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Media Release

Lakevia Mills named Top 5 Teacher of the Year Finalist

St. Johns High School

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Karolyn Belcher
Chief Academic Officer

Sharon Randall
Executive Director of Secondary
Learning Community

Steve Larson
Principal



Charleston, SC – St. John’s High School science teacher Lakevia Mills has no qualms about sharing her life experiences with her students. They often mirror what the students are going through in their own lives. The purpose is to show them that they can bounce back.

“I am an example of how they can grow,” said Mills. “If I don’t show them my life then they won’t see me as an example. I have high expectations for these kids. They can and will do what is required and then some.”

Mills grew up an only child in Lancaster, SC. She had dreams of going into the field of science. She was always interested in process learning and figuring out how things work. She did a lot of self-exploration as a way to satisfy her curiosity.

Through college campus tours of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Mills knew on the spot that she wanted to attend Virginia State University. She did and earned her undergraduate and masters in biology. Her interest in teaching was sparked along the way by people who inspired and encouraged her.

Mills took her first teaching position in 2014 in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools at Harding University High School. Several years later, her husband was offered a job in the Lowcountry and they agreed to make the move.

"Charleston County School District stood out to me the most," said Mills. "I knew I wanted to work for the district because I did my research and learned what the district stood for and how much they valued their teachers. I also researched St. John's High School and determined that the school focuses on much more than the students being able to pass their classes."

What Mills has learned in her three years at the school is that the students are loving and kind.

"They show great respect for each other and their teachers," said Mills. "If you show that you care and you're involved in their lives, they reciprocate that. My philosophy is to offer my assistance and interest in what they're doing and how they are. That way they can come to school with a little less stress. I am more than willing to go to bat for them."

Mills' journey to becoming a standout educator was not one she made alone.

"My husband and my parents have been great support systems in every move that I have made in my educational journey," said Mills. "For that, I thank them continually. My husband has been my biggest cheerleader; from the late nights and early mornings, he has been right there shouting, 'You got this!' My parents have also helped by seeing the great potential in me since I started teaching. They were very instrumental in making sure I was supported from classroom supplies to helping with lesson plans. Lastly, Ms. McIntyre, my instructional coach, helped me improve my teaching pedagogy and content."

Principal Stephen Larson described Mills as kind, caring, conscientious, and expects the very best for herself and her students.

"Mrs. Mills is St. Johns," said Larson. "She is highly regarded among her peers and stands out as a leader in professional learning, collaboration, and attitude. I can't say enough about her, but I'm willing to whenever I'm given the time!"

Mills said she grew up not knowing her full potential and what she could accomplish.

"What I've learned is that I must push myself and prove to my students that I will keep improving so as to better myself," said Mills. "The idea is that the students will make that a goal for themselves."

There is a special culture at St. Johns. Mills likens it to being part of a big family that is collaborative.

"We are all goal oriented and we are all working very hard to close the achievement gap," said Mills. "Principal Larson is all about high expectations. He demands that we hold ourselves accountable and he's always encouraging us to aim for the next milestone."

Mills believes that she and her colleagues are the voice and encouragement for the students that need it most. She's honored to have been chosen as a Top 5 Finalist for CCSD's District Teacher of the Year and hopes to use the opportunity to express the importance of creating equitable learning environments across the entire district.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools that spans 1,000 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 87 schools and specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.