



Williamsburg County School District

"Imagine Greatness"

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Dr. Angela K. Jacobs, Interim Superintendent

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A Legacy in Full Harvest: How Williamsburg's Burgess Became a Modern Renaissance Man

Written by Angela Crosland of the S.C. School Boards Association

A Renaissance Man is often described as someone accomplished across multiple disciplines, a person whose curiosity, expertise and service stretch well beyond a single field. Few fit this description more fully than Mack Jacobi Burgess, the District 2 representative on the Williamsburg County School District Board of Trustees. He is a lifelong educator, decorated veteran, coach, principal, mentor and community pillar whose life reflects service, scholarship and deep devotion to the people who shaped him.

Burgess grew up in a family rooted in education. He and his four brothers were raised by parents who spent more than 40 years working in Williamsburg County Schools. Their influence set the tone for everything he would become.

"Education is the backbone of my family," Burgess said. "My parents were strict but supportive, and they made it clear failure was not an option."

His early years in Cades, a small community in northern Williamsburg County, doubled as lessons in responsibility and service. The family farm served as both classroom and character forge. His father raised cows, planted cucumbers, soybeans, corn and watermelons, and tended a garden large enough to feed the wider community.

"He grew just about every vegetable you can think of and shared it with our neighborhood and many of his colleagues," Burgess said.

Cades shaped him, but Nesmith later became his spiritual and relational anchor. The rural community, his mother's birthplace, became his home after he inherited the land she cherished.

"Nesmith means a lot to me because of the strong sense of community and the incredible hunting land full of deer and turkey," he said. "People look out for one another, and that's why I chose to settle here."

As the middle child among five boys, Burgess grew up with examples of academic excellence. Four brothers earned degrees in elementary education and one in mass communications. All pursued graduate studies. One became a doctoral-level leader in higher education with service at institutions including St. Augustine's University and Florida A&M University. Expectations were clear: earn degrees, return home, serve others.

Burgess followed the same path. After graduating from South Carolina State University in 1999 with a degree in elementary education, he began a career that quickly grew beyond the classroom. At W.M.

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Anderson Primary in Kingstree, he taught second grade and coached baseball, football and basketball, broadening academics with mentorship. Dr. Angely K. Jackie, Interim Superintendent
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He recalls one student on homebound instruction due to kidney complications, a child he taught to read, to solve math problems and to set goals. The boy later became the honorary baseball manager at Kingstree High School and now owns a trucking company.

"Moments like that showed me my calling was not just on the baseball field but in shaping lives through education," Burgess said.

He pursued advanced degrees, earning a master's in educational administration and an Ed.S. in educational leadership. In 2006, he became an assistant principal and, 12 years later, principal of McDonald Elementary School, a role he calls one of his greatest blessings.

Burgess also served eight years in the S.C. Army National Guard, achieving the rank of E-4 Specialist before receiving an honorable discharge.

His greatest mentor, he said, was his father, Mack H. Burgess Sr., a teacher, coach, administrator, firefighter, church leader and philanthropist. His influence echoes in every lesson Burgess passes to students.

"He taught me to treat people the way I wanted to be treated," Burgess said. "He always reminded me to show respect by saying 'yes ma'am' and 'yes sir' because you must give respect to receive it."

His mother, Janie, who was an English teacher, shaped him through her love of literature and belief in lifelong learning.

Among Burgess's signature contributions is "Dress for Success," an initiative grounded in the belief that presentation reflects discipline, confidence and pride. Inspired by his father's expectations and his own standards as a student teacher, he launched Tie Tuesday, Guys With Ties and Girls With Pearls. Support has come from around the world, turning one boy's question about "church clothes" into a movement that reshaped campus culture at McDonald Elementary.

In 2021, Burgess was elected to the Williamsburg County School Board seat previously held by the late Gladys Dorsey. Before running, he sought blessings from both his family and the Dorsey family, a reflection of the respect that guides his leadership.

He views his dual service in Williamsburg County as trustee and Georgetown County as principal as a calling anchored in faith and supported by family. His wife, Elneicia, is a school nurse in Williamsburg County Schools. Their children — Trey, Tristen and Mackenzie — remain central to his work. His daughter has attended school with him for five years. His son now attends his alma mater, South Carolina State University.

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From Soldier to Scholar, Principal to Board Member, Coach to Mentor, and Son of Educators to Father of Future Leaders, Burgess stands as a modern Renaissance Man. His life reflects mastery across roles, service across decades and leadership across communities.

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