are proposed changes, not enacted funding cuts. Congress determines federal appropriations.

Communities are looking for solutions

Some communities are pursuing solutions.

Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens has announced a two-year pilot program offering $500 interest-free microloans to residents facing financial hardship.

Other approaches include emergency rental assistance, mediation and legal representation for tenants facing eviction.

New York City, despite its high housing costs, recorded an eviction filing rate of about 5% in 2025. Its tenant protections, including access to legal representation for eligible low-income renters, may help explain some of the difference, although local housing markets and court procedures also play a role.

Preventing eviction isn't just about keeping people in their apartments. It's about protecting their health and stability.

Some communities are also experimenting with guaranteed basic income programs that provide participating families with regular cash payments to help cover expenses such as rent, food and transportation.

These programs remain relatively small, and researchers are still examining their long-term effects. But they offer another approach to helping families manage financial emergencies before they become housing crises.

Preventing eviction isn't just about keeping people in their apartments. It's also about protecting their health and stability.

State public schools aim to boost enrollment in voucher landscape

Continued from page 2A

students that are chronically absent.

Part of NCDPI's plan to turn the tide on current enrollment trends is to change the narrative around public schools. Two of the eight pillars of the five-year plan are to celebrate the excellence in public schools and galvanize champions to invest in and support public education. Coltrane said there is a sense that, if NCDPI can deliver on the other goals in the five-year plan, then the enrollment percentage will naturally rise, too.

"Part of what we've been doing is obviously celebrating those successes, but also making sure people understand," Coltrane said.

"In a lot of cases, we share these stories with people, and they're like, 'I had no idea.' So I think there's a both/and there. I think both continuing to make progress on those measures to show that 'Hey, look at our graduation rate. Look at our student performance rates. Look at Advanced Placement and CTE.' All these other things that will help to tell the story that public schools are a great option will have more students come to public schools.

"… Just getting that information out there will help to change people's thinking on public schools. So getting to those rates may make a difference. It may not, but … just telling people about those successes will also help people to say, 'Well, maybe I need to check out my public school.'"

Schools of thought

There's vastly differing perspectives among education thought leaders on how public schools can stay competitive.

Director of the Carolinas Academic Leadership Network, part of the libertarian John Locke Foundation, Bryce Fiedler said he's not sure he agrees with the enrollment goal as a concept, but the other goals in the plan are ones to aspire to.

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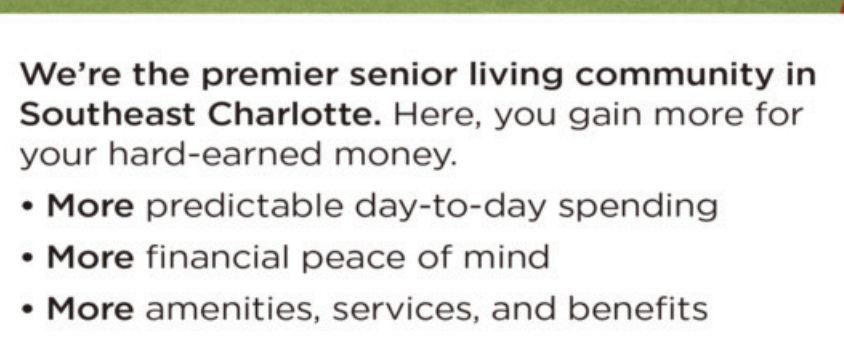


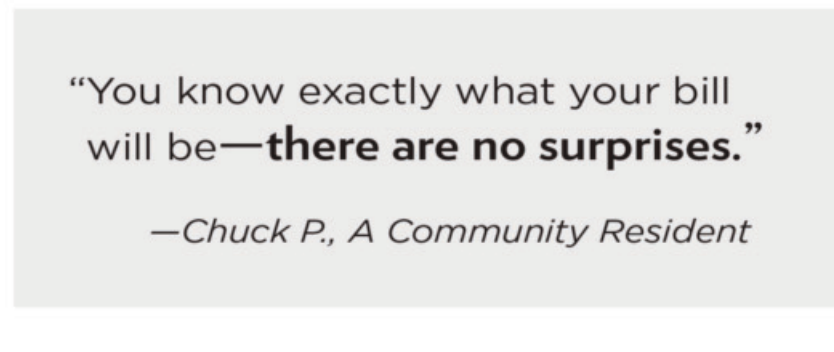
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Dollar General

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show Dollar General was aware of the overcharging, "knew that it was systemic and chose not to fix the problem."

"That means they've broken the law," Jackson said. "That means we have good evidence for a strong case that directly impacts families in North Carolina."

Jackson said the overcharges are sometimes a dime, a quarter or a dollar or more.

"Sometimes people catch it," Jackson said. "Usually they don't. Usually they just pay the extra money. They go on about their lives.

Dollar General operates more than 1,100 stores across the state, and in some rural areas, it's the only local option for basic goods, food and supplies.

Jackson said NCDOJ will ask the court to order Dollar General to take verifiable action to stop overcharging customers. The NCDOJ will also seek penalties.

He noted that the N.C. Department of Agriculture recently fined 10 Dollar General Stores in Eastern North Carolina for overcharging customers. The Department of Agriculture regularly conducts inspections to ensure that sticker prices match prices at the register.

Those 10 stores are in Hertford, Pamlico, Carteret, Transylvania, Craven, Onslow, Buncombe, and Scotland counties. In addition, Dollar General stores have also failed audits in previous years in Franklin, Alamance, Transylvania, Montgomery, Brunswick, Hyde, Lee, and Moore counties.

Jackson said the families that Dollar General overcharged deserve money back. He said it's too early to say how that would take place.

"Ultimately, that's going to be a question for the court and part of our advocacy to the court," he said. "There are some different ideas in play here, but I can tell you, our consumer division routinely finds a way to get customers their money back when they've been ripped off."

AI data centers' community impact

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as of April 2026, they were in the planning phase of the project.

"Investing in cloud infrastructure in North Carolina supports long-term digital growth and helps ensure that essential online services remain reliable and accessible," reads Microsoft's website regarding the Person County site. Microsoft was unavailable for an interview with UNC Media Hub.

To address community members' concerns about the high water usage of data centers, Microsoft has said the Person County site will use air-cooled chillers with a recirculating water loop. This is instead of traditional methods that typically use open-loop evaporative cooling systems, continuously drawing water from the ground and putting more strain on municipal water supplies.

Berryhill is concerned about the data center's water usage because tobacco is a water-intensive crop. His fields already put some strain on the community's water supply, so he wonders what further stress could do to those resources.

Microsoft said water rates won't increase for Person County residents because the company will pay for the infrastructure needed to support the data center. However, data centers that use less water typically require more energy to run, highlighting the need for an expansion of energy sources to reduce stress on local power grids.

This problem isn't confined to rural North Carolina. Urban and suburban areas are also seeing AI data centers attempt to take up residence.

A 12-month moratorium on data centers in Apex, about an hour south of Person County, was put in place in April after a proposed data center project in New Hill, North Carolina generated strong opposition. With the temporary ban, Apex is unable to review or approve applications for the development of data centers until April 27, 2027.

Apex's Environmental Advisory Board was tasked with researching data center development and proposing Unified Development Ordinance amendments that pertain to the regulations surrounding land use, zoning and development.

"I've been in office now for seven years and I've never seen the community come together on one topic and item of concern as this," Apex mayor Jacques Gilbert said.

The Protect Wake County Coalition was formed in mid-August 2025 by residents of New Hill who opposed the development of the data center in their neighborhood. Michelle Hofner O'Connor, one of the co-founders of PWCC, is especially concerned about the impact of data centers on people's health.

"I am concerned our state is unwilling to impose strict regulations and that North Carolinians are going to feel the real impact of it," O'Connor said. "Not just with their wallets and the cost of their electricity bills, but exposure to major pollutants and toxins that will potentially change the day-to-day course of their lives."

Gilbert said that his constituents have additional concerns, such as the energy that would be drawn from a data center of that magnitude, how drinking water levels would be affected and the noise from generators that could hinder quality of life for those living closest to the site.

O'Connor said she believes research is key to understanding the multifaceted nature of what building data centers means for communities.

"The group really focused on the message of responsible growth," O'Connor said. "The proposal submitted to the town of Apex was similar to many of those submitted around the U.S. for hyperscale data centers: irresponsible and seeking to take advantage of council members' lack of knowledge."

The opposition in Apex has been seen across North Carolina as well. In an Elon University poll from March, 44% of North Carolinians opposed data centers in their communities. A follow-up poll in July 2026 found that objections grew to 53%. Support for data centers dropped from 24% to 20% between March and July, and the percentage of those unsure of their stance dropped from 32% to 27%, presumably moving into the opposition category, Jason Husser, director of the poll, said.

Husser said that the opposition has been seen from various demographics and backgrounds, adding to the increasing complexity of the issue. The local opposition translates to a growing trend of national resistance against the construction

of data centers. A Gallup survey done in March 2026 found that seven in 10 Americans oppose constructing a data center in their local area, including 48% who are strongly opposed and 23% who are somewhat opposed.

In an April 2026 web survey, Gallup asked an open-ended question about people's reasons for favoring or opposing data center construction in their communities. Those in favor named potential economic benefits as their reason, and those who opposed data centers said they were mostly apprehensive because of the potential environmental concerns.

Gallup found that most Americans appear to be adopting a "not in my backyard" attitude, where they fight against projects built near their homes. Husser believes this is what's happening in North Carolina, especially because of the resource usage and environmental concerns.

"I do think, over time, we will see data centers become controversial," Husser said. "Not simply because of resource utilization, but of a much deeper worry about the role of AI on the economy, particularly in job loss and loss of things that, in the past, were uniquely human skills."

Berryhill hopes that having a data center in his backyard won't alter his livelihood too much. He believes it will, no doubt, change the view from his fields forever — whether he's ready or not.

"Most of that land you look at was prime farmland," Berryhill said. "Once it's gone, it's gone."

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TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Johnson C. Smith running back Fabian Duncan (1) celebrates after an 11-yard touchdown catch in Johnson C. Smith's 39-33 overtime win against Virginia State at Eddie McGirt Field on Oct. 31, 2026. Duncan rushed for 203 yards and a pair of scores, including the game-winner, on a season-high 39 carries.

Survival of the resilient

JC Smith's overtime win against Virginia State pushes the Golden Bulls closer to their postseason goal

By Herbert L. White
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Fabian Duncan demanded the ball with J.C. Smith's season on the line.

The junior running back delivered with 222 yards of total offense and three touchdowns, including a 19-yard walk-off run to lift the Golden Bulls to a 39-33 overtime win against Virginia State. Duncan made quick work of his opportunity when linebacker Vincent Hill's strip-sack of Rashaan Matthews ended the Trojans' lone possession post-regulation.

"It's crunch time, so it's like 'with all due respect coach, give me the rock,'" said Duncan, a North Mecklenburg High graduate who rumbled for 203 yards and two scores on a season-high 39 carries as well as an 11-yard touchdown catch. "He called something else at first, and I told him, 'No disrespect, but lean on me.'"



Duncan

JCSU coach Maurice Flowers deferred, and after gaining 6 yards on his first two overtime carries, Duncan beat Virginia State's defense to the perimeter for the game-winner. The result left both teams 7-2 overall and 6-1 in the CIAA with JCSU holding the tiebreaker for a berth in the conference title game if they can beat rival Livingstone next week in Salisbury. Virginia State can advance with a win against Virginia Union (8-1, 7-0).



Flowers

"Our fans got a treat on Halloween, but glad to get the win against a very good Virginia State team," Flowers said. "A lot was said about the loss last week and things like that, but we have a saying in our program: we don't lose, we learn, and we learned some things about ourselves last week."

The Golden Bulls shook off last week's 16-13 loss at Bowie State by leaning on what they do best: run the ball and create stops on defense. They roared to a 26-13 halftime lead by controlling time of possession – 22 minutes, 30 seconds compared to 7:30 for Virginia State powered by Duncan's 114 yards rushing. JCSU limited the

Please see **JC SMITH** | 6A

Commemorative Classic raises stakes for HBCU rivalry

By Herbert L. White
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The renewal of Black college football's oldest rivalry has larger implications for Johnson C. Smith.

Saturday's Commemorative Classic between the Golden Bulls (7-2, 6-1 CIAA) and Livingstone (3-6, 2-5) is the last hurdle between JCSU and a second straight trip to the CIAA title game. The Blue Bears have derailed Smith's postseason aspirations before – their 15-10 win in 2024 knocked the Golden Bulls out of the running. JCSU, which leads the all-time series 50-34-3, is taking a business-like approach.

"It's a big game because it's the next game," said linebacker Vincent Hill, who played in last year's 26-21 JCSU win. "It doesn't matter if they're a rival or not, we respect all opponents. We're not going to get too high, get too low. We're going to prepare the same and we're going to come in ready to play."

When Golden Bulls quarterback Damien Mazil, a graduate transfer from Wagner, arrived on campus in the summer, he was unsure what to make of the dynamic between JCSU and what coach Maurice Flowers referred to as "the school down the way."



Mazil

"I was absolutely confused for the first two weeks," Mazil said. "I asked a couple questions about what's going on but we're going to take this like every other game. We're going to prepare the same. We're not going to do anything different. But again, the history that goes behind this game is huge, and for me, it's something I'm excited playing."

The series started Dec. 27, 1892, on Livingstone's snow-swept campus. The players' uniforms were sewn by Livingstone's women students, their shoes improvised with nails driven through the soles and both sides pooled their money to buy the ball. Biddle Univer-

Please see **SMITH-LIVINGSTONE** | 6A

49ers show signs of life, even with another loss



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte running back Khamani Alexander celebrates after a touchdown run in the 49ers' 38-31 overtime loss to Tulane on Oct. 30, 2026, at Jerry Richardson Stadium.

By Cameron Williams
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The trick play was no treat.

Under two minutes to go, Charlotte was up seven points on fourth-and-4 at the Tulane 42. Instead of trying a 59-yard field goal, the 49ers lined up to punt. Charlotte coach Tim Albin opted for a fake and ran an end around with running back Khamani Alexander that wound up 2 yards short.

It set Tulane up with a short field and they took advantage to tie the game at 31 and went on to win 38-31.

"The difference in the game is the fake punt," Albin said. "That's my call. I made a call. … I thought we had it. [Tulane] guy made a good play. I think it's fourth and I don't know seven. We made five, maybe. But to be honest with you, I'd do it again. So, that's the difference in the game. … It's one of those you're the hero or you're the zero that's how I look at it."

Charlotte dropped to 1-7 on the year and 1-4 in American Conference play. It's the seventh consecutive season the 49ers will not be bowl eligible.

Charlotte was up 10 at halftime and came out and forced an opening drive punt by the Green Wave. There were a handful of times where it appeared Char-

Please see **49ERS** | 6A

Hough opens the postseason atop Magnificent Seven rankings

By Herbert L. White
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The North Carolina 8A football postseason could also be called the Magnificent Seven invitational.

Hough High, the wire-to-wire No. 1 in The Post's rankings, is one of seven Mecklenburg County programs in the 10-team West region bracket, and one of four teams to earn first-round byes when the playoffs start on Friday. Beyond that, Mallard Creek, fresh off a 17-7 win against Chambers to win the Meck Power Six title, moves up to second while Palisades jumps to third.

West Charlotte bumps back into the ranks at No. 7.

This week's rankings, with overall record and previous week's ranking.

1. *Hough* (10-0, PW: No. 1). The 8A state title runs through Cornelius, no doubt about it. North Carolina's deepest and most talented roster is experienced and ready to rack up a second straight crown. The Huskies earned a first round bye after mugging Hopewell 49-0 in the final tuneup.

2. *Mallard Creek* (8-2, PW: No. 3). The Mavericks fought tooth-and-nail to lock down the Meck Power Six title with a 17-7 win against rival Chambers in the regular season finale. It's a good warmup for what's to come in the 8A tournament where Hough casts a large shadow. First round bye.

3. *Palisades* (8-2, PW: No. 4). The Pumas have been impressive in a season of adversity and change that resulted in a 4-1 mark in the Southwestern 7A/8A. They knocked off East Mecklenburg 42-13 in the regular season finale and kick off the postseason at home against No. 5 Ardrey Kell in a rematch of their 21-14 win on Oct. 2.

4. *Chambers* (9-1, PW: No. 2). The Cougars missed out on the program's first undefeated regular season with a 10-point loss at Mallard Creek.

Their overall body of work was good enough to earn a first-round bye.

See **MAGNIFICENT** | 6A

Defensive lapses led to Evero's ouster

By Herbert L. White
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A very bad week of defense was enough to cost Ejiro Evero his job with the Carolina Panthers.

The Panthers fired Evero, the team's defensive coordinator, and passing game coordinator Jonathan Cooley last week after conceding 43 points to Tampa Bay and 27 to Green Bay in a five-day span. Defensive line coach Todd Wash will step in as the defensive play-caller for the remaining 10 games.



Evero

"Ultimately, when I look at how many games we have in front of us, the position we're at in the division, and really just wanted to get the most out of our guys and really making that decision," coach Dave Canales said. "I take that responsibility very seriously as the head coach, and I know it's my responsibility to put the players in a position where they feel confident, where they feel ready to go. "Just took in a lot of information and came to this conclusion at this point right now to be able to lay the groundwork for the style of football that we want to play."

Against Green Bay, which has the league's worst rushing attack, the Panthers couldn't contain Jordan Love, who

Please see **EVERO'S** | 6A

49ers show signs of life, even with another loss

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lotte was running a tempo offense, snapping the ball with plenty of time left on the play clock. There were at least three instances when there were double-digit seconds left.

"We could have been better there on the last drive," Albin said. "We were to a point where three first downs [and] we're kneeling. We slowed it down and we jumped up there. We had a penalty. … We could have been better there, but we were certainly talking about it on the headphones and talking to Connor [Harrell] through the communication device in his helmet."

Albin emphasized that he doesn't believe in moral victories, but there is clear improvement especially on offense as the 49ers have scored at least 30 points in their last two games. They scored 18 points in the two games prior.

"We're here to win the game," Albin said. "... We went out tonight and did a lot of good things against a team that I think is way better than their record, so that speaks to our belief. Obviously … it's not all Conner. You have 11 guys that I think are really starting to click, and it's why it's such a heartbreaker. We want to win the game. We don't want to just score 30 points."

The 49ers' rushing attack has been clicking as well. Henry Rutledge has 120-plus rushing yards in the last two games — the first 49ers rusher to do so in consecutive games since Benny LeMay in 2018 — and was a key factor in the pass game too. Rutledge led Charlotte in receiving against Tulane with 79 yards on four catches to mark the first time in the FBS era for a Charlotte player to eclipse 250 all-purpose yards in a game.

"We've got to continue to find ways to get him the ball," Albin said. "He's worked his tail off to get here. He's a senior and he could have bailed. He could have just said, 'I don't want to play.' But, he and Conner, just their whole injury thing and where they are as players right now, it just speaks volumes to who they are as young men and their character.

"[Rutledge] has gotten better every week. He was better at Temple than the week before against North Texas and he was better (against Tulane) than he was against Temple. We'll take that."

Evero's out, Wash takes over

Continued from page 5A

connected on 30-of-41 passes for 288 yards and three touchdowns.

Over Evero's four seasons in Charlotte, the Panthers rank 30th in points per game at 26.3, including a historically bad 2024 season when the allowed a league record for points allowed with 534. This year's defense has been racked by injuries, especially in the secondary where starting cornerbacks Jaycee Horn (quad) and Mike Jackson (groin) have been sidelined for most of the campaign.

Carolina (3-4) is tied with Atlanta for the NFC South lead despite having one of the NFL's leakiest defenses. In addition to the 43 points racked up by Tampa Bay in Week 6, the Panthers conceded a team-record 59 to Chicago in the season opener. Wash's task is simple: turn the defense around while there's a chance to compete for the division title.

"Just want to see the guys connected," Canales said. "I want to see them excited about going out there and executing the plan, and playing fast, playing the physical brand. The effort's been there and those things are right, but I know that we can make strides with being able to get everybody on the same page, tying in the whole unit. Eleven is one, do your 1/11, and being able to execute that way – that's what I'm hoping happens."

Wash, who is in his fourth season with the Panthers, was Jacksonville's defensive coordinator from 2016-20 when the Jaguars finished in the top 10 in total defense three times and advanced to the AFC title game in 2017. Wash has 31 years of coaching experience, including 20 in the NFL, with Tampa Bay, Seattle, and Detroit.

"I've known him for a long time," Canales said. "We go back to our days in Seattle, but even here, his connection with the players, he knows their stories, he's connected to their lives, he pushes them hard and trains them hard, and I feel like he does a great job.

"I believe he does a great job of earning the right to be able to push guys because of the emotional equity that he pours into his groups, and so I appreciate that, and I'm excited about what that what happens with the whole group as they get connected and playing together."



CHARLOTTE HORNETS

The Charlotte Hornets will retire Muggsy Bogues' No. 1 jersey on Feb. 7 at halftime of their game against Milwaukee. Bogues, an original Hornet, spent 10 years with the franchise.

Hornets retire Bogues' No. 1 jersey

By Herbert L. White
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Muggsy Bogues' jersey is finally going to Spectrum Center's rafters.

Bogues, the smallest player in NBA history at 5-3, will have his No. 1 jersey retired on Feb. 7 at halftime of the Hornets' game against Milwaukee. Bogues will become the third player in franchise history to have his jersey retired, after Bobby Phills (No. 13) and Dell Curry (No. 30). Bogues and Curry are original Hornets and played together for 10 seasons.

"Charlotte has been home to me and my family for so many years, and the support I've received from Hornets fans has meant everything to me," Bogues said in a statement. "To have my number retired alongside Bobby and Dell is an incredible honor. I'm grateful to (Hornets owners) Rick [Schnall] and Gabe [Plotkin], the organization, my teammates and coaches, and everyone who has been part of this journey. I can't wait to share this night with my family and the fans who have been with us since the beginning."

Bogues, who has spent more than 20 years with the organization as a player and team ambassador, was selected by Charlotte in the 1988 expansion draft. He quickly made his mark as one of the most accomplished players in franchise history, averaging 8.8 points, 8.8 assists and 1.7 steals over 632 games.

He retired as the franchise leader in assists (5,557), assists per game (8.8), steals (1,067) and minutes played (19,768), and is among the top 10 in seasons played (tied for first), games (second), steals per game (fifth), field goals made (sixth), field goals attempted (eighth), and points (ninth).

"Honoring the players who helped build this franchise is an important part of our commitment to Hornets history," Schnall and Plotkin said. "Muggsy was here from the beginning and played with a heart, toughness and competitive spirit that made him a fan favorite.

At 5-foot-3, he overcame obstacles throughout his career and proved he belonged among the best players in the world. He became a role model for generations, showing young people that their size doesn't have to limit what they can achieve."

Bogues finished in the top seven in the NBA in assists in six straight seasons (1989-95) and top 10 in steals (1989-90, 1991-92, 1992-93). His 10.7 assists per game in 1989–90 is the highest single-season average in team history and the only Hornet to average at least 10 assists in a season (1989–90 and 1993–94).

As the Hornets' point guard, Bogues was the engine to three 50-plus win campaigns, including a franchise-best 54–28 in 1996–97, and four playoff appearances, including its first postseason series win in 1993.

When he retired after 14 seasons, Bogues ranked 12th all-time with 6,726 career assists and his career 4.69 assist-to-turnover ratio is the best in NBA history among the top 100 all-time leaders.



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Johnson C.Smith receiver Brian Lane gathers in a 36-yard touchdown pass from Damien Mazil for a second-quarter touchdown. Lane caught three passes for 49 yards.

JC Smith moves to within a game of CIAA title berth

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Trojans to a single touchdown on two trips inside the Golden Bulls' 20 while Smith converted all three red zone possessions into paydirt.

JCSU's special teams came up big as well. The Golden Bulls blocked three kicks, including Marque Vereen swatting a 23-yard field goal try with 1:17 in regulation and a two-point return by Divine Ohiaeri for a 19-13 Smith lead.



Hill

"I'm just so proud of our young men and how they attacked the week, and I'm so proud of how they played in the game," Flowers said. "There were several times a lot of teams would have folded under the pressure that Virginia State was putting on offense and defense. … The heart of a champion is something that you can't measure, and that was definitely on display today by these Golden Bulls."

That heart was tested in the second half. Virginia State, which outgained the Golden Bulls 614 yards to 474, scored twice to deadlock the score at 26-all in the third quarter before JCSU responded with a 64-yard pass from Damien Mazil (15-of-29, 256 yards and three touchdowns) to Reggie Brigman (two catches, 98 yards).

The Trojans answered with a 14-yard strike from Matthews (25-of-38, 476 yards, 3 TDs) to McKenzie Nazir with 4:46 left.

The Golden Bulls were better at complimentary football down the stretch, though: Vereen's kick block to force overtime, Hill's strip-sack and Duncan's closing dash.

"Virginia State is a very good team," said Hill, who led Smith with 11 tackles. "Good teams are going to make good plays. It's about limiting those plays and containing those plays. As far as the energy, coach says all the time energy is contagious."

Smith-Livingstone implications

Continued from page 5A

sity's – today's JCSU – team traveled to Salisbury by horse-drawn wagon. They won 5-0. A plaque on the Livingstone campus marks the site of the inaugural game, not far from Alumni Stadium where the Blue Bears and Golden Bulls will once again tangle. Bragging rights are always on the line, but for the third straight year, there are bigger stakes.

"We're going to keep preparing the way that we prepare," said Flowers, a JCSU alumnus who is 2-2 as coach against Livingstone. "We've got a good opponent next week, it's the Commemorative Classic, and what we know is that our work is not done. We have not secured anything to go to the championship game."

Magnificent Seven: the playoff edition

Continued from page 5A

5. *Ardrey Kell* (7-3, PW: No. 5). The Knights have plenty to like about first-year coach Carter Greene, who posted a 4-1 mark in the Southwestern 7A/8A. They also get a shot at redemption against Palisades in the playoffs.

6. *Myers Park* (7-3, PW: No. 6). A week after dispatching South Mecklenburg 35-0 in the regular season finale, there's a rematch at home in the 8A West bracket.

7. *West Charlotte* (6-4, PW: Unranked). The Lions return to the rankings with Providence's loss to Ardrey Kell in the finale. First-year coach D.J. McFadden's crew hosts Hoke County in the first round.

49ers basketball launches Wes Miller era

By Cameron Williams
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The Charlotte men's basketball team will look a lot different in 2026-27.

New coach Wes Miller hit the transfer portal in the offseason and brought in several players he coached at Cincinnati. While Miller said he doesn't take a results-oriented approach, if the 49ers reach their potential, the results could be special.

"We're going to be driven by things that we can control," he said, "and what we can control is the way that we approach whatever we're going to do today. One of the standards that we have is to maximize the moment, to be present, and to try to grow and evolve as much as we can in each and every moment. And if we can do that one day at a time, one drill at a time, one practice at a time, I think we give ourselves the best chance to reach our potential by the end of the year."

One key addition is point guard Keyshuan Tillery, whose stats from his freshman year at Cincinnati – 3.8 points per game, just over one assist and a rebound per game – don't jump off the page.

Tillery was a four-star prospect at New Hampton High in New Hampshire, and the eighth-ranked point guard in the nation. He's learning from Miller and assistant coach Marcus Paige – both played the position at North Carolina – during the offseason.

"It's been great, especially learning from coach Paige," Tillery said. "He was one of the best point guards in the country for a long period of time. [He] played professionally for a long period of time, so I try to take as [many] jewels from him as I can. I'm still early in my career. I'm only a sophomore, so trying to learn a lot being in this new system. And then Coach Wes was also a point guard on a national championship team, so I really try to learn a lot from those guys."

Miller said there were some tough days coaching Tillery, but he knew it would be in his best interest and better him as a player.

Said Miller: "In today's climate, nobody wants to hear this, but there's a process to improvement and sometimes the most difficult segments are the most important segments for growth. We had some really difficult times last year, Keyshawn and I, where I was very demanding, very hard on him.

"He struggled at times, especially at this time in the preseason and early in the year as a freshman point guard, I say all that because he's been through some process to get to this place, and he's been a real bright spot – not just recently, but the entire time he's been here at Charlotte."

One key returner is forward Arden Conyers, who averaged 7.5 points per game last year on 36% shooting from three-point range. Retaining Conyers was a top priority.

"When you looked at this roster, there were some really, really good players on last year's team that we did want to keep here at Charlotte," Miller said. "Arden was at the top of that list. His shooting, he's proven it in this conference. He shot over 40% for most of the season last year. I think, maybe in February he had a stretch where he didn't shoot it as well, and it dropped to 37 or 38% for the year. But a guy that is, I think he was 6-6 last year, he's 6-8 now, so it's pretty cool that he grew a little bit. But he's a guy with length on the perimeter, a ton of shooting gravity, and experience in the conference."

Conyers said there was connectivity from the start with Miller.

"With coach Miller, we definitely had a good conversation," he said. "A good long conversation about the season. I decided to stay with him because I felt like we were on the same page. I liked everything that he said to me, and I felt like we really meshed, so that's why I stayed."