



Military Magnet Academy

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Media Release

MMA student earns associate degree just ahead of high school graduation

North Charleston, S.C. – For the first time in Military Magnet Academy's (MMA) history, a student received her associate degree from Trident Technical College (TTC) just a few weeks prior to high school graduation.

Ashanti Ray has been working toward this goal since seventh grade when she started taking high school classes. She earned her associate's in Small Business Management and Entrepreneurship which Ray said will help her get a head start on one of her careers as an entrepreneur. She has big dreams and plans to also become an FBI agent, a lawyer, and the President of the United States – in that order.

"Cadet Ashanti Ray has embodied every characteristic of what we envision a Military Magnet Academy cadet to be," said Principal Dr. Robert Perrineau. "She has successfully attempted and participated in every activity possible and been at the forefront in a leadership role in most cases. As a history maker, she has set the mark of excellence that our future scholars should aspire to achieve. We are excited to see what she accomplishes in the future."

Wonder woman

Command Sergeant Major Joseph Dawson, Jr., the founder of MMA, saw Ray's potential early on. As he does with all of the cadets at MMA, he took the time to get to know Ray, who he describes as a ball of energy. She quickly earned a nickname from Dawson, and joyfully answers to "Wonder Woman."

"She has a lot of energy and she uses it for good," said Dawson. "She's aggressive in her academics and all of her pursuits and is able to channel that into almost anything. Ashanti used her energy to encourage others to do likewise. She's a special student."

Nathaniel Taylor, MMA's Commandant, marveled at how easily Ray assimilated with her peers.

"She has an active social life and is known for far more than her intelligence," said Taylor. "She is part of the regimental staff; she is a high-ranking cadet, participates

in dance and band, and is a three-time state title basketball athlete. Her high level of energy has enabled Ashanti to put her mark on everything she put her time and effort into."

Finding the right balance

Ray began at MMA as a sixth grader, and by seventh grade, she was taking high school courses. She sailed through the curriculum with the possibility of graduating early. Her mother sought other options for her young child, and the most appealing was the dual-credit pathway.

Ray enrolled at TTC the summer before her sophomore year and continued her studies with her college courses while simultaneously finishing her high school requirements. Just a few weeks ago, she walked across the stage in her cap and gown. In two more weeks, she will walk across another stage in her military dress uniform.

None of that would have been possible without the discipline Ray learned during her experience at the military high school.

"I learned that you have to be disciplined in order to survive in any environment," said Ray. "I let myself go a time or two while I was learning to juggle everything. Once I found my balance, everything was fine."

Guidance counselor Sheila Davis could not be more proud of Ray.

"She took this and ran with it," said Davis. "That's how you have to be to accomplish something like this. It was truly an amazing feat."

Like most graduates, Ray said moving on to Tennessee State University to study Political Science is bittersweet.

"I am absolutely ready to graduate, but at the same time, it is hard to leave," said Ray. "I will miss my classmates and the younger cadets who I have had the privilege to watch grow and mature."

While joining the military was never on her radar, Ray is grateful for the experience and the principles she learned.

"The experience prepared me for many things and for life in general," said Ray. "I leave here confident in my professionalism and independence."

Ray lives by the motto that "Music isn't a sound, it is a beat. Everything works better when you control the beat." As she walks out into her future, Ray will think of that phrase as she takes one step at a time.

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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.