



## Compare & Contrast

# ACHS ADMIN CHANGES

### Mid-level Principals

	2023-24	2024-25
Position Title	Asst. Principal	Academic Principal
# of Positions	10	6
Focus	Students & Instruction	Instruction
Days employed	245	245
Certification	Required	Required

### Deans

	2023-24	2024-25
Position Title	Dean	Dean
# of Positions	6	11
Focus	Students	Students
Days employed	215	215
Certification	Not Required	Required

CHART/JAMES LIBRESCO

Administrative changes at ACHS from the 2023-2024 school year to the 2024-25 school year.

# Inside the High School Project

## Students react to ACHS replacing nearly half of mid-level administrators Part 3

BY JAMES LIBRESCO

Summer vacation is in full swing, but some Alexandria City High School students

are focused on how staffing changes at the school may impact them during the next school year.

According to internal documents and multiple interviews with high-level staff, the school has replaced nearly half of its 16 assis-



**PIERRETTE FINNEY**

tant principals and deans, a move that is causing significant discourse among students, particularly about the lack of Spanish-speaking administrators within the International Academy.

The ACHS student newspaper Theogony, in an article reprinted by the Alexandria Times, reported earlier this year that the school district had initiated an administrative restructuring at ACHS, requiring all 16 mid-level administrators to re-apply for their jobs. The move accompanies the opening of the new Minnie Howard campus and shift to an "academy" learning model, which will split ACHS into six specialized learning academies.

According to an internal memo dated Aug. 6 that was reviewed by the Times, two assistant principals and four deans will retain their prior roles, and three assistant principals will shift to work as deans. The other seven

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Alma Powell was an Alabama native but spent many years in Northern Virginia.

PHOTO/WIKIPEDIA

# Civic leader Alma Powell dies at 86

## Wife of former secretary of state leaves her own powerful legacy

BY CAITLYN MEISNER

Alma Powell, a civic and nonprofit leader and philanthropist, died July 28 in Alex-

andria. She was 86.

Alma Vivian Johnson was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1937, to Mildred Eliza Bell Johnson, who built and ran a day care center for Black families, and Robert Charles

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# Lyles gets the gold in photo finish race

## Alexandria native vies for rare sprinting 'triple crown' in Paris

BY CAITLYN MEISNER

Noah Lyles, a T.C. Williams High School graduate, clinched the gold medal in the men's 100-meter race in the Paris Olympics on Sunday. This is the first time he's competed in this race at the Olympic level and secured his fastest recorded time at 9.79 seconds.

It was a tight race as a group of sprinters crossed the

finish line simultaneously and a winner wasn't decided until 30 seconds after the race. It was a literal photo finish, as photographs were needed to determine that Lyles had edged out his competitors. The time difference between Lyles and the silver medalist, Kishane Thompson of Jamaica, was only five one-thousandths of a second. Fred Kerley, an American from San Antonio, Texas, won the bronze medal

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Roy Byrd hosted a campaign kickoff for his Council run.

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“ One of the things that Alma represented is the kind of job that you want to do as a mother while being the wife of a famous man, a man who is striving hard ... and breaking barriers.”

– Elayne Bennett, long-time friend

**POWELL**

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Johnson, who was a high school principal at an all-Black institution. She moved to Nashville, Tennessee, to attend Fisk University, a historically Black institution, at the age of 16. A year later, Alma moved to Boston to earn her degree in pathology and audiology from Emerson College.

It was Boston she met her future husband, Colin Powell – who would later become the first Black U.S. Secretary of State and a four-star General – on a blind date in November 1961. At the time of their meeting, Alma was working for the Boston Guild for the Hard of Hearing and Colin Powell was gearing up for a tour to Vietnam.

According to tellings of

their first interactions, Alma was not thrilled about dating a soldier and wasn't interested in pursuing a relationship. But, as soon as she met Colin Powell, her mind quickly changed.

The couple was engaged in the summer of 1962 as Colin was ordered to travel to Vietnam by former President John F. Kennedy as an adviser. Colin and Alma Powell were married in Birmingham on Aug. 25, 1962. They marked 59 years of marriage just months before Colin Powell's death from COVID-19 complications in October 2021.

During her husband's decades of military service, Alma was there to shuffle their children, Michael, Linda and Annemarie, from post to post and “keep the family grounded,” long-time friend



PHOTO/ELAYNE BENNETT

Alma Powell (right) on stage at a Best Friends Foundation event many years ago.

Elayne Bennett said.

“One of the things that Alma represented is the kind of job that you want to do as a mother while being the wife of a famous man, a man who is striving hard ... and breaking barriers,” Bennett, who herself is married to a famous man – former Secretary of Education

William Bennett – said. “She was very good at talking to me about that.”

Powell was also an active volunteer, particularly with military families and in those communities. She was an Arlington Lady, someone who attends funeral services at Arlington National Cemetery to

ensure nobody is buried alone. She also, at one point, served as the U.S. Army liaison to the National Red Cross and was an advisor to the Red Cross of the Military District of Washington, her official obituary stated.

Powell was very influential

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PHOTO/ELAYNE BENNETT

Elayne Bennett and Alma Powell at a Best Friends Foundation event.

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in Gen. Powell's 1995 decision to not run for president despite widespread speculation that he would. In a press conference on Nov. 8, 1995, with Alma by his side, Colin Powell thanked supporters for calling on him to run, but said he ultimately

decided not to. "I have spent long hours talking with my wife and children, the most important people in my life, about the impact and entry into political life would have on us," he said. "It would require sacrifices and changes in our lives that would be difficult to make

at this time. The welfare of my family had to be uppermost in my mind." Bennett said Alma identified as a Democrat, but Colin Powell declared himself an Independent until 1995, when he switched to the Republican Party. He became an Independent again in 2021.

Bennett also recalled conversations she had with Alma during this time, particularly about the country's readiness for a Black president. She said Alma wasn't sure the country could handle it in the 1990s. "I remember talking to her and I said, 'Alma, he'd be so wonderful.' And she said,

'Elayne, I know someone will take a shot at him. I am not going to let that happen. Someone will try to assassinate him,'" Bennett recalled.

A CNN article from the time corroborates this sentiment from Alma. In a May 1997 Ladies Home Journal article, she wrote: "I don't want to describe the hate mail we've gotten. ... One day I got two letters – one telling me what a wonderful man I was married to and how much the country needed him; the other said Colin Powell is a scumbag and proceeded to list all his evils."

Colin Powell reentered civilian life in 2005 after serving as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations and secretary of state in the George W. Bush administration.

Bennett said she and Alma met at a ladies luncheon around the beginning of former President Ronald Reagan's second term in 1985 when Colin Powell was working in national security. They bonded quickly, commiserating over the hassle of moving.

"We had just moved from a rental house, but we were commiserating on what a chore packing is," Bennett laughed,

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“ She participated in every activity and she didn’t come in as a person who was anything other than wanting to be responsible and being a leader for the girls [at BFF].”

– Pauline Hamlette,  
retired principal

## POWELL

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remembering their first conversation. “She told me how she moved every two years, and how she kept some trunks just packed [and] and never unpacked them.”

In 1987, as Elayne Bennett was setting up the Best Friends Foundation – a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that provides programs for middle and high school students – Alma was one of the first directors on the board and supported the foundation’s work to “provide positive peer groups for adolescents and create an environment that raises aspirations and promotes achievement,” the foundation’s website states.

“She was very helpful in helping me get started,” Bennett said. “She led the whole mission, the idea of Best Friends with her presence. She gave it the gravitas it needed because, at the time, I was amazingly young to start something like that.”

Bennett recalled a time when she and Alma had seen one another at an event or a get together, Alma nonchalantly gave her an envelope from her and the General. Bennett said she stuck the envelope in her evening purse and forgot about it, but soon after found the \$50,000 check from the Powells in support of BFF.

Pauline Hamlette, a retired educator and former principal of Amidon-Bowen Elementary School in the District, said she met Powell through BFF in the 1980s when the founda-

tion’s programming was implemented in her school.

The two immediately connected over their shared homeland of Alabama, passion for education and life as a military spouse.

“Alma was a very special person to me and I will never forget the moments we shared as a part of the Best Friends Foundation,” Hamlette said. “She was just special. She had an amazing personality and always made you feel wonderful, along with the girls [at BFF] that she was involved with.”

Hamlette remembered the annual pinning ceremony BFF did for the students and how special it was for Alma to be there for the girls.

“She participated in every activity and she didn’t come in as a person who was anything other than wanting to be responsible and being a leader for the girls,” Hamlette said. “She is a word in everybody’s household because of her relationship with the girls.”

Hamlette said she got to know Alma so well because they often traveled outside of the DMV to apply for grant money that would go toward college scholarships for BFF participants. Through the years, they became close friends and Hamlette even asked Alma to speak at her small Baptist church in Fort Washington, Maryland, which she said she happily did.

The Powells founded America’s Promise – aptly named after one of Alma’s published books of the same name – in



PHOTO/CNN

Alma and Colin Powell on their wedding day in 1962.

1997 to make strategic investments in young people a top national priority. In 2011, the couple was also named the National Association of State Boards of Education’s National Education Policy Leader of the Year.

Alma was also named to the board of the Kennedy Center by former President Bill Clinton for a six-year term and eventually served as its vice

chair. She was also a member of former President Barack Obama’s advisory board on historically Black colleges and universities.

Following Colin Powell’s death, Alma moved to Alexandria from their home in McLean. She is survived by her three children, son Michael Powell and daughters Linda Powell and Annemarie Powell Lyons, a niece, two neph-

ews, four grandchildren, a great-grandchild and many friends. There are no details yet available on a celebration of life.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions can be made in Powell’s honor to the America’s Promise Alliance at americaspromise.org/donate-in-memory-of-alma-powell.

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