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## COMMUNICATIONS

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For Immediate Release

### DISTRICT STARS HONORED AT AIKEN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS ANNUAL EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION EVENT

During a banquet held at Aiken High School on Thursday, March 21, the District recognized its STARS of Public Education. Aiken County Public Schools' annual employee recognition celebration has expanded over the years,"

ACPSD Superintendent King Laurence shared. "All employees supporting one another and appreciating each other's contributions to our shared work makes tonight beautiful."

The Stars of Public Education event celebrates the best and the brightest throughout the district in seven categories, including the GEM (Giving Even More) of the Year, Professional Staff Member of the Year, District Level Administrator of the Year, Assistant Principal of the Year, Principal of the Year, First Year Teacher of the Year, and Teacher of the Year. School and department-level stars were honored during the March 21 event, and Honor Courts were celebrated for each employee recognition category before District winners were announced.

Each Honor Court member received a special plaque as a symbol of their accomplishments. Through generous sponsorship support, district winners also received a monetary award and a specially selected trophy along with a gold ring to celebrate their honor courtesy of Jostens Rhodes Graduation Services' Platinum Sponsorship. Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, this year's Presenting Sponsor, allowed for a beautiful and memorable evening for all. Financial and in-kind resources from the Special Section in the Aiken Standard to Panera Bread free dessert cards for each winner and nominee are among some of the contributions community businesses dedicated to celebrating our STARS of Public Education. Additional major sponsors included Bridgestone, DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen, H.G. Reynolds Construction Engineers, and SRP Federal Credit Union as Gold Sponsors.

## NAMING 2023-2024 STARS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

After guests celebrated nominees through a slideshow featuring nominees and winners from every school and department for each category over dinner, Ms. Merry Glenne Piccolino, Director of Communications and Community Partnerships, continued the program with recognition of the GEM of the Year Honor Court.

## GEM OF THE YEAR AWARD

The 2024-2025 GEM of the Year Award Honor Court included:

- Bonnie Gibbons, Secretary/Bookkeeper, Kennedy Middle School;
- Susan Adams, Media Aide, Millbrook Elementary School;
- Derrick Rouse, Custodian, Mossy Creek Elementary School;
- Tammy Posey, Parent Involvement Aide/Secretary, North Aiken Elementary School; and
- **Tanja Brammer, Instructional Aide, Paul Knox Middle School.**

"The winner of our District GEM of the Year award is described as someone who is patient and empathetic, always finding positivity in what they do and providing hope to students each day," Piccolino shared. "Join me in congratulating our 2024-2025 GEM of the Year winner, Ms. Tanja Brammer."

ACPSD's GEM was quickly surrounded by several family members and friends who had been invited to surprise her.

## PROFESSIONAL STAFF MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Tray Traxler, the District's Chief Financial Officer, welcomed to the stage the 2024-2025 Professional Staff Member of the Year Award Honor Court which included:

- Ashlee O'Neal, Instructional Technology Support Specialist, Instructional Services;
- April Slack, Middle Level Math Support Specialist, Instructional Services;
- **Monica Wells, School Nurse, North Aiken Elementary School;**
- Tina Streubel, School Nurse, Paul Knox Middle School; and
- Mungera Cash, School Psychologist, Special Programs.

"Our District Professional Staff Member of the has shared that advocacy and connecting students to resources is her favorite thing, and her work reflects her passion," Traxler shared as he announced and congratulated the winner, Mrs. Monica Wells.

Just like the newly-named GEM of the Year, Wells and all other District winners that followed quickly found themselves surrounded by their loved ones who had been hidden backstage as they awaited the surprise and celebration.

## DISTRICT LEVEL ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

Jennifer Hart, the District's Chief Officer of Administration and Human Resources, introduced the District Level Administrator of the Year Award Honor Court.

The District Level Administrator of the Year Award Honor Court included:

- Dustin Fowler, Virtual Learning Coordinator, Aiken iNOVATE;
- Berkeley Postell, Assistant Superintendent of High Schools, Division of Instruction; and
- **Carl White, Director of Student Services, Division of Operations and Student Services.**

"The winner of our District Level Administrator of the Year award is described as an authentic and caring leader who possesses the experience and expertise to handle a myriad of high-pressure situations that are almost a daily presence in a large school district," Hart shared before congratulating the 2024-2025 District Level Administrator of the Year winner, Mr. Carl White.

## ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR AWARD

Dr. Salvatore Minolfo was honored to recognize administrators he supports through his role as the District's Director of Administration for their dedication to shaping the academic successes of students and cultivating leadership in their buildings.

The Assistant Principal of the Year Award Honor Court included:

- Suman Marks-Johnson, Assistant Principal, Aiken County Career & Technology Center;
- Anna Beth Harbeson, Assistant Principal, Belvedere Elementary School; and
- **Karen Fiery, Assistant Principal, Busbee Elementary School.**

"Our District Assistant Principal of the Year winner is described as someone who has devoted her career and life to her students, giving every ounce of herself to make her school the best it can be," Dr. Minolfo shared as he announced the winner for District Assistant Principal of the Year, Ms. Karen Fiery.

## PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR AWARD

Dr. Amy Edwards, the district's Chief Officer of Instruction, welcomed to the stage the 2024-2025 Principal of the Year Award Honor Court which included:

- Michelle Padgett, Principal, Graniteville Elementary School;
- Sheldon Higgenbottom, Principal, Midland Valley High School; and
- Shunte Dugar, Principal, New Ellenton Middle STEAM Magnet School.

"Our District Principal of the Year award-winner is described as a mentor principal who consistently exemplifies the qualities of a true servant leader both personally and professionally," Dr. Edwards shared before congratulating the 2024-2025 Principal of the Year winner, Mrs. Michelle Padgett.

## FIRST YEAR TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Christen Sikes was honored to celebrate the many exceptionally skillful and dedicated new educators she supports through her role as the District's Educator Effectiveness Coordinator.

The First Year Teacher of the Year Award Honor Court included:

“Our District Teacher of the Year winner is described as someone who has an excellent rapport with students and ensures students experience success by challenging their abilities to encourage as much growth and development as possible,” Superintendent Laurence shared as he congratulated the winner for District Teacher of the Year, Mr. Philip Sirk.

## **STARS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION SCHOOL AND DEPARTMENT-LEVEL WINNERS AND NOMINEES**

Congratulations STARS of Public Education winners, as well as nominees in each category.

### **GEM OF THE YEAR**

Dorothy Landy, A.L. Corbett Middle School

Michelle Bush, Aiken County Career & Technology Center

Tammy Bell, Aiken Elementary School

Jody Morgan, Aiken High School

Shephone Ryan, Aiken Intermediate School

Cathey Ferrell, Belvedere Elementary School

Edith Walker-Reed, Busbee Elementary School

Keisha Jackson, Business Services

Marilyn Abellan, Byrd Elementary School

Hope Platt, Center for Innovative Learning

Brook Byers, Chukker Creek Elementary School

Connie Bell, Clearwater Elementary School

Kimberly Pollina, East Aiken School of the Arts

Lynde Ball, Educational Technology

Patricia Young, Gloverville Elementary School

Breannah Cleveland, Graniteville Elementary School

Shirley Hilton, Greendale Elementary School

Debra Townsend, Hammond Hill Elementary School

Debbie Glover, Highland Springs Middle School

Deloris Brown, Human Resources

Rebecca Canalejo, J.D. Lever Elementary School

Teresa Pearson, Jackson STEM Magnet Middle School

Christopher Sims, Jefferson Elementary School

Bonnie Gibbons, Kennedy Middle School

Eugene Eshun Phillips, Langley-Bath-Clearwater Middle School

Michelle McCord, Leavelle McCampbell Middle School

Benjamin Parry, Maintenance Department

Leota Bragg, Midland Valley High School

Susan Adams, Millbrook Elementary School

Derrick Rouse, Mossy Creek Elementary School

James Ingram, New Ellenton Middle STEAM Magnet School

Tammy Posey, North Aiken Elementary School

Pamela Faw, North Augusta Elementary School

Katherine Barrett, North Augusta High School

Stephanie Abney, North Augusta Middle School  
Angela Taylor, Oakwood-Windsor Elementary School  
Renee Reynolds, Operations & Student Services  
Tanja Brammer, Paul Knox Middle School  
Jami Mims, Redcliffe Elementary School  
Pam Layton, Ridge Spring-Monetta Elementary School  
Ashley Bradley, Ridge Spring-Monetta Middle/High School  
Shaunna Hay, Schofield Middle School  
Regina Brock, Silver Bluff High School

### **DISTRICT LEVEL ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR**

Dustin Fowler, Aiken iNNOVATE  
Salvatore Minolfo, Division of Administration & HR  
Brenda DeLoache, Federal Programs  
Micki Dove, Division of Instruction  
Berkeley Postell, Division of Instruction  
Phyllis Gamble, Division of Instruction  
Carl White, Division of Operations & Student Services

### **ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR**

Suman Marks-Johnson, Aiken County Career & Technology Center  
Anna Beth Harbeson, Belvedere Elementary School  
Karen Fiery, Busbee Elementary School  
Krish Risher, North Augusta High School  
Sylvia Gay, North Augusta Middle School  
Wendy West, Paul Knox Middle School  
Patrick Newsome, Ridge Spring Monetta Elementary School  
Miranda Fulmer, Ridge Spring-Monetta Middle/High School  
Tami Shaffer, South Aiken High School

### **PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR**

Kenneth Lott, Aiken County Career & Technology Center  
Jeffery Matthews, Busbee Elementary School  
Renaë Enlow, Byrd Elementary School  
Lisa Fallaw, East Aiken School of the Arts  
Michelle Padgett, Graniteville Elementary School  
Caroline Barker, Greendale Elementary School  
Sheldon Higgenbottom, Midland Valley High School  
Shunte Dugar, New Ellenton Middle STEAM Magnet School  
Elisa Sanders-Pee, North Aiken Elementary School  
Casey Rogers, Paul Knox Middle School  
Callie Herlong, Ridge Spring-Monetta Elementary School  
Sidney Johnson, Schofield Middle School  
Samuel Fuller, South Aiken High School

### **FIRST YEAR TEACHER OF THE YEAR**

Heather Moore, Aiken Elementary School  
Jordan Fernandes, Belvedere Elementary School  
Paige Hall, Byrd Elementary School  
Angela Huggins, Chukker Creek Elementary School  
Julie Griffin, Clearwater Elementary School  
Deanna Jowers, Gloverville Elementary School

Ashley DeFore, Graniteville Elementary School  
Holly Sharpe, Greendale Elementary School



Melissa Overcash, Homebound

Stacie Sidwell, J.D. Lever Elementary School

Philip Sirk, Jackson STEM Magnet Middle School

Veronica Smith, Jefferson Elementary School

Meredith Parrott, Kennedy Middle School

Amy Buchkeister, Langley-Bath-Clearwater Middle School

Allison Boggess, Leavelle McCampbell Middle School

Samantha Luzzatti, Midland Valley High School

Anna Scaggs, Mossy Creek Elementary School

Anna Scaggs, Mossy Creek Elementary School

Carrissa Brown, New Ellenton Middle STEAM Magnet School