



**For Immediate Release**  
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**Contact:**  
Henry Darby, 843-745-7140

## Media Release

**North Charleston High School**

### **Top Five Teacher of the Year Finalist –** **North Charleston High School's** **Stevie Shirey**

**Anita W. Huggins, Ed.D**  
Superintendent of Schools

**Jacqueline Haynes**  
Associate Superintendent of  
Acceleration Schools

**Trevor Strawderman**  
Executive Director, North  
Charleston HS and Athletics

**Henry Darby**  
Principal



**North Charleston, S.C. –** Stevie Shirey spent most of her young life feeling underestimated and overlooked. Her family was not wealthy, and the stereotype that often accompanies a person's socio-economic status affected Shirey's academic placement in middle and high school. This only determined Shirey to put in the hard work, and today, she is proud to have been named a Top Five Finalist for Charleston County School District Teacher of the Year.

Shirey is a science teacher at North Charleston High School (NCHS) and is the department chair. She is proud of the department she has helped build over the last three years at NCHS after teaching at Goose Creek High School for 15 years.

#### **Becoming a teacher**

While in middle and high school, she desired to enroll in honors courses but was told she could not. Not one to take no for an answer, Shirey signed herself up anyway and excelled at all of her advanced classes.

"I wanted to become a teacher so I could be the person I didn't have as a student," said Shirey. "I wanted students to feel supported and confident in their pursuits."

As Shirey kicked off her new career, she again had the sinking feeling of being underestimated. Some veteran educators thought the first-year teacher would only last for a short time in the profession.

"Everyone thought I was on my way out," said Shirey. "I was determined to be a teacher and a good one at that. I was successful because my goal was to build rapport with my students. I did that, and here I am now, almost 20 years later, as a district finalist for Teacher of the Year."

Shirey's former and current students all show a great deal of respect toward her and care for her as much as she cares for them. That is evident in how protective they are of her, Shirey explained.

"The environment within my classroom is a communal one where the work gets done, but everyone has fun doing it," said Shirey. "We enjoy each other's company in my classroom."

Shirey also focuses on building up the person as much as she does the academics.

"I work to instill self-accountability in my students," said Shirey. "They know they have to put in the work, and they are learning to advocate for themselves."

Shirey learned very similar lessons from her mother, who also inspired her to become a teacher. Her mother was a scout leader and a band booster. She was also very supportive of Shirey's education.

"She believed in me, and she encouraged me to be my best at all things," said Shirey. "I watched her interact with my peers at my school; she was like a second mother to so many of them. I try to model my teaching and mentoring style after her."

NCHS Principal Henry Darby said Shirey is focused on closing the achievement gap. Shirey's emphasis is not only on preparing students for major exams but also on sponsoring life-enriching experiences.

"Ms. Shirey has been laser-focused on getting students to concentrate on their end-of-course exams (EOC), and as a result, the student's first semester EOC scores have improved markedly," said Darby. "Additionally, she facilitates professional learning communities to analyze benchmark data as well as providing hands-on experiences using laboratory experiments and guest speakers to make the content and student learning relevant. She has sponsored field trips to the South Carolina Aquarium, Bulls Island, ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge, and Kayaking in Shem Creek, exposing students to new experiences and expanding their socio-educational-cultural perspectives."

### **More than just teaching**

Shirey describes her career as very rewarding. While many days Shirey feels like she is ticking off a long "to-do" list, she appreciates the challenge. She also enjoys the many activities she participates in and volunteers for outside of the classroom.

Students are often amused and impressed to see Shirey sitting in the driver's seat of the school's activity bus, heading to field trips and athletic events.

"I make myself available to students in any way that I possibly can," said Shirey. "If I am able, I want to be of service."

She restarted the school's National Beta Club, a service organization which has been dormant at NCHS since 2014. Under her sponsorship, the club has won state and national awards. NCHS is the only school in CCSD that competed at the South Carolina National Beta Club Convention this year.

Darby said Shirey comes from altruistic values in the desires, efforts, and results of helping students who reside in metaphysical, abstract, poverty-stricken areas to become productive citizens.

"From focusing on school work to participating in civic programs in the area of helping others, perhaps Ms. Shirey's greatest contribution was to leave a very reputable educational institution to teach at a school where she is needed the most to help the least of these," added Darby.

### **A platform to advocate**

Shirey said being named to the finalist list was a complete shock - but an honor as well.

"If named District Teacher of the Year, it would mean a lot to me because of the change it could bring to my school," said Shirey. "It would allow me to showcase the excellence and dedication of the staff and students at NCHS. I'd love to recruit more teachers to be part of this community and help NCHS expand opportunities for these young people."

Shirey believes the primary purpose of public education is to improve the educational and economic prospects of the communities it serves.

"Teaching essentially requires we create an environment which is nurturing to the instructional needs of our students," said Shirey. "I strongly believe that this nurturing must also extend beyond my classroom doors."

Shirey plans to advocate for her fellow teachers to ensure they have everything necessary to do their best.

"All too often, we see new teachers come in, make mistakes, flounder, and then leave the profession," said Shirey. "Instead of penalizing and ostracizing teachers for rookie mistakes, we, as veteran teachers, need to offer them guidance."

Shirey said that as a new teacher, she was blessed with strong (informal) mentor leaders.

"I learned my craft within a department of teachers that supported and shared with each other," said Shirey. "When I arrived at NCHS, I stepped into an all-new department where I had the opportunity to guide and influence the building of a positive and effective team. We took the school's weakest department and, in one year, turned it into the strongest."

Shirey plans to help her colleagues model that across the district, and Darby has no doubt that Shirey will be successful in that mission.

"Ms. Shirey serves in the capacity of a teacher-role model whereby other instructors emulate the professionalism they see daily in the candidate's daily school practices," said Darby.

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#### **About the Charleston County School District**

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 50,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, portfolio of educational options and specialized programs delivered to the students of CCSD through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools and programs. Rich educational opportunities for students include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military; dual credit; and many more.