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# The Institute Times

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BREAKING GROUND ON THE  
FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN  
LANCASTER COUNTY

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE  
BONUSES FOR CHARTER  
SCHOOLS: THE 2025  
ACADEMIC SHOWCASE





## Lawmakers Continue Engagement with SC's Charter Schools

This month, the General Assembly reconvenes to vote on crucial legislation for charter school children across South Carolina. The Institute has been partnering with its schools over the past several months to bring these legislative leaders into charter schools across the state to showcase their innovation, academic growth, and methodology for navigating the current funding model.

Thornwell Charter School hosted Senator Danny Verdin (R-9), allowing him to personally engage with Thornwell's teachers and students. His visit gave Thornwell leadership the chance to share insights on the school's operations, growth, and achievements. Two students from Thornwell were able to share their personal perspective on why students choose charter schools with Senator Verdin.

Representative Bill Hager (R-122) generously donated school supplies to Libertas Academy - Colleton (LAC) to support their growing student population. This visit allowed LAC leadership to share highlights from the school's first year, underscoring the shared commitment between LAC and Rep. Hager to advancing school choice and student success in the Lowcountry.

Additionally, Representative Brandon Newton (R-45) delivered remarks at Cogito Academy's new facility groundbreaking ceremony, where he proudly represented Lancaster by highlighting the importance of strong legislative support for educational innovation.

Finally, Representative Blake Sanders (R-9) was featured as the keynote speaker for the Institute's 2025 Academic Showcase, recognizing his ongoing commitment to education and academic excellence. In his remarks, he highlighted the outstanding work of administrators, teachers, and students across South Carolina's charter schools and encouraged community members to remain engaged, present, and courageous in supporting educational success.

The Institute is working to elevate the voices of the school choice movement at the State House this session. These efforts will include meetings with state legislators, participation in legislative events, and engagement in advocacy at the Capitol.

Thank you to all of the lawmakers who are spending their valuable time connecting with families and educators, both within South Carolina charter schools and at the State House!

# Get to Know Our New Transfer Schools

Schools That Will Be Joining the Institute Family After Transitioning from a Different Authorizer

**Colearn Academy** is a K-12 virtual school that collaborates with families to personalize a learning plan for each student while building a sense of community among students, parents, and faculty. Led by Executive Director Ms. Amber Robinson, Colearn Academy's vision is rooted in family partnership—bridging the best of home education and traditional school to nurture confident, capable, and connected learners prepared to thrive in life. Colearn Academy serves students nationwide, with South Carolina residents eligible to enroll tuition-free as public charter school students.



**Morning Star Academy**, located in Horry County, provides a nurturing and supportive environment for students in grades K-8. The school is scheduled to open in the Fall of 2026 and will be managed by The Educational Empowerment Group. Morning Star Academy's vision is to inspire young minds to become innovative, compassionate, and lifelong learners through a STEAM-infused, play-based curriculum that builds knowledge, independence, life skills, confidence, and resilience.



**South Carolina Construction Academy** is an innovative charter high school opening in Fall of 2026 to serve students in grades 9-12. The school's mission is to ignite a passion for positive change by blending academics with hands-on construction experiences. Students will gain practical skills through industry-aligned coursework, preparing them for successful careers. South Carolina Construction Academy will partner with Morning Star Academy to occupy the same building and offer a full K-12 public education to the Horry County area.



**Harrisburg Global Academy** will be a new school of choice option for Lancaster County, with a unique education model focused on language immersion. The school's world language program provides students with foundational skills through Spanish immersion, fostering cultural awareness, cognitive development, and global competence. In its first year, Harrisburg Global Academy will serve students in grades K-6 and adding grades 7 and 8 at full matriculation.



**Horse Creek Academy – Kershaw** is a public charter school serving students in grades 5K–5 in Camden. Currently in its first academic year of operation, the school emphasizes a whole-child approach to education that includes academic instruction alongside character development. The school is led by Mr. Michael Manning, who works closely with families and staff to support student learning and school culture.



**Entrepreneur High School**, located in Spartanburg, will open for the 2027-2028 school year, initially serving grades 9-10 before expanding to serve grades 9-12. Its mission is to foster active and engaged citizens by emphasizing academic achievement, character development, entrepreneurial skills, and community service. Administrators, teachers, parents, and community members collaborate to equip students with the essential entrepreneurial skills necessary for becoming fully engaged, productive, and successful adults.



# Academic Performance Bonuses for Charter Schools:



The Institute started 2026 on a high note with the Academic Showcase, an annual celebration of the outstanding academic achievement of charter schools in its portfolio across the state.

The showcase opened with a keynote address by Representative Blake Sanders (R-9), who delivered a powerful message on uplifting students' successes while guiding them with thoughtful correction to help them grow. Following those inspiring remarks, Dr. Meka Childs and Dr. Abbey Duggins from the South Carolina Department of Education offered further insight into shaping confident and capable leaders in an evolving educational landscape.

14 schools were presented with awards recognizing outstanding academic performance, growth, and culture scores as measured by the South Carolina Department of Education report card ratings from the 2024-2025 school year. These achievements were memorialized through banners, plaques, and certificates that will be displayed in schools as enduring reminders of the commitment, perseverance, and success of their students and staff.

Students with perfect scores on their end-of-grade assessments in science, ELA, or math were also invited to attend the banquet with their families, receiving a special certificate onstage for their hard work. Additionally, students were brought onstage to help accept their school's awards, highlighting the school community's shared commitment to honoring achievement as a family.

New this year was the awarding of the Math Trailblazer awards. The Institute honored Royal Live Oaks Academy of the Arts and Sciences Charter School's elementary school and Berkeley Preparatory Academy's middle school with the Math Trailblazer award. This award honors exceptional progress in student math achievement through dedicated instruction and a strong commitment to accelerating learning, recognizing significant gains in math growth as measured by SC Ready.

# The 2025 Academic Showcase

Surprises were in store in the afternoon! Superintendent Cameron Runyan announced that nearly a quarter of a million dollars in Academic Performance Bonuses would be distributed to Institute schools with Overall Good and Overall Excellent report card ratings.

“For far too long, the education establishment has funded struggling schools to the exclusion of those who are producing excellence. These performance bonuses are a statement that the Institute believes in rewarding the efforts that are producing success for children,” said Cameron Runyan, Superintendent at the Charter Institute at Erskine.

Finally, the Institute recognized Ms. Julianne Lang with the Pursuit of Excellence Award, a testament to her visionary leadership and dedication to serving her community at Lowcountry Leadership Charter School for over 13 years.

The Institute will continue to celebrate and reward the success of its charter schools as they provide an excellent education to the children of South Carolina. The Institute extends great thanks to the Board members, school leaders, teachers, and special guests for their support in moving the needle forward in South Carolina education.

Scan the QR code for a complete list of award recipients.



# Breaking Ground on the Future of Education in Lancaster County

Cogito Academy marked a significant milestone in its mission to serve Lancaster County with the groundbreaking of its \$31.5 million state-of-the-art educational facility. The permanent facility is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2026 and will open for the 2026-2027 school year. The construction is being funded by a \$31.5 million bond secured entirely through state funding, without utilizing any local taxes.

The ceremony welcomed special guests Representative Brandon Newton (R-45) and Senator Allen Blackmon (R-27), both strong advocates for education who represent Lancaster in the state legislature. Newton spoke about the significant impact Cogito Academy will have on students in Lancaster County, and Blackmon highlighted how the academy reflects the exciting growth of the region. Superintendent Runyan joined Tutelage School Solutions leadership to celebrate this momentous achievement in the official groundbreaking ceremony, along with comments highlighting the critical role of education and the importance of offering values based educational options for students and parents.

"Cogito Academy offers more choices for families while delivering an outstanding education for students in Lancaster County and setting them up for a successful future," Superintendent Runyan said. "Every child in South Carolina should have the chance to achieve their full potential through an excellent education tailored to their needs, and schools such as Cogito Academy are setting the standard."

"This milestone is deeply meaningful because it represents a long-term investment in the students and families we serve," said Jason Cole, School Director of Cogito Academy. "We're incredibly thankful to our Board of Directors, the Charter Institute at Erskine, Tutelage School Solutions, and especially the families and communities who have trusted us with their children. Their belief in our mission makes it possible to create a permanent, high-quality learning environment for every student."

Cogito Academy is managed by Tutelage School Solutions, an award-winning, comprehensive service provider supporting high-quality public charter schools across South Carolina. The school's mission is to develop the next generation of American citizens through a classical education system built on a rigorous curriculum, strong character formation, and genuine care for student well-being.





# Choice Stories: Legacy Leaves A Wake

Join us for the premiere showing of the Institute's newest installment in the Choice Stories documentary series - "Choice Stories: Legacy Leaves A Wake". The film provides highlights the challenges charter schools must overcome and the transformative impact of the steadfast leadership of Ms. Julianne Lang, the school founders, the Board of the school, and the LLCS team.

The premiere will take place on Thursday, February 26, hosted at 5139 State Road S-10-79 in Meggett beginning at 6:00 p.m.

Please scan the QR code RSVP for this exciting event!



## Langston Charter Leads the Way in Academic Innovation

Langston Charter Middle School was the recipient of the Innovation in Academic Excellence award at this year's S.C. Charter Schools Conference, hosted by the Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina! Langston's single-gender model allows teachers to tailor instruction to how boys and girls developing brains learn best, creating an engaging and effective classroom experience. This commitment to innovation delivers a student-centered education at the highest level to Greenville families. Congratulations to Langston on this well-deserved honor!





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## Quiz

*Put your knowledge to the test! Send in your answers to  
[kstrickfaden@erskinecharters.org](mailto:kstrickfaden@erskinecharters.org) to be eligible for a prize!*

1.

**Which two schools won math trailblazer at the Academic Showcase?**

2.

**Which transfer school has an education model focused on language immersion?**

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