ORANGEBURG COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
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Thursday, May 29, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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One Last Walk, One New Beginning: Farewell to Robert E. Howard Middle School

ORANGEBURG, S.C. – For decades, Robert E. Howard Middle School was more than an institution for education; it was a home, a hub, and a heartbeat for generations of Orangeburg residents. On Wednesday, May 28, 2025, the Orangeburg Community gathered one final time to walk the halls before officially closing the building's doors and preparation begin for new construction.

Former Wilkinson High School Alumni Anthony Jarvis (Class of 1957), Evia Thomas (Class of 1958), Issac Haigler (Class of 1971), Dr. Debora Brunson (Class of 1969), Calvin Wright (Class of 1962), and Dr. Judith Salley (Class of 1971) sat down with Superintendent Dr. Shawn D. Foster ahead of the farewell event to reflect on their time at Wilkinson and share their hopes for the future.

Mr. Jarvis stated, “My brother Donald designed the Wolverine logo. It was our mascot, and I was proud of that mascot. We had Wolverine tenacity, but most importantly, we had each other.”

Dr. Salley added, “During those times, we were known for our athletic programs. I was on the basketball team, and we won six state championships. We were the real deal at Wilkinson, and we packed out stands. Everyone in the community supported the students at our school, no matter what event was happening.”

Mr. Haigler agreed, adding, “Our teachers nurtured us. They believed in us during those segregated times, especially after experiencing the Orangeburg Massacre that happened in 1968.”

Dr. Brunson smiled, mentioning, "As a veteran educator, I always want to think that I'm doing what's best for children. As an African American, we always had secondhand everything given to us in school. So, when the opportunity presented itself for us to upgrade these facilities based on the superintendent's vision, I stepped right up. This school district is on the way to being the premier school district in the state, if not the nation."

Mr. Wright affirmed, "Wilkinson High School's legacy will forever live through us. I wouldn't be who I am today if it wasn't for the people I met and the lessons I learned."

"In 1938, Wilkinson became the first African American high school in the state of South Carolina that had grades 9 through 12. We were proud to be the first," said Mrs. Thomas.

The alumni shared their memories through the singing of their alma mater, old yearbooks, library archives, and school paraphernalia, and chanting their school motto: ***"Strive to excel, not to be equal."*** Their stories painted a vivid portrait of the school's impact, not only in their individual lives but in the Orangeburg community as a whole.

As the moment arrived to tour the school, former students, longtime teachers, proud parents, and community residents attended for a heartfelt last stroll through the historic halls, reliving decades of memories and honoring the legacy of a place that shaped thousands of lives.

The nostalgic moment served not only as a goodbye to a memorable building but also as a celebration of a new beginning. The site will now unite students from Brookdale Elementary, Whittaker Elementary, and Mellichamp Elementary under one roof for the first time.

Dr. Foster stated, "I think it is important to see that today is about history, and the opportunity to merge history with the future doesn't mean that anything will be forgotten but added on too." Dr. Foster also shared that the new elementary school will preserve the legacy of the Wolverine mascot and continue to honor the Robert E. Howard name.

The school set to rise on Belleville Road will serve as a beacon of unity and progress, with modern facilities, collaborative learning spaces, and a shared vision for educational excellence. It reflects the Orangeburg County School District's commitment to consolidating resources, expanding educational opportunities, and creating an environment where students can excel academically. Wilkinson High alumni encourage everyone to remember that buildings may change, but the heart of the school community will remain the same forever.

For additional information, please contact Taylor R. Johnson, Communications and Multi-Media Specialist, at taylor.johnson@ocsdsc.org or 839-253-2070.

Orangeburg County School District

The mission of Orangeburg County School District, the catalyst of innovation and excellence, is to ensure all students discover and develop their person, purpose, and platform through high-quality educational experiences distinguished by a culture of collaboration, equity, and inclusion; a creative learning environment with inspiring opportunities; a commitment to nurture the academic, physical, social and emotional well-being of all. Visit us online at ocsdsc.org

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