



Williamsburg County School District

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Dr. Kelvin Wymbs, Superintendent

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WCS D INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF VISIT SCHOLARS ACADEMY

The Advanced Placement (AP) faculty at Kingstree High School, along with Principal Mr. Mark Fraiser, had the opportunity to visit the Scholars Academy in Horry County, thanks to an invitation from leaders within the Williamsburg County School District. Dr. Kelvin Wymbs, Superintendent; Mrs. Genia Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction; and Mrs. Angela McClary-Fred, Secondary Literacy Coordinator, facilitated the visit.

As a former employee of the Scholars Academy, Mrs. McClary-Rush played a key role in organizing events alongside the school's principal, Mr. Norman McQueen. She understands the importance of offering advanced learning opportunities that meet students' educational needs. Reflecting on her time as an Advanced Placement teacher at C.E. Murray High School, Mrs. McClary-Rush stated, *"During my tenure, I had the privilege of providing high-quality education to students who went on to attend top universities across the country and pursue careers as doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, and more. I've learned that students must be challenged to reach their fullest potential. My experience working at the Scholars Academy deepened this understanding, as the institution is a model of student-centered learning. Returning to WCS D and applying the best practices I learned at the Scholars Academy has truly transformed advanced learning in the Williamsburg County School District."*

Under Mr. Norman McQueen's leadership, the Scholars Academy is currently ranked as the #1 school in South Carolina. Visiting a school of such excellence was an inspiring experience for the Kingstree High School team and the WCS D Instructional Leadership Team. The Academy's unwavering commitment to academic rigor, individualized student attention, and a challenging curriculum creates an environment where students can truly thrive. The dedication of the faculty and the strong sense of community among the students contribute to an atmosphere that encourages both intellectual growth and personal development. The Scholars Academy exemplifies innovation and critical thinking, equipping students with the necessary tools and skills to succeed in an ever-changing world.

In the fall of 2023, the Williamsburg County School District launched the WCS D Scholars AP Academy, beginning with 66 students for the 2024-2025 school year. Modeled after institutions like the Scholars Academy and the state's Governor's Schools, the AP Academy

focuses on providing world-class professional development for AP educators. A key component of this development involves visiting exemplary institutions such as the Scholars Academy.

During their visit, Williamsburg County's AP educators observed classrooms and learned about the methods and operational procedures employed by the Scholars Academy's faculty in various advanced courses. They also engaged with students to discuss their academic goals and daily experiences. These discussions, along with meetings between the district's instructional team and Scholars Academy leadership, provided valuable insights into best practices that will further enhance the WCSD program.

Currently, the Williamsburg County School District offers a range of Advanced Placement courses, including AP Biology, AP Language and Composition, AP U.S. History, AP Physics, AP European History, AP Human Geography, and AP Calculus AB. Feedback from instructional leaders and educators regarding the partnership with the Scholars Academy will inform future decisions to strengthen the district's AP offerings. The feedback includes a variety of reflections and thoughts.

Genia Smith, WCSD's Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, expressed her gratitude for the visit: "My experience at the Scholars Academy was both inspiring and affirming. It reinforced that we are on the right path in creating opportunities for our gifted scholars to excel, positioning them as highly sought-after candidates for some of the nation's most prestigious colleges. The greatest takeaway from this visit was the potential for expanding our program, with a focus on recruiting students who are committed to academic excellence and prepared for the rigor required for success."

Principal Mark Fraiser from Kingstree High School added, "The visit was truly eye-opening and left a lasting impression. I was particularly impressed with how the teachers delivered their lessons, which were clearly the result of meticulous planning. Each lesson was brief yet engaging, lasting no more than 10 minutes, allowing students to take the lead in their learning. It was clear that collaboration among the teachers was key to creating a cohesive and effective learning environment. Overall, the experience offered a glimpse into a well-coordinated educational setting where student engagement and academic excellence are prioritized."

Mr. Sean Berry, WCSD's Math Coordinator, noted: "Attending the Scholars Academy was an incredible experience. The Building Thinking Classrooms I observed in the math classes were truly impressive. It was inspiring to see the scholars so engaged, excited, and fully invested in their learning, holding themselves accountable in the process. I also had the opportunity to speak with two scholars during their study hall period. Both were balancing an impressive workload, taking three AP courses and two college courses. One student aspires to attend Duke University, while the other hopes to join the U.S. Air Force Academy. This is the kind of educational experience every scholar should have the chance to be a part of."

Mr. Salifu Mack, AP U.S. History and Constitution teacher, reflected on the visit by saying, "Leaving the Scholars Academy, I felt re-energized and inspired to envision the future of project-based and higher-order thinking teaching here in Williamsburg County. What we observed were students empowered to take ownership of their education. The ethos of Advanced Placement courses has the potential to develop students who are collaborative, confident, and critical thinkers. This reflects a legacy of educational excellence in Williamsburg County while also addressing the needs of students who are seeking that extra challenge."

Cassandra Friend, AP Physics 1 teacher, echoed similar sentiments: "The Scholars Academy provided invaluable insights into how to run a successful AP program. The relationships between students, teachers, and leadership were clearly central to the Academy's success. It was evident that leadership support, teacher preparation, and student engagement were all key to creating a culture of academic rigor. Through my observations, I saw successful classroom cultures, mastery of content, and effective use of data to guide instruction. I'm grateful for this opportunity to learn from such an established AP program."

Mr. Sheela Vipin, Mathematics Department Chairperson and AP Calculus instructor, shared, "Thank you for allowing me to visit the Scholars Academy. The opportunity to interact with such dedicated teachers and students was invaluable. I learned a great deal about creative teaching strategies and the high standards of rigor in both teaching and learning. The warm reception from the principal, faculty, and staff made the experience unforgettable. I was especially excited to observe the implementation of the Building Thinking Classroom Framework."

Mrs. Teneica Barnaby, AP Language and Composition teacher, observed, "The Scholars Academy is a model of student engagement and academic achievement. During my visit, I witnessed lessons that were student-centered and highly collaborative. In one AP Language session, students worked in different groups to develop prompts and provide textual evidence to support their claims for the AP exam. The level of engagement and the quality of discussion were impressive. I'm grateful to everyone who helped organize this visit."

The visit provided valuable insights into innovative teaching methods, strategies for student engagement, and academic support systems that promote student success. Melissa White, a teacher of AP Human Geography and AP European History, remarked, "Our team left feeling inspired and eager to implement new ideas that will enhance the learning experience for our own AP scholars at Kingstree High School."

The day-long professional development visit to the Scholars Academy was an invaluable experience for the educators and leaders of the Williamsburg County School District. It offered a glimpse into the practices of one of the top schools in South Carolina and provided an opportunity to gather insights that will help strengthen and expand the WCSD Scholars AP Academy. The

exchange of ideas, observation of innovative teaching methods, and emphasis on fostering student engagement and academic excellence will serve as a foundation for enhancing the district's programs. As the WCSD team returns with new knowledge and inspiration, they are more committed than ever to empowering their students with the tools and opportunities needed to excel in their academic journeys and beyond.