



West Ashley High School

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Media Release

Top Five Teacher of the Year Finalist – West Ashley High School's Julia Royall



West Ashley, S.C. – Despite an unfortunate breast cancer diagnosis in July, West Ashley High School French teacher Julia Royall was determined not to miss the start of the school year. In fact, she didn't want to miss any day of school. But, not all things were in her control, and surgery was scheduled on the same day that the 2023-2024 school year started. However, just three short weeks later, Royall was where she wanted to be, back in her classroom with her students.

"Being in this classroom lets me forget about the cancer treatment," said Royall. "I just want to be with my students."

Royall knew that teaching was the career for her, the first day she ever taught in a classroom. Her passion has grown even stronger over the last 20 years. That kind of drive is what makes Royall stand out among her peers. As a result, she was named a Top Five Finalist for Charleston County School District's (CCSD) 2023-2024 Teacher of the Year.

According to Principal Ryan Cumback Under Royall's leadership, the World Language Department at West Ashley has flourished.

"She has been instrumental in recruiting and mentoring a team of excellent teachers, thereby enhancing the quality of language education at our school," said Cumback. "Her initiative in establishing the school's National French Honor Society marks a significant achievement, inspiring other departments, such as Spanish, to

follow suit. This initiative not only enriches our school's academic offerings but also fosters a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity among students."

Royall said that not only has she embraced her role as department chair, but she is also the co-chair of the school's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) committee.

"Her efforts have resulted in nearly 100 percent staff participation, contributing substantially to a positive shift in the school's climate and culture," added Cumback. "This transformation under her guidance speaks volumes about her leadership skills and her ability to unite and motivate her colleagues toward a common goal."

Becoming a teacher

Royall became a teacher, because of the influence that teachers had on her life.

"Throughout my adolescence, I struggled with low self-esteem and often made bad decisions as a result," explained Royall. "Fortunately, I had several teachers who were able to relate to me, who I was able to trust and respect, and who were a constant support when I needed them. Thanks to the support of my teachers, my self-esteem improved along with my grades."

The encouragement given to Royall by her high school French teacher pushed her to enroll in the AP French course where she excelled. In college, a professor confided that she was the best student in the class, and that made Royall realize she could teach French. That is when her dream of teaching French was born.

"My love for and desire to become the best French teacher I could possibly become led me to take a year away from college to be an Au Pair in France," said Royall. "I quickly realized that the best way to better understand a language and a culture is to live it. So I did, and that has had the biggest impact on my teaching career."

Royall was afforded a student teaching opportunity with CCSD in 2002. She was assigned to Staci Attafi's classroom. The two share a special bond now as colleagues.

"I rely on her as our "go-to-teacher" in the district when I need her to support other teachers with best practice instruction," said Attafi, CCSD's Instructional Specialist for World Languages. "She worked with me on the South Carolina curriculum team in 2020 to write curriculum for all state content teachers and most recently on the CCSD curriculum writing team to write complete, proficiency-based units for our district teachers."

While Royall has taught in various schools and received distinguished designations throughout her career, her dream was to join the team at West Ashley High School. The stars aligned, and she joined the faculty three years ago.

'This is a very diverse school and I enjoy that we all come from all different backgrounds," said Royall. "Our administration is very supportive and my colleagues and I all work very well together. Our parents are outstanding and they support and appreciate us."

Everyone has the ability to learn

"My own personal background and experience with my students are proof that having a teacher who has high expectations and believes in their students can change lives," said Royall. "I am an outstanding teacher because of my belief that all students can learn, my relentless effort to motivate them, and my willingness to learn and adapt to their individual needs."

Royall is a fierce advocate for learning foreign" languages and said it can benefit every student.

"South Carolina is [leading the state](#) in foreign companies and opportunities with 9,5% of South Carolina's private workforce employed by an international firm," said Royall. "Students can take what they've learned in French or any other world language class into the professional world and excel. Students in my classroom are not only learning an important target language but are encouraged to be global citizens and are given regular opportunities to make cross-cultural connections as well. "

Royall believes that in order for teachers to impact students, they have to have a relationship of mutual trust and respect, and they have to want to get to know their scholars as individuals.

"I work very hard from the beginning of each term to earn my students' trust and to find a connection with them," said Royall.

Cumback added that her resilience in the face of adversity has served as an inspiration to both her colleagues and students, exemplifying the strength and dedication of a truly outstanding teacher.

"Ms. Royall embodies the qualities that the Teacher of the Year award seeks to recognize: dedication, innovation, leadership, and a profound commitment to student success," said Cumback. "She is not only a credit to West but also to the teaching profession as a whole."

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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.