



Barnwell County School District

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BCSD News Release: Barnwell County School District Partners with STARS College Network to Expand College Advising for Students

BARNWELL, S.C. — Barnwell County School District students will have access to additional individualized college planning and advising support through a partnership with the STARS (Small Town and Rural Students) College Network, a national initiative focused on expanding pathways to higher education for students in rural and small-town communities.

The STARS College Network brings together 32 colleges and universities committed to working with high schools and college-access organizations to broaden opportunities for rural students. Its member institutions represent a wide range of higher education options, including public and private universities, Ivy League institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and liberal arts colleges.

Through the STARS College Advising Program, participating Barnwell County students in grades 9–12 will receive individualized guidance throughout the college-planning process at no cost to students or families. The program is designed to supplement the support already available through school counselors while giving students consistent, personalized assistance as they explore their postsecondary options.

A STARS college advisor will work directly with participating students on academic and career planning, course selection, resume development, building college lists, college essays, financial aid and completing college applications. The program also provides college-access programming for students and professional development opportunities and resources for educators.

“Our students have tremendous potential, and we want to make sure they have access to the information, resources and personal support they need to see all of the possibilities available to them after high school,” said Dr. Crissie Stapleton, Superintendent of Barnwell County School District. “The STARS College Advising Program gives our students another valuable layer of support as they plan for their futures, while also helping families navigate a process that can sometimes feel overwhelming.”

Participation in the advising program is not limited to students interested in attending one of the 32 STARS institutions. Instead, advisors help students identify and pursue the college pathway that best fits their individual goals, interests and circumstances.



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Initially, BCSD school counselors and administrators will help identify students who may benefit most from the program. Students being considered include 10th–12th graders who rank within the top 25 percent of their class and ninth-grade students who completed Algebra I or English I while in middle school.

The STARS college advisor plans to visit Barnwell County schools in September to meet identified students, introduce the program and answer questions. Students interested in participating will then submit a transcript, receive a counselor recommendation and complete the STARS application process.

Beyond individualized advising, the STARS College Network provides students with additional opportunities, including virtual college admissions webinars, free opportunities to visit participating campuses through fly-in, drive-in and summer programs, and advanced math preparation resources. The network also provides professional development and networking opportunities for rural educators and counselors.

The 32-member network includes institutions such as Auburn University, Brown University, Duke University, Georgia Institute of Technology, MIT, Spelman College, Stanford University, the University of South Carolina, Vanderbilt University and Yale University, among others.

“This partnership reflects our district’s commitment to ensuring that where a student lives does not limit where that student can go,” Stapleton added. “By connecting our students with additional expertise, exposure and individualized guidance, we are helping them make informed decisions and take meaningful steps toward college, career and lifelong success.”

Families and students will receive additional information about the STARS College Advising Program through their schools as the program continues for the 2026-2027. More information about the STARS College Network is available through [STARS College Network](#).

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