



Academic Magnet High School

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Media Release

Natasha Akery named a Top Five Teacher of the Year Finalist

North Charleston, SC – Teaching is a second career for [Natasha Akery](#); she joined the profession in 2017 through an alternative certification process. She has filled the roles of English instructor and Diversity Coach at Academic Magnet High School since 2020.

Akery placed herself in positions throughout her life where she could teach as it came natural to her. She was a yoga instructor for eight years and after the birth of her second child, friends asked her if she was going back to work. As luck would have it, she majored in education at her magnet high school, The Academy for Arts, Science, and Technology in Myrtle Beach. Her passion for literature is something she always wanted to share and with a father who is a veteran educator, it seemed like the next best step.

“In talking about it with my family, I learned that they were all waiting on me to realize that I needed to be in the classroom,” said Akery.

Fast forward to today, and the 2009 College of Charleston graduate (Religious Studies) attends the International Institute for Restorative Practices as she pursues her Master of Science.

Akery’s inspiration to become an English teacher came from her very own teacher, Susie Huggins, who ignited a passion that she had for the written word.

“Mrs. Huggins laid the groundwork,” added Akery.

It did not take Akery long to fall in love with her decision and her students.

“The greatest part of teaching is storytelling,” said Akery. “Storytelling also includes listening and looking for stories not heard or stories that were missed. Students hear stories they hadn’t considered before and they quickly learn how and why to consider another person’s perspective or viewpoint.”

In reflecting on her teaching practices, Akery recognized that Charleston County School District (CCSD) has sought to address inequities that compromise student achievement.

"I engage in restorative practices and culturally responsive teaching because I want to dismantle those inequities," said Akery. "I collaborate with school district representatives to offer an educator's perspective and advocate on behalf of my students. Seeing students thrive brings me the greatest joy as an educator."

Not only does she advocate for her students, but Akery advocates for her future and current colleagues.

Akery has presented at the South Carolina Council for Teachers of English in the 2020 and 2022 Annual Conferences and is a member of Teacher2Teacher (National Social Media Network for Educators), and #HipHopEd (Virtual Professional Learning Community).

In her role at Academic Magnet, Akery designs and facilitates professional development for administrators, faculty, and staff pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Akery also facilitates professional development for CCSD English Language Arts and Social Studies teachers inspired by culturally responsive teaching and restorative practices.

"The advice I give to future educators is to ask themselves honestly if they are willing to care about every child and will they be willing to build the bridge to lead that child to success," said Akery.

Akery considers teaching an opportunity to get to know her students, recognize their strengths, identify their opportunities for growth, and make them laugh.

"I teach my students that all literature and poetry, regardless of its historical or cultural context, belongs to them," said Akery. "Every text is a window into another perspective that also reflects back an aspect of our shared human experience."

Principal Jacob Perlmutter said that the honor of school teacher of the year was bestowed on Akery by the faculty and staff of Academic Magnet who recognize that AMHS has been made stronger, kinder, and more inclusive through her outstanding efforts.

"Mrs. Akery strengthens the teaching profession because every student leaves her classroom with a heightened respect for the teaching profession," said Perlmutter. "Her time and instruction are devoted to not only making good students but making good people. Her students were the first to welcome me to my role as principal this year when last summer I received their 'Dear Mr. Perlmutter' letters detailing both the aspects of our school that they loved and the areas that needed additional attention."

Akery said that teaching is rewarding even when it is challenging. She genuinely enjoys the relationships she has with her students and watching them grow into the leaders she is confident they will become.

"Now that I have the pleasure of watching her well-planned and thoughtfully executed instruction, I can see why her students regard Mrs. Akery so highly," added Perlmutter. "I have witnessed her as a positive force in the life of students at our school with both academic lessons and social-emotional lessons that will serve students in their adult lives."

Akery considers being named a Top Five Finalist as not only an accolade but a responsibility.

"It puts me in a position to be a liaison between other teachers across the district, ensuring their voices are heard and amplified," said Akery. "I see this as an opportunity to restructure the Teacher of the Year format so that teachers can participate in subcommittees and programs and find communities among one another. I would like to create more opportunities for teachers to bond and display their expertise."

"Mrs. Akery's devotion to this field is her single greatest contribution to our profession," added Perlmutter. "She embodies the honest sensibility of education, work that is deeply meaningful but not boastful. When she is in line at a coffee shop and says that she is a teacher, it elevates the prestige of all educators."

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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 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.