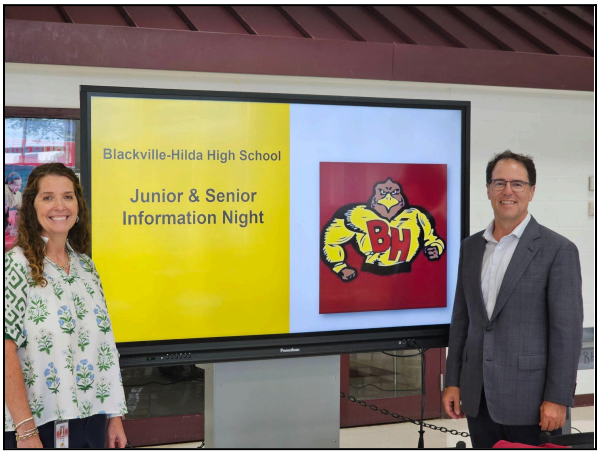
Barnwell County School District

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Barnwell County School District Partners with STARS College Network to Expand College Access for Students

Barnwell County, S.C. — Barnwell County School District is proud to announce a new partnership with the STARS College Network, a national consortium of 32 top colleges and universities working to help students from rural and small-town communities access and succeed in higher education. This initiative represents a major step forward in BCSD's ongoing mission to provide students with meaningful opportunities beyond high school.

In celebration of this milestone, David Lourie, Director of High School Initiatives for the STARS College Network, visited campuses across Barnwell County School District on September 24 and 25. During his visit, Lourie worked directly with high school students, offering insight into the college journey. At Williston-Elko High School, he participated in college application workshops with seniors, providing personalized support and guidance as they prepare for life after graduation. He also presented at College Night for Blackville-Hilda High School, where he connected with students and families, answering questions and reinforcing the importance of higher education in today's world. He also visited Barnwell High School and met with students who have registered for the College Advisor Program.



BHHS Principal Christina Snider and David Lourie of the STARS College Network prepare to present college information to the parents of Juniors and Seniors.

This new partnership brings the STARS College Advisor Program to Barnwell County, offering high school students personalized, on-demand college advising. Students in grades eight through twelve will also benefit from a wide range of college access programming designed to prepare them for the transition to college. In addition to expert advising, the program offers access to in-person and virtual experiences with member universities, giving students a chance to explore campuses and build relationships with mentors who share similar backgrounds.

A key part of this partnership is the academic support provided to students through collaborations with Khan Academy and Schoolhouse.world. These tools help students strengthen essential skills in core subjects such as math, ensuring they're not just ready for

college admission, but prepared to succeed once they arrive. The support extends to educators and school counselors as well, who will receive professional development to strengthen their ability to guide students through the college preparation and application process.

The STARS College Network also addresses one of the biggest challenges rural students face: a sense of isolation when entering college environments far from home. Through ambassador and mentorship programs, STARS member institutions work to foster welcoming campus communities that help students from small towns feel supported and connected. These personal networks and peer communities are critical for building confidence and promoting long-term student success.



David Lourie of the STARS College Network presents information to Juniors and Seniors in a college application workshop at WEHS.

Superintendent Dr. Crissie Stapleton emphasized the significance of the partnership, stating, “Our district is grateful to have the opportunity to work alongside David Lourie and STARS College Network. This program represents more than access to top-tier colleges. It is a commitment to eliminating barriers, fostering opportunity, and affirming to our students that they are capable of succeeding in any environment. Our responsibility extends beyond preparing them for college; we are preparing them for the broader challenges of life.”

The timing of this partnership couldn’t be more critical. With the job market evolving rapidly, over 70% of positions are expected to require some form of postsecondary education by 2027, and more than 40% will require a bachelor’s degree or higher. Ensuring that Barnwell County students are ready to meet those demands is not only vital for their individual futures, but for the long-term economic health of the region.

The district is grateful to its friends at Old Barnwell for their role in connecting Barnwell County School District with this program. Old Barnwell’s mission—to create programs that empower, invite, and celebrate people and communities historically underrepresented in the game of golf—resonates deeply. They have been a shining example of reaching out to the area and making a lasting impact. Their commitment to community-building played a vital role in helping connect BCSD with the STARS Network, and the district is deeply grateful for their continued partnership.

In the coming weeks, Barnwell County School District will continue rolling out the STARS program across all middle and high schools. Virtual information sessions will continue to

be held for families to learn more about the resources available, and the district encourages parents and students to take part in this exciting new chapter. This partnership with the STARS College Network is a new step toward a future where every student, regardless of their zip code, has the support they need to pursue college and career pathways with confidence.

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