ORANGEBURG COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
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Kimberly Obiet
William J. Clark Middle School Winner

William J. Clark Middle School Students Shine at Statewide Read Across America Art Contest

Orangeburg, SC – Students at William J. Clark Middle School were surprised with a special celebration after earning top honors in the 11th Annual Read Across America Art Contest hosted by the South Carolina Education Association (SCEA). The contest, inspired by the national Read Across America literacy initiative, encourages students across South Carolina to combine their love of reading with artistic creativity. This year's theme, "From the Mountains to the Sea, Read with Me," invited students to illustrate how literacy connects communities across the state, from the Upstate mountains to the coastal Lowcountry.

During a surprise ceremony in the school's media center, SCEA leaders joined Orangeburg County School District staff, parents, and school administrators to celebrate the talented student artists. The event recognized four William J. Clark students who placed in the statewide competition.

Award Winners:

- **Best in Show:** Kimberly Obiet - Awarded $300
- **1st Place:** Ma. Geneva Patiluna – Awarded $100
- **3rd Place:** Chantae Benyard – Awarded $25
- **Honorable Mention:** Kiersten Thomas – Awarded $15

Kimberly Obiet earned the competition's highest honor, Best in Show**,** for her artwork, which beautifully illustrated the contest theme and will be featured on commemorative T-shirts distributed to her classmates.

Dena R. Crews, President of the South Carolina Education Association stated, "This art contest is about celebrating literacy and creativity together. Our students have incredible talents, and opportunities like this allow them to express themselves artistically while highlighting the importance of reading. We must celebrate these gifts just as much as we celebrate academic achievements. Reading, writing, and math will always be important. But our students also have gifts as artists, musicians, and storytellers. Celebrating those talents helps them understand that their creativity matters."

The contest is open to students from kindergarten through 12th grade across the state. According to Caleb Mickler, Public Affairs Specialist for the SCEA, the competition has grown significantly over the past decade and involves educators, artists, and literacy advocates who review and select the winning artwork.

For Melissa Wright, visual arts educator at William J. Clark Middle School, the recognition is a reflection of the dedication and creativity her students bring to their work. "This started as an art lesson aligned with state standards. Students began with sketches, then developed their artwork using their chosen mediums. Seeing them recognized at the state level confirms that they are pouring their best into their craft," she expressed.

The achievement marks the second consecutive year that William J. Clark Middle School students have earned Best in Show**,** highlighting the school's continued excellence in arts education. School leaders say the recognition underscores the importance of nurturing both academic and creative talents in students. The celebration concluded with cheers from students, parents, and staff as the winners proudly displayed their artwork and awards, marking a memorable moment for the school community and reinforcing the powerful connection between literacy, creativity, and student success**.**

"Seeing our students recognized at the state level for both creativity and literacy is something that makes our entire district proud. These students represent the talent, imagination, and dedication we strive to nurture every day in our schools. Their success is a testament to the outstanding instruction they receive and the power of combining academics with the arts," said Shawn D. Foster, Superintendent of Orangeburg County School District.

For additional information, please contact Taylor R. Johnson, Communications and Multimedia 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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