

**For Immediate Release**

January 23, 2022

**Contact:**

Andy Pruitt, 843-937-6583

# Media Release

## **DLI cohort partners with CCSD to focus on Career Readiness**

### Office of Communications

**Donald R. Kennedy, Sr.**  
Superintendent of Schools

**Anita Huggins**  
Deputy Superintendent

**Vanessa L. Denney, M.Ed.**  
Interim Executive Director of  
Communications

**Charleston, SC** — Charleston County School District's (CCSD) Director of General Counsel Investigations, Oscar Douglas recently completed the [South Carolina Diversity Leaders Initiative](#) (DLI), hosted by [The Riley Institute at Furman](#).

The DLI equips leaders with the tools and perspectives needed to leverage diversity as a way to improve organizational outcomes and drive social and economic progress in South Carolina. As a part of the experience, participants form small groups and complete targeted community action projects in their local area, combining their individual talents to develop real solutions for real issues in the state.

Douglas' group focused on career readiness for high school seniors. In collaboration with CCSD's Career and Technology Education Department (CTE), the group branded their initiative "CATalyst for Career Readiness," and 15 soon-to-be graduates from North Charleston High School (NCHS) were identified in collaboration with school counselors and other educators.

With the ultimate goal of confirmed employment or college acceptance prior to graduation, the seniors completed self-discovery activities and employability lessons. In addition, students and their DLI mentors attended a variety of field trips, visiting local colleges, worksites, and offices aligned with their career interests. These visits included MUSC, South Carolina Ports Authority, Trident Technical College's culinary training program, and more.

"There are employment and workforce training opportunities for these students immediately upon graduation," explained Oscar. "Our community partners are willing to provide training for the students and open up pathways towards professional growth and salary increases. Additionally, Trident Technical College currently has no cost tuition for many of their educational programs."

The DLI mentors' lead contact with the CTE department was Chad Vail, Work-based Learning Partnerships Coordinator. Vail said the CATalyst team's mentoring efforts provided valuable support and built lasting relationships of trust and accountability over the term of the program.

"This program is designed to provide students with the opportunity to build relationships and earn the designation of Career Readiness," said Vail.

“Participating seniors complete the 40 documented hours of career experiences so they can be best prepared to maximize the wide variety of professional opportunities available right here in the Charleston region.”

Deputy Superintendent Anita Huggins was also a graduate of the most recent Diversity Leaders Initiative. She participated in a separate cohort. Huggins put her full support behind continuing the CATalyst initiative so it can serve as a sustainable program year after year.

“The work that the CATalyst team did shows its commitment to supporting CCSD students,” said Huggins. “It is the continued goal of CCSD to build supportive ecosystems around our educational goals so that no student slips through the cracks. We resolve to give every student a chance for a bright future, and this Career Readiness mentorship program is an example of that.”

Huggins said that as CCSD expands and solidifies its “ecosystem” community partners will be called upon to continue the effort.

“We hope public and private entities will join us in providing our students with access to training and to securing employment,” added Huggins.

While the CATalyst team has graduated from the Diversity Leaders Initiative, their work continues. Douglas said team members will continue to mentor the students in their cohort, including teaching life skills, interview techniques, and how to prepare for opportunities that await them.

“The team was able to add some engine power to an existing CTE program and add some new community partners so we consider that a win,” said Douglas. “Of the 15 students who participated, almost all of them had a verbal commitment to employment with one of the participating community partners. Not all CCSD students are ready to transition to a four-year college. This program shows them a way to make a viable living, especially in industries that support Charleston’s economy.”

“These mentorships will hopefully remain as lifelong relationships,” said Douglas. “Seeing first-hand the transformation taking place with these kids truly was beautiful to see. In a blink, these young men and women will transform from soon-to-be graduates to contributing members of Charleston society.”

For more information, contact the Office of Communications at (843) 937-6303.

###

#### **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 49,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military.