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Contact: Ashley Epperson
Director of Communications
Charter Institute at Erskine
aeperson@erskinecharters.org
(803) 995-0527

Charter Institute at Erskine hosts annual Awards Banquet and Five-Year Celebration

COLUMBIA, SC – On Thursday, May 18, the Charter Institute at Erskine hosted its Awards Banquet and Five-Year Anniversary Celebration at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

Over 450 attendees from the Charter Institute at Erskine’s 24 charter schools statewide attended the event, including students, parents, volunteers, teachers, and school leadership. Charter School Ambassadors Jack Stapleton (South Carolina Virtual Charter School) and Trinity Higgins (Gray Collegiate Academy) served as the hosts of the event.

Ms. Sharmaine Roaden, a high school Spanish teacher from Cyber Academy of South Carolina and a resident of Summerville, was named the 2023-2024 Nathan Yon Institute Teacher of the Year. Senator Sean Bennett (Chairman, Senate Ethics Committee and Finance K-12 Education Committee), Superintendent of the Charter Institute at Erskine Cameron Runyan, and 2022-2023 Nathan Yon Institute Teacher of the Year Ms. Megan Patterson presented Roaden with her award. Ms. Roaden received a trophy and a gift from the family of Nathan Yon.

“I am truly humbled by the opportunity to represent the Institute as their 2023-2024 Nathan Yon Institute Teacher of the Year. More often than not, teachers are overlooked and underappreciated – hence the national teacher crisis,” said Roaden. “This award is so meaningful because it reminds me that the hard work of teachers is appreciated and that dedication to students does not go unnoticed.”

Mr. Landen Killius (Midlands STEM Charter School, Winnsboro), Ms. Addison Stroud (Thornwell Charter School, Clinton) and Ms. Emma Steckly (Brashier Middle College Charter High School, Simpsonville) were also announced as the Elementary, Middle, and High School Students of the Year. These students were nominated by their school’s staff and were selected as the winners by a panel of Institute judges. The winning students received a special trophy for their accomplishments. All Student of the Year winners from the schools were recognized at the Banquet and received a certificate and medal for being nominated at their school.

Please see below for a complete list of winners and nominees.

Ms. Tonya Bouknight of Mevers School of Excellence was awarded the 2022-2023 Lynn Higgins Volunteer of the Year award. Mevers School of Excellence will receive a \$250 donation in honor of Ms. Lynn Higgins, a volunteer at Clear Dot Charter School. All Volunteer of the Year nominees were recognized and received a certificate for their accomplishments.

Ms. Ainsley Crowe, Charter School Student Ambassador and high school student at Cyber Academy of South Carolina, and her mother, Ms. Jessica Crowe, were named the State Advocates of the Year for the Charter Institute at Erskine. This title represents their dedication to advocating for charter schools and school choice in South Carolina. Superintendent Cameron Runyan and Director of Communications Ashley Epperson presented the Crowes with their awards.

Additionally, the Charter Institute at Erskine staff announced eleven Champion of the Year award winners for school staff members who went above and beyond in their roles at their respective schools.

Following the Banquet, the evening transitioned into a Five-Year Celebration. Dr. Steven Adamson, Erskine College President and Institute Board Chairman, and Superintendent Runyan took the stage to share their reflect on the journey so far. Both leaders reiterated the importance of the many people that have made the Institute's success possible.

In honor of those important people, Superintendent Runyan and Institute Director Vamshi Rudrapati created the Erskine Pillar Award. The individuals that receive this award have shown unconditional support for the Institute and an unwavering dedication to the children of South Carolina. Mr. Les Wicks, Dr. Cherry Daniel, Ms. Deirdre McCullough, and Mr. Martin O'Connor were recognized as Erskine Pillars for their contributions.

“It is humbling to reflect on the birth of the Institute in 2018, when so few people believed our dream could become today's reality, and then to look at the changes we have brought to families and children across this state in the years since,” said Superintendent Runyan. “Five years from now, South Carolina will never be the same.”

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.



2023-2024 Nathan Yon Institute Teacher of the Year, Ms. Sharmaine Roaden, with Institute leadership and Senator Sean Bennett.



Dr. Steven Adamson, President of Erskine College and Institute Board Chair, reflects on five years.

2022-2023 Institute Student of the Year Winners

2022-2023 Institute Elementary School Student of the Year: Landen Killius, Midlands STEM Charter School

2022-2023 Institute Middle School Student of the Year: Addison Stroud, Thornwell Charter School

2022-2023 Institute High School Student of the Year: Emma Steckly, Brashier Middle College Charter High School

Student of the Year Nominees

Belton Preparatory Academy – Dellah Johnson
Berkeley Preparatory Academy – Joshua Williams
Brashier Middle College Charter High School –
Emma Steckly
Calhoun Falls Charter School, Middle School –
Anastasia Gilliam
Calhoun Falls Charter School, High School – Quade
Lindler
Cherokee Charter Academy – Brody Church
Clear Dot Charter School, Elementary School –
Isabella Johnson
Clear Dot Charter School, High School – Khalil
Goodwin
Cyber Academy of South Carolina, Elementary
School – Charlie McDuffie
Cyber Academy of South Carolina, Middle School –
Emma Harmon
Cyber Academy of South Carolina, High School –
Jasmine Silvestri
Gray Collegiate Academy, Middle School – Mollie
Adams
Gray Collegiate Academy, High School – Hope
Shipman
Legion Collegiate Academy – Riley Anne Burton
Lowcountry Connections Academy – Brandon
(Dakota) Veillette
Lowcountry Leadership Charter School, Elementary
School – Sierra DUBY
Lowcountry Leadership Charter School, Middle
School – Nadia Hernandez
Lowcountry Leadership Charter School, High School
– Lane Shearer
Meyers School of Excellence – Kaili Agee
Midlands STEM Charter School, Elementary School
– Landen Killius

Midlands STEM Charter School, Middle School –
Maxwell Williamson
Odyssey Online Learning – Hope Poole
Royal Live Oaks Academy Charter School,
Elementary School – Gracy Patel
Royal Live Oaks Academy Charter School, Middle
School – Hunter Dougherty
Royal Live Oaks Academy Charter School, High
School – Ernesto Dominguez Gomez, Jr.
South Carolina Connections Academy, Elementary
School – Jayden “Italia” Armstrong
South Carolina Connections Academy, Middle
School – Emily Shockley
South Carolina Connections Academy, High School
– Michael “Caleb” Gurley
South Carolina Virtual Charter School, Elementary
School – Peyton Martin
South Carolina Virtual Charter School, Middle
School – Hannah Lee
South Carolina Virtual Charter School, High School
– Jack Stapleton
Summit Classical School – Gavin Wilson
Thornwell Charter School, Elementary School – Ella
Rinaca
Thornwell Charter School, Middle School – Addison
Stroud
Thornwell Charter School, High School – Tatiyanna
Rice
Virtus Academy of South Carolina, Elementary
School – Marisa Eason
Virtus Academy of South Carolina, Middle School –
Katelynn Proctor
Virtus Academy of South Carolina, High School –
Jane Woodberry

2022-2023 Institute Volunteer of the Year: Ms. Tonya Bouknight, Meyers School of Excellence

Volunteer of the Year Nominees

Berkeley Preparatory Academy – Ruby Bresch
Brashier Middle College Charter High School –
Crissy Massengill
Cherokee Charter Academy – Wanda Blackwell
Clear Dot Charter School – Alma Wallace

Gray Collegiate Academy – Judy Holmes
Legion Collegiate Academy – Christine Johnson
Lowcountry Leadership Charter School – Rebecca
Gallagher
Meyers School of Excellence – Tonya Bouknight

Royal Live Oaks Academy Charter School – Amanda Mincey
South Carolina Connections Academy – Tamra Greeley

Summit Classical School – Domino’s Pizza of Clinton and Laurens, represented by Chad Griffin
Thornwell Charter School – Davidson Street Baptist Church, represented by Kenny Moore

2023-2024 Nathan Yon Institute Teacher of the Year: Ms. Sharmaine Roaden, Cyber Academy of South Carolina

Teacher of the Year Nominees

Bold font indicates teacher was a finalist for 2023-2024 Nathan Yon Institute Teacher of the Year

Belton Preparatory Academy – Kristen Wright
Berkeley Preparatory Academy – Miranda Powell
Brashier Middle College Charter High School – Amanda Burdette
Calhoun Falls Charter School – Timothy Riddle
Cherokee Charter Academy – Rhonda Hamrick
Clear Dot Charter School, Elementary School – Kenyetta White
Clear Dot Charter School, Middle and High School – Kevin Darley
Cyber Academy of South Carolina, Elementary School – Caitlin Teachey
Cyber Academy of South Carolina, Middle School – Sandy Burris
Cyber Academy of South Carolina, High School – Sharmaine Roaden
Gray Collegiate Academy – Jessica Goings
Legion Collegiate Academy – Aaliya Muneem
Lowcountry Connections Academy – Maria Ignacia Valdes
Lowcountry Leadership Charter School – Susanne King
Mevers School of Excellence – Shanice Murphy
Midlands STEM Charter School – Yandean Bhoorasingh

Odyssey Online Learning – Anna Kendrick
Royal Live Oaks Academy Charter School, Elementary School – Amber Palmer
Royal Live Oaks Academy Charter School, Middle School – Dr. Terri Timothy
Royal Live Oaks Academy Charter School, High School – Richards Amani Fumbi
South Carolina Connections Academy, Elementary School – Nicole Retsos
South Carolina Connections Academy, Middle School – Brandi Thompson
South Carolina Connections Academy, High School – Amy Edouard
The South Carolina Preparatory Academy – Jonathan Baity
South Carolina Virtual Charter School, Elementary School – Lauren Dorn Enloe
South Carolina Virtual Charter School, Middle School – Joanna Keller
South Carolina Virtual Charter School, High School – Lara Ann Whitehead
Summit Classical School – Marcia Baxter
Thornwell Charter School – Maria Morgan
Virtus Academy of South Carolina – Toni Brandt

2023 State Advocates of the Year: Ms. Ainsley Crowe and Ms. Jessica Crowe

2023 Champions of the Year

Assistant Principal of the Year: Jordan Coward, Berkeley Preparatory Academy
Communications Champion of the Year: Tori Graves – Odyssey Online Learning
Coach of the Year: John Li – Gray Collegiate Academy
Educational Management Organization of the Year: Tutelage School Solutions
Federal Programs Champion of the Year: Brenda Hunt – Royal Live Oaks Academy Charter School
Finance Champion of the Year: Marty Rawls – Gray Collegiate Academy
PowerSchool Champion of the Year: Mary Morse – Royal Live Oaks Academy Charter School
Testing Champion of the Year: Kate Lawhon – Virtus Academy of South Carolina
Student Services Champion of the Year: Courtney Boyd – South Carolina Connections Academy
Rookie of the Year: Jason Byrd – Cherokee Charter Academy
Board Member of the Year: Kevin Thomas – Midlands STEM Charter School

Erskine Pillar Award Recipients

Les Wicks, Co-founder of Royal Live Oaks Academy Charter School

Dr. Cherry Daniel, CEO and School Leader of South Carolina Virtual Charter School
Deirdre McCullough, Founding Principal of Belton Preparatory Academy
Martin O'Connor, Founding Charter Institute at Erskine Board Member