



## 20 QUESTIONS

May

### Celebrating 20 Years of ACS

ACS is 20 years old! We're celebrating this milestone with a game of "20 Questions," featuring some of the people who've inspired us the most during our two decades in the field. Each month, we'll highlight a few answers from each of our featured guests.

#### Dr. Gene Harris, Retired Superintendent, Columbus Public Schools

We admire Dr. Harris for many reasons—especially because of her ability to create systems change. She delivered concrete, powerful results for students in Columbus Public Schools during her long career as an administrator, which included 13 years as superintendent, overcoming apathy, naysayers and downright resistance to secure investment for the renovation or construction of 40 district buildings. In addition, she increased the on-time graduation rate from 55% to 80% during her tenure—a trend that continued after her retirement. All of this Dr. Harris achieved with grace and good humor, undergirded by unflagging resolve to support Columbus students and their families. She's a powerhouse, but also a compassionate and caring human being who definitely has changed her corner of the world for the better.

**1 What's your philosophy for life?**

Treat people the way you want to be treated.

**2 Best book you've read lately?**

*Black Cake*, a novel by Charmaine Wilkerson (Ballentine, 2022) and *Black Fortunes: The Story of the First Six African Americans Who Escaped Slavery and Became Millionaires*, by Shomari Wills (Amistad, 2018).

**3 Something you've done in your work that you're most proud of?**

One was the implementation of full-day kindergarten, even without state funding, and the other was the building program that renovated or built 40 buildings.

**4 Favorite watering hole?**

It's real simple—The Rusty Bucket.

**5 One public policy you'd change?**

School funding. The way we fund education in the United States makes no sense.

**6 What made you choose your career path?**

My mother tells me that, as the youngest, I would sit my older siblings down and play school, and I would be the teacher all the time. The impression that teachers left me with at my all-black elementary school made me think "this is what I want to do." They were smart, knew everything, and liked kids a lot. Even as a kid I knew this work was really important.