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OCSD and International African American Museum Bring History to Life Through Districtwide Partnership

More Than 40 OCSD Educators Participate in Hands-On Professional Learning Experience at IAAM

ORANGEBURG, S.C. — For Orangeburg County School District (OCSD) students, some of the most meaningful lessons happen when they have the opportunity to step outside of the classroom and experience history for themselves.

For the past two years, OCSD's partnership with the International African American Museum (IAAM) has created those opportunities for students across the district. Today, that partnership focused on the educators who help bring those experiences to life.

As part of OCSD's ongoing commitment to investing in its educators, the District provides two half-days each month dedicated to professional learning. These intentionally designed opportunities give teachers time to strengthen instructional practices, collaborate with colleagues and engage in learning experiences that can be taken directly back to their classrooms.

Today was one of those professional learning days, and more than 40 OCSD educators used the opportunity to travel to IAAM in Charleston for a hands-on, interactive experience designed to strengthen classroom instruction and prepare teachers for the field experiences their students will have throughout the school year.

The South Carolina standards-aligned professional learning experience allowed teachers to explore the museum as both educators and learners. They engaged with exhibits, resources and instructional activities while identifying ways to connect the museum experience directly to what students are learning in their classrooms.

"Our goal is for teachers to feel just as inspired and connected to this history as we want their students to feel," said Dr. Felice F. Knight, Education Director for the International African American Museum. "When educators have the opportunity to experience the museum themselves, they can return to their classrooms with new ideas, new resources and new ways to help students make meaningful connections between history, literacy, their families and the world around them."

Through the districtwide partnership, OCSD students in grades 4, 8 and 11 have the opportunity to visit IAAM each year at no cost to students or the District, including reimbursement for eligible transportation costs. Teachers also receive curriculum-aligned resources to use before and after each visit, helping ensure the museum experience becomes an extension of classroom learning rather than simply a field trip.

Students in grades 3, 7 and 10 also benefit from the partnership without leaving their schools. IAAM educators bring inquiry-based learning experiences directly into OCSD classrooms, using museum collections and historical resources to help students explore history in personal and relevant ways.

"This is exactly what we mean when we talk about creating high-quality educational experiences for every student," said Dr. Shawn D. Foster, Superintendent of Orangeburg County School District. "Our students deserve opportunities to see history, experience it and understand how their own stories connect to it. But we also know that investing in students means investing in the educators who serve them. Our dedicated professional learning time allows our teachers to continue growing, exploring and bringing new ideas back to their classrooms. Today's experience at IAAM is a great example of that commitment in action."

Located at Gadsden's Wharf in Charleston, one of the nation's most historically significant sites connected to the arrival of enslaved Africans in North America, IAAM provides a powerful setting for students and educators to explore African American history and culture. Through its exhibitions, African Ancestors Memorial Garden and Center for Family History, students can connect the history they study in school with people, places and stories that bring that history to life.

For OCSD, the partnership reflects the District's continued commitment to building relationships that expand opportunities for students while also strengthening the educators who serve them.

"The strongest partnerships are the ones where our students and our educators both benefit," said Dr. Erica S. Taylor, OCSD Assistant Superintendent for Communications, Business & Community Partnerships. "Today is a wonderful example of what can happen when professional learning and partnership come together with purpose. Our educators aren't simply learning about a place their students will visit; they are experiencing it themselves, making connections to the standards they teach and thinking intentionally about how they can make the experience even more meaningful for their students. That is the value of partnership, it creates opportunities that we could not always create alone, shared Taylor."

The partnership was IAAM's second districtwide partnership and reflects a shared belief that access to meaningful educational and cultural experiences should not depend on where a student lives or the resources available to their family.

Over the past two years, that belief has translated into meaningful experiences for OCSD students and educators. As the partnership continues, OCSD and IAAM remain committed to creating opportunities that strengthen teaching, deepen learning and help students better understand their history, their stories and the possibilities ahead of them.

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

About the International African American Museum

The International African American Museum in Charleston, South Carolina, honors the stories, history and contributions of Africans and their descendants. Through exhibitions, educational programming, the African Ancestors Memorial Garden and the Center for Family History, IAAM provides opportunities for visitors to explore African American history, culture and its lasting impact on our nation and world.

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