



For Immediate Release

February 26, 2020

Contact:

Donnie Newton, 843-852-2516

Media Release

West Ashley High wins state Ethics Bowl title

West Ashley High School

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Karolyn Belcher
Chief Academic Officer

Sharon Randall
Interim Executive Director,
Secondary Learning Community

Ryan Cumback, Ed.M.
Principal

Charleston, SC – West Ashley High School (WAHS) competed in the South Carolina High School Ethics Bowl at Wofford College last month and came in first place! Eighteen teams from 12 schools across the state, including Chapman High School, Palmetto Scholars Academy, and Spartanburg High School (this year's runner-up), were part of the second annual event.

West Ashley High's Ethics Bowl team is comprised of members of the school's Philosophy Club. The group formed three years ago because of WAHS science teacher John Junge's love of the discussions and debates he liked to hold with his students. After several students inquired about starting a team, Junge realized there was a mutual interest and the Philosophy Club was born.

According to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's website, regional ethics bowls "are competitive yet collaborative events in which students discuss real-life ethical issues. This event teaches and promotes ethical awareness, critical thinking, civil discourse, civic engagement, and an appreciation for multiple points of view."

A typical Ethics Bowl consists of a series of hour-long matches throughout the course of one day. The morning competition is a qualifying round where schools compete in three matches against randomly selected opponents. The top four teams then move on to the playoffs in a bracket-style tournament consisting of two semi-final matches followed by one final match.

Each year, the High School Ethics Bowl releases a case set of 15 ethical scenarios for teams to study, such as student loan debt or confronting someone whose behavior is morally problematic. Teams are judged on the clarity of their presentations as well as the depth and breadth of their thinking on each case.

West Ashley High's team met once a week from September through January to get ready for the state contest.

The students were excited about bringing home a championship. However, they feel it is more important to be a part of the Philosophy Club so they can expand their viewpoints and be willing to listen to differing opinions.

"I've learned how to see other people's point of view rather than just my own opinion," said junior Copeland Johnson, one of the students who helped start the team three years ago. "One of our very few rules is seek first to understand. This is so we can hear the other viewpoints and ask questions to clarify meaning. Once we see the other side, we can criticize or introduce new points."

An ethics bowl differs from a debate competition in one significant way – students are not given differing points of view they have to defend but rather speak up for whichever viewpoint they feel is correct. Showing they have thought through each case fully and logically while they interact respectfully with their opponents demonstrates a grasp of the material.

"Honestly, win or lose, the process is the most rewarding part," added Junge. "When we first started in September the students didn't really know one another very well. Having regular conversations about these complex issues, and learning how to disagree in respectful and constructive ways, is a very intimate act. You really learn a lot about someone's character. So, I think what I'm most proud of is how well the students worked together and the rapport they built over the course of the year."

The team competed against the winner of Georgia's Ethics Bowl in a virtual playoff last week and lost in the final round. While disappointed, they did not advance to the national tournament, the team is already thinking about next year.

"We are currently looking to recruit members for a team for next year," said Johnson. "We are going back to having Socrates Cafés, which are open discussions about questions that we have so we can generate interest and find new members."

For more information about the WAHS Philosophy Club's victory in the state Ethics Bowl, please contact Public Relations Coordinator Donnie Newton at (843) 852-2516.

Photo Captions

West Ashley High Takes 1st Place at Ethics Bowl (01)

The West Ashley High Philosophy Club competed in the 2nd annual South Carolina High School Ethics Bowl at Wofford College and took the top spot. Last year they competed but were knocked out in the semi-finals. This year's team members are (l to r) Nick Kalyna, Copeland Johnson, Coach John Junge, Taylor Mills, Zahavi Johnson, and Damitria Sheares.

West Ashley High Takes 1st Place at Ethics Bowl (02)

When asked how he felt about coming in first place at the 2nd annual South Carolina High School Ethics Bowl, senior Zahavi Johnson said, "Philosophy is definitely one of those things where the work is done before the competition. We didn't win on competition day; we won when our discussions went on seemingly irrelevant tangents that highlighted issues that we incorporated into our understanding; we won when Mr. Junge developed a framework for our presentation and we, as a team, bought into it; and we won on competition day because each member made relevant and unique contributions to our presentations."

West Ashley High Takes 1st Place at Ethics Bowl (03)

Damitria Sheares, Copeland Johnson, and Taylor Mills show off the first place medals they received after competing in the South Carolina High School Ethics Bowl. "My favorite part of this year would definitely be our team's chemistry and how we all worked so well together," said sophomore Taylor Mills. "I also enjoyed getting to interact with the other teams and have good conversations with them."

###

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 span 1,000 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 86 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.