

For Immediate Release

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Media Release

West Ashley's AJ Barnes named CCSD 2021 Teacher of the Year

Division of Strategy and
Communications

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools

Erica S. Taylor

Chief of Staff



Charleston, SC – Adam “AJ” Barnes is Charleston County School District’s 2021 Teacher of the Year. Barnes teaches AP European History, US History, and coaches baseball at West Ashley High School (WAHS). This is his fifth year at the school.

Barnes is humbled by the honor and will use the opportunity to promote and foster collaboration across the district between teachers and various high schools.

The announcement came via a surprise visit Thursday, August 26, 2021, from Superintendent Dr. Gerrita Postlewait and a caravan of district officials. Selected from over 80 school-based teachers of the year, Barnes will help lead the CCSD Teacher of the Year Roundtable during the 2021-2022 school year.

Barnes follows 2020 honoree, Lakevia Mills of St. John’s High School.

Barnes was honored to have been selected among his colleagues.

“This isn’t about me, though,” said Barnes. “This is about this amazing school and our community here in West Ashley. This is representative of the

district and the incredible students we serve. This represents how we ended last year so successfully despite the challenge and how even more successfully we kicked off this school year.”

Barnes and four other finalists were selected through a multi-step process that began with a review of their applications by the outgoing Teacher of the Year Roundtable. Once the finalists were chosen, each of the five teachers gave a tour of their school to a panel of judges, provided a model lesson to be critiqued, and participated in a thorough interview process.

Barnes is motivated to improve the learning experience for students across CCSD thanks to his own experiences in high school and college. He was a high school athlete and played baseball at Otterbein University in Ohio. His teachers and coaches were positive role models.

“I had one teacher who was passionate about teaching,” said Barnes. “He was just as intense and passionate in the classroom as he was on the field. For him, the whole student mattered. Through him and many other coaches and teachers, I learned the importance of relationships and how to overcome adversity. I was taught those tools at a young age and I have carried them with me ever since.”

Principal Ryan Cumback describes Barnes as someone with a positive attitude and an unwavering commitment to make a sincere difference in not only the lives of his students, but also the greater West Ashley community.

“Mr. Barnes is an incredible educator and coach,” said Cumback. “He’s an advocate for every student at West Ashley High School regardless of whether or not he teaches them. Mr. Barnes is humble and selfless and consistently puts the needs of others before his own.”

In addition, Abigail “Abby” Best from James B. Edwards Elementary School was named the 2021 CCSD Teacher of the Year Runner-Up.

Best holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education with add-on certification in Early Childhood Education from Anderson University and a Master of Education in Educational Leadership. She earned her Master’s degree in leadership from The Citadel while teaching, and taking on various leadership roles and positions throughout the school and community. She has served as Grade Level Chair and as a member of the Principal’s Cabinet. Last year she was a third grade virtual teacher.

Other finalists for 2021 CCSD Teacher of the Year include Candace Bare (Ladson Elementary School), Katie Johnston (East Cooper Center for Advanced Studies), and Vickie Klatt (St. Andrew’s School of Math and Science).

For more information, contact the Division of Strategy and Communication at (843) 937-6603.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 49,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), music and other creative and performing arts, career and technical preparation programs, and military.