ORANGEBURG COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
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OCSD Honors Powerful Student Voices During MLK Jr. Oratory Competition

Orangeburg, SC – Orangeburg County School District proudly hosted the MLK Jr. Oratory Competition, *"Valuing the Voices of Our Youth,"* on Tuesday, January 27, at Edisto Fork United Methodist Church at 6p.m. The inspiring evening showcased the powerful voices, original speeches, and leadership potential of OCSD's fourth and fifth grade students as they honored the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Following individual school-level competitions, selected students advanced to the district competition, where participants were required to deliver original speeches, memorized and lasting between two to five minutes. Each speech reflected the students' perspectives on unity, justice, kindness, and positive change in the world, particularly the Orangeburg Competition.

"Our youth are speaking with purpose, passion, and vision far beyond their years. The messages shared during this competition reflect hope for our community and show that the next generation is ready to lead with compassion, courage, and unity," said Hayward Jean, director of Student Services for Orangeburg County School District**.**

OCSD is proud to announce the 2026 MLK Jr. Oratory Competition winners:

1st Place: Sile Martin, 5th grade – Marshall Elementary School
2nd Place: Jazlynn Pough-Samuels, 5th grade – Dover Elementary School
3rd Place: Kailyn Jamison, 4th grade – Brookdale Elementary School

First place winner Sile Martin delivered a moving speech emphasizing the importance of remembering the Orangeburg Massacre, where three Black students, Samuel Hammond Jr., Delano Middleton, and Henry Smith, were tragically killed on the campus of South Carolina State University. Sile spoke passionately about being the change he wants to see and making a difference in his community by honoring history and standing up for justice.

Second place winner Jazlynn Pough-Samuels delivered a bold and passionate speech about using her voice to create change. She made a promise that her voice would not be silent, sharing her plans to help put a stop to drug use and gun violence as she grows older. Jazlynn challenged the audience directly, asking what each person is doing to help one another and uplift the Orangeburg community. She stated that it is her mission to strive for excellence in all that she does.

Third place winner Kailyn Jamison shared her heartfelt initiative titled "Kailyn's Kindness Chats," a movement she created to encourage kindness, respect, and unity within her community. She spoke about how people often face challenges we may not see and reminded the audience that while kind words are powerful, kind actions are even more impactful. Kailyn expressed her goal to visit churches and businesses, just as Dr. King did, to spread unity and compassion.

Each winner expressed deep love for Orangeburg and a shared desire to be part of making their community a better place. "Our students are not just learning history, they are carrying it forward with courage and purpose. Every student who participated demonstrated excellence, confidence, and a heart for positive change," said Dr. Shawn D. Foster, superintendent of Orangeburg County School District.

The competition featured a distinguished panel of judges, including:

- Annette Grevious, Professor of Speech and Drama and Theatre Program Coordinator at Claflin University
- Rev. Ellis White Jr., Pastor of Edisto Fork United Methodist Church
- Kayleigh Vaughn, Executive Director of the Orangeburg County Fine Arts Center
- L. Kobie Wilkerson, also known as "Kobie Da Wiz," International Award-Winning Author

The event statistician was Dr. Bernard E. Frost, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction for Orangeburg County School District.

Winners were awarded scholarship prizes in recognition of their outstanding performances:

- **1st Place:** $500
- **2nd Place:** $300
- **3rd Place:** $150

Orangeburg County School District extends congratulations to all participants, winners, families, and educators who supported this meaningful event. The MLK Jr. Oratory Competition continues to uplift student voices and inspire leadership rooted in the values of Dr. King, service, unity, justice, and love.

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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