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Media Release

Friends from SOA Share Special Experience at Boys and Girls State

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Charleston, SC — Attending Palmetto Boys and Girls State is an honor for any rising senior across South Carolina. To be elected to a statewide office during the week-long program is an even bigger honor. So imagine the level of joy and surprise when two best friends from Charleston County School of the Arts learned the other was elected State Superintendent for their corresponding weeks.

Jada Orr won her election at Palmetto Girls State at Presbyterian College, while Caleb Smith became State Superintendent at Palmetto Boys State at Anderson University recently (both events were held June 11-17).

"I was so excited and so proud of [Caleb]," exclaimed Orr. "We shared with each other what the election process was like, how everything went with our speeches, and we were both just humbled by the process of it all."

"It was mind-boggling, but only because we made history," add Smith. "I don't believe that anyone from the same school has held the same [state] office as their counterpart has."

Speaking of history, Palmetto Boys State, which is run by the American Legion, started in 1940. The South Carolina Department of the American Legion Auxiliary has organized and administered Palmetto Girls State since 1947.

Boys and Girls State is a one-week leadership and citizenship training program created to educate outstanding rising seniors in high school, or delegates, about state and local government and citizenship. "Delegates" experience governmental procedure by simulating political campaigns, elections, and the political process. They also learn about the principles of citizenship and public service from guest speakers, expert panels, and staff members.

The delegates are selected for the program based on the leadership skills and involvement they have shown in their respective schools and

communities. As citizens of either Palmetto Boys or Girls State, the delegates are divided into groups called "cities." They create local governments, devise political party platforms, and ultimately elect a Senate, a House of Representatives, and state constitutional officers.

'Something right up my alley'

Smith said he didn't know much about Boys State, and only applied because his parents (including his father, Kevin Smith, who is the principal at C.E. Williams Middle School) asked him to apply. He was skeptical at first, but his thoughts about the opportunity quickly changed.

"It turned out to be something right up my alley," commented Smith. "I appreciated the emphasis of the brotherhood the most at Boys State. No matter how different you were from the [guy] standing next to you, you both had two things in common: your white Palmetto Boys State shirt and the brotherhood you would look back on after the program."

Smith won his city's party chairman position early in the week, which built up his confidence. That confidence, coupled with the knowledge he already had about the education system from his father, paved the way for his electoral victory as 2017 Palmetto Boys State Superintendent.

"It was life changing," Smith described. "It was so crazy to believe that you could gain such a strong and large support system in such a short amount of time. I was also impressed with myself, seeing where my personal drive ended up, at the end of the program. I stayed up until 3:47 a.m. writing a speech for my campaign. It doesn't get any more authentic than that. I would have never done something that intense if it wasn't for Boys State."

Principal Smith appreciated the opportunity his son had as well. He could tell Caleb was going to learn valuable lessons when they arrived at Anderson University. He was able to keep track of what his son was doing, and accomplishing, throughout the week thanks to technology as well.

"We followed them on social media and watched their news team broadcasts daily," said Principal Smith. "Caleb told us he was running for office. First, [he became] their city party chairman, then the county superintendent of education, and then, campaigning and giving a speech as he ran for State Superintendent of Education. When he won, he was elated!"

'More capable than I think'

Orr knew a little bit more about Girls State than Smith did; she had family members who participated in the past. Still, it was a learning experience once she got there; a learning experience she appreciated.

"Even though I don't have any career interests in politics, I still feel obligated to understand the structure of our nation's government and its values," Orr said. "The opportunity to connect with so many young women from all over the state taught me about places and things in South Carolina I had no knowledge of beforehand. I realized that there were more young women like me from South Carolina than I thought."

As the week continued, Orr felt called to run for the State Superintendent position. She said she has really learned about the need for quality education and equitable educational opportunities for communities over the past few years. This issue is now one of her passions.

Of course, she still had to make up her mind and take the initiative to put herself out there to run for office. The environment at Palmetto Girls State encourages students to get out of their comfort zone and take chances. Orr did that, and, was successful; a nice surprise you could say.

"I was taken aback I guess you could say," Orr mentioned. "This wasn't my first time running for something, but it was my first time without my mom guiding me and helping a lot. So after it all, I felt maybe I'm more capable than I think I am going into certain things."

The experience gave Orr more confidence about pursuing different opportunities. She is also more "educated" about education and state government in general.

"Honestly, there are a lot of the problems that really do rely on funds and the difference between them being state or federal," said Orr. "The main thing that I took away [regarding issues with public education] is that if there's a problem going on in one city, then it's probably a problem for another, if not everywhere. It takes a lot to address common problems for various cities, but I also see that those [problems] which may seem like the least concerning [need to be] addressed as well."

"Amazing experience"

Winning the election for the office of State Superintendents was the highlight of the week for both Orr and Smith, until they learned about what the other one accomplished. The participants from Boys and Girls State got together later in the week for a parade in Columbia; that's when they broke the news to each other. Smith was a little more subtle at first.

"He tried to surprise me when we met up for the parade, so until then, he was acting as if he lost," Orr explained. "At first, I was a little upset for him, but then I figured out he was joking with me, and we laughed [until] the parade started. Everyone kept asking if we planned the whole thing before coming, but honestly, we didn't even know what to expect when we got to Palmetto Boys and Girls State, so really it was all just by coincidence!"

"It wasn't too surprising hearing that my friend won the same office," Smith commented. "She is such an intelligent, well-spoken individual. I had a very good feeling that she would win the office, any office, she was to run for due to her professionalism and way of socializing with others. It was an amazing experience that I can proudly say I was able to walk down the state [capitol building] steps in front of an audience of over 1,200 people with my best friend."

Learning more about Palmetto Boys and Girls State

Everyone who participates in this program won't have the experience Orr and Smith had. However, everyone who attends can have their own powerful experience. Principal Smith is thankful for what his son learned and accomplished. He also hopes more students in Charleston County School District (CCSD) take advantage of this opportunity in the future.

"Not only [have I spoken with] people who attended in South Carolina, I found people who attended Boys State in other states as well," said Principal Smith. "I saw a picture of President Bill Clinton as a citizen of Boys State, shaking the hand of President John F. Kennedy. I also saw an image of former CCSD student and Academic Magnet High School graduate, William Pugh, shaking the hand of President Barack Obama just two years ago."

To learn more about how to be a part of Palmetto Boys or Girls State, visit <http://palmettoboysstate.com/about-palmetto-boys-state/how-to-apply/> or <https://palmettogirlsstate.net/faq/#q3>.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools that span 1,000 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 86 schools and several specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities led by associate superintendents. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.