

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## **Laura Ferguson of South Carolina Connections Academy named the 2021-2022 Nathan Yon Institute Teacher of the Year at the Charter Institute at Erskine**

**COLUMBIA, SC** - Laura Ferguson, a 4th grade teacher at South Carolina Connections Academy, has been named the Charter Institute at Erskine 2021-2022 Nathan Yon Institute Teacher of the Year and was flown over Columbia in a private plane as a celebration of her accomplishments.

The Charter Institute at Erskine organized an event to be held in Ferguson’s honor at Jim Hamilton Airport in Columbia. After convincing Ferguson that she was attending a curriculum meeting, the South Carolina Connections Academy(SCCA) team brought Ferguson to the airport and surprised her with members of her family and the Institute team. Ferguson and her husband were then treated to a private plane flight over beautiful sights in Columbia such as Williams-Brice Stadium, Lake Murray, and the South Carolina State House. The pilot, Mr. Rick Ott, even turned off autopilot and allowed Ferguson to fly the plane. Mr. Ott and the staff at Jim Hamilton airport volunteered their time and resources to make the flight a possibility.

“Once we were up there, I was no longer nervous,” said Ferguson in an interview after they landed. “Going up, it matched how I felt.”

The Teacher of the Year was announced on Thursday, May 20 during a virtual Awards Banquet hosted by the Charter Institute at Erskine. Representative Rita Allison, Chairlady of the House Education and Public Works Committee, announced Ferguson as the Institute Teacher of the Year at the end of the Banquet. Directly following the announcement, footage of the surprise flight at Jim Hamilton was played for the over 150 attendees at the virtual banquet.

Within South Carolina Connections Academy, which serves over 6,300 students statewide, Ferguson was nominated as SCCA’s Elementary School Teacher of the Year from among their 208 teachers on staff. Ferguson was then selected as the top candidate for the Institute Teacher of the Year from 29 nominees from charter schools across the

state. A panel of judges from educational organizations across the state reviewed all 29 applications and selected their top five finalists with no knowledge of the candidates' names, school affiliation, or educational background. The five finalists then were interviewed by the panel of judges and the winner was selected.

“We saw the challenges that COVID presented for brick-and-mortar schools across the state of South Carolina and across the nation, and we also saw how virtual teachers and virtual schools excelled even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Cameron Runyan, CEO and Superintendent of the Charter Institute at Erskine. “This is the perfect year to celebrate virtual education, and for Mrs. Ferguson to be able to take the knowledge that she has from living through COVID as a virtual teacher and impart that wisdom to our schools all across the state.”

Ferguson holds a Master of Science in Education from Hofstra University and a Gifted and Talented Certification from Converse College. Entering her tenth year at SCCA, she has also served as a member of the Elementary Guiding Coalition for the past year.

“Laura is a person who cares deeply for the students of South Carolina,” said Josh Kitchens, Principal at South Carolina Connections Academy. “She is a pioneer of virtual education.”

The winners of the Charter Institute at Erskine Students of the Year and the Charter Institute at Erskine Volunteer of the Year were also announced during the Awards Banquet. See the full list of winners below.

“We could not be prouder of the accomplishments of our students, volunteers, and teachers this year,” said Vamshi Rudrapati, Director at the Charter Institute at Erskine. “All of our schools have demonstrated their commitment to Moving the Needle in South Carolina, and we are honored to celebrate them today.”

The Charter Institute at Erskine is South Carolina’s only higher-education charter school authorizer. Serving 22 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, please visit [www.erskinecharters.org](http://www.erskinecharters.org).

2021 Charter Institute at Erskine Awards Banquet:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJm6obxnICw>

2021 Charter Institute at Erskine Awards Banquet Program:

<https://tinyurl.com/ab21program>

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Awards Banquet Winners

*Charter Institute at Erskine Elementary School Student of the Year:* Kinsley Black, Belton Preparatory Academy, 4<sup>th</sup> grade

*Charter Institute at Erskine Middle School Student of the Year:* Maren Runyan, Virtus Academy of South Carolina, 6<sup>th</sup> grade

*Charter Institute at Erskine High School Student of the Year:* Carmen “CC” Brown, Legion Collegiate Academy, 12<sup>th</sup> grade

*Charter Institute at Erskine Volunteer of the Year:* Sarah Sears, Lowcountry Leadership Charter School

*Finalists for 2021-2022 Nathan Yon Institute Teacher of the Year:* Laura Ferguson (South Carolina Connections Academy), Robert Johnson (Cyber Academy of South Carolina), Cindy Moore (Royal Live Oaks Academy of the Arts and Sciences), Christina Trimarco (Oceanside Collegiate Academy), and Charles Walker (Coastal Leadership Academy)

*2021-2022 Nathan Yon Institute Teacher of the Year Winner:* Laura Ferguson, South Carolina Connections Academy, 4<sup>th</sup> grade



