

For Immediate Release

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Media Release

The West Ashley CAS celebrates first certified pipe welders

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Charleston, SC – The West Ashley Center for Advanced Studies (WACAS) recently celebrated their first-ever [certified pipe welders](#). Students Aden Jones and Crawford Helms were recognized last month for successfully passing the national test. They are students in Andrew Dock's Welding Technology program at the WACAS. Jones and Helms are the first students in Charleston County School District (CCSD) to become certified pipe welders and the youngest in the state.

According to Dock, this is a milestone accomplishment for these students.

"We are so proud of these young men as well as Mr. Dock for all their hard work and dedication to achieve this nationally recognized certification," added Principal Dale Metzger. "This will enable them to assume their place in the high-demand, high-salaried industrial workforce immediately after graduating high school."

According to Dock, the Welding Technology program does not yet offer the pipe welding certification.

"These boys went out on their own to receive the national certification," said Dock. "That's quite an accomplishment."

The success of the program and the drive that Dock sees in his students has motivated him to reach out to the South Carolina State Department of Education and submit the Industry Certification Application to be able to give the students credit for the certifications that they are earning.

Helms is a senior at West Ashley High School and because of his advancement in the Welding Technology program at the CAS, he has been appointed as a teacher assistant (TA). He mentors students in the early stages of the program and assists as needed to Dock.

"After just two semesters I was hooked," said Helms. "I've developed a passion for this trade and enjoyed learning about the tools and perfection required to complete a project successfully. It gives me a sense of satisfaction."

Helms' classmate Frankie Ramirez is chasing his pipe welder's certification, hoping to follow his friend's example. He is in Welder 3 and said his experience in the program will give him an advantage when applying for jobs.

Classroom to career

Upon graduation, Helms will head to Nucor Steel where he will start work as a welder at Thompson Pipe.

"I'm excited to put my newfound passion to work," said Helms.

There are six courses in the program to provide students with the skills and knowledge to effectively perform cutting and welding applications used in the construction industry or in advanced manufacturing. Courses include basic welding, structural welding, advanced welding, and teacher's aide.

According to Dock, students who go straight into the workforce with their pipe welding certification can earn upwards of \$32 an hour.

"It means a lot to me to be able to prepare these students to go straight into the workforce," said Dock. "There were people in my life who coached and mentored me and prepared me for a very rewarding career. I am glad to be able to give back."

Dock worked for six years in the industry before he came to CCSD at just 24 years old.

"I wanted to be like my welding teacher Gene Cribb," said Dock. "I knew I could teach the next generation everything they need to know about this industry. I was lucky I got the call to come to West Ashley, and maybe a little faith played into that as well."

Ramirez researched the industry and realized this could be a lucrative career path. He soon learned the program and his instructor could help him lock in his future.

"I appreciate this class," said Ramirez. "Dock and the teacher assistants have helped me learn through a hands-on approach. I really look up to [Crawford] and I want to be like him, one day working as a TA."

While Dock is teaching students the basics, he eases them into technical college-level instruction.

"That approach allows my students to grow and mature so that when they leave here they are confident in their work and in the workplace," said Dock. "They are able to take instruction from leaders; they are able to go into jobs needed in our community."

Helms said Dock's level of knowledge is impressive.

"This is a very technical skill to learn," said Helms. "From the math and measuring components to the actual welding piece, it can be complicated."

Helms added that Dock's teaching style has made learning fun.

"This is an elective course, so some students take it to have the credits," explained Helms. "I took it to prepare for my future and I have taken it very seriously. My teacher set me up for success and I took full advantage of that."

The CAS pays for students to earn their certification, which Dock explains is another incentive to work hard and get to the next level.

"This is not an easy program," said Ramirez. "It is difficult, but with support from Dock and my classmates, I am learning everything I need to know to find employment when I graduate."

Dock said that several certified students attempted the advanced pipe welding test, but were not successful, but will be going back in a few weeks to try it again.

"To put it into perspective, one student failed by 1/32 of an inch," said Dock. "That's how difficult this test is."

Dock's seniors all have a job lined up or are heading to college, and he is very proud of that.

"Companies in this area know that there are good welders coming out of this program," said Dock. "They're looking to hire my students and that's a compliment to the program and the hard work these students put in."

In addition to fulfilling his dream of being an instructor, Dock said the WACAS has allowed him to earn his AWS CWI (Certified Welding Inspector) credential which is a very prestigious credential.

"The test has roughly an 80% fail rate," said Dock. "Having the ability to earn my CWI has put me 12 years ahead of where I thought I would be at this age."

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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 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; military; dual credit; and many more.