

2026 North Carolina Charter School Teacher and Principal of the Year

Dr. Natasha Norins
Office of Charter Schools



Deborah Brown

The Exploris School Middle School Director, Raleigh, NC



Deborah believes strong leadership creates the foundation for school success. By hiring talented educators, trusting their ideas, and removing barriers, they empower teachers to turn innovative visions into meaningful learning experiences. A strong advocate for public charter schools, they embrace their role as laboratories for creative and effective approaches to education.

At Exploris, they champion project-based, service-centered learning that connects classroom lessons to real community needs. Students might study biology, chemistry, and nutrition while working with a local food pantry. Viewing education as a powerful act of hope, this principal is committed to developing confident, compassionate student leaders who are prepared to build a better future.



Stephanie Lane

Lake Norman Charter Elementary School, Huntersville, NC



Stephanie believes every student deserves to enter the classroom feeling safe, valued, and that they belong. Guided by respect, responsibility, peace, and enthusiasm for learning, they create a close-knit classroom community where students feel like a family of friends. One of their most meaningful moments came when a student returned from winter break, offered a hug, and said, “This feels like home.” That experience reflects their goal of creating a comforting environment where students feel confident taking risks, trying new things, and enjoying learning. They view teaching as a calling—an opportunity to encourage the next generation to discover who they are and who they hope to become.

