



# MEDIA RELEASE

**For Immediate Release – September 30, 2022**

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## **Charter School Authorizers host second annual Kids First Conference**

*School staff, leaders, and board members enjoy presentations, breakout sessions, networking, and more*

**COLUMBIA, SC** – This week, the Charter Institute at Erskine and the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD) hosted the second annual Kids First Conference at the Columbia Convention Center. The conference took place on Tuesday, September 27, and Wednesday, September 28, bringing together school leaders, staff, teachers, and board members from more than 60 charter schools across the state.

Day 1 of the conference featured keynote speaker Dr. Rick Rigsby, breakout sessions, opportunities for networking, and more. Institute and SCPCSD Teachers of the Year Megan Patterson and Juliana Smith emceed the event. Notable guests included retired South Carolina State football coach Willie Jeffries, Executive Director of SCASA Beth Phibbs, and State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman. Senator Sean Bennett and Representative Shannon Erickson also participated in a legislative panel.

Day 2 featured authorizer-specific presentations. The Charter Institute at Erskine's leaders enjoyed presentations from charter school students, leaders, and teachers. The SCPCSD's leaders learned about the importance of school branding.

The theme, "Charter LIFE (Learning is For Everyone)" highlighted the organizations' shared dedication to school choice and the opportunities that it provides to all of South Carolina's students. In addition to being an opportunity for professional development, the conference was also a celebration of all that South Carolina charter schools have accomplished, and all that they have the potential to accomplish in the coming years.

"We believe it's really important that you keep first things first. You have to make sure that your teachers, your administrators, and your school leaders understand that we're in this business for one reason and one reason only - that's for children and the education of the next generation of South Carolinians," said Charter Institute at Erskine Superintendent Cameron Runyan.

The “Kids First” partnership was formalized in August 2020 when both statewide charter school authorizers signed a joint Memorandum of Agreement. Since the Institute and SCPCSD have joined forces, they have achieved much on behalf of South Carolina’s students, even achieving permanent funding for charter schools earlier this year.

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*The Charter Institute at Erskine is the fastest-growing school district in South Carolina. Serving 24 schools and 24,000 students across the state, the Charter Institute at Erskine is committed to innovative, creative, high-quality methods of education. For more information about the Institute, please visit [www.erskinecharters.org](http://www.erskinecharters.org).*



Teachers of the Year and conference emcees, Megan Patterson and Juliana Smith, make an entrance to start off the event.



Molly Spearman is honored for her contributions to charter schools.



Charter Institute at Erskine Superintendent, Cameron Runyan, and SCPCSD Superintendent, Chris Neeley, celebrate the end of day one.



Student Ambassadors for the Charter Institute at Erskine talk about why #CharterLife and school choice are important to them.