Awards to local schools and educators highlight Spartanburg Academic Movement Celebration

Spartanburg, SC – Four local schools and three educators were awarded over $20,000 by the Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM) Wednesday evening, September 18, at SAM’s annual celebration, Lone Oak and Jesse S. Bobo Elementary Schools in Spartanburg District 6 and Mary H. Wright and Cleveland Academy of Leadership in Spartanburg District 7 were each awarded $5,000 from the John T. Wardlaw Institute of Continuous Improvement, the training hub for the Spartanburg Academic Movement. The awards recognized the schools’ participation and results from engaging in the Institute’s Continuous Improvement (CI) training and strategies.

Collectively, the four award recipient schools are part of “The Four Schools Project” a focused intervention designed to improve early grades reading achievement and overall academic success in Spartanburg County’s highest poverty schools. Just before the awards were announced, a graph depicting the 2019 results of third grade reading proficiency revealed a more than 60% increase in student achievement, markedly higher than earlier gains.

“These schools and their teachers have been working deeply in continuous improvement strategies to improve student achievement. SAM is proud to be part of that success, but it is their hard work and dedication every day that is making this happen,” said John Stockwell, SAM’s executive director.

In addition to the financial award, each school received a framed artistic rendering of their school façade for being a “Wardlaw Pioneer Champion.” Dr. Darryl Owings and Dr. Russell Booker, superintendents of Districts 6 and 7 respectively, spoke about each award recipient and the impact of CI in their districts.

Victoria Bradley (Mary H. Wright), Argyl Brewton (Cleveland Academy), and Amanda Justice (Jesse Bobo/Lone Oak) each received individual Wardlaw Pioneer Awards and a gift of $500. The three were the first Continuous Improvement Coaches hired in the County. Bradley and Justice, along with Mendy Mossbrook, director of SAM’s Wardlaw
Institute, were also recognized for having shared the Institute’s successful strategies at a national convening of the StriveTogether network held earlier this month in Washington, DC. The network includes 70 partnerships across the nation, working in their local communities to help every child succeed in school and in life from cradle to career, regardless of race, zip code or circumstance. The network is impacting the lives of 13.7 million children nationwide.

Through the Wardlaw Institute, SAM has been working to embed CI practice across the county, with initial focus given to teachers and administrators involved in “The Four Schools Project.” Initial work began on the project began in 2017, with CI training beginning in 2018 and the formal launch of the Wardlaw Institute happening in March 2019. Over 330 local educators and dozens of nonprofit leaders have received training through the Institute.

Mendy Mossbrook, Director of the Institute, explained that five training tracks have now been launched: CI 101 for Educators, CI 101 for Leaders, CI Leadership, CI for School Leadership, and CI 102.

At the event, the story of the late John T. Wardlaw’s deep passion for improving academic achievement was shared by Troy Hanna, president and CEO of the Spartanburg County Foundation. Wardlaw’s philanthropic legacy supported the launch of the Institute and the awards. His daughter, Saunders McCollum, helped present awards to each recipient.

“We have honored our pioneers in this work tonight. We are on the right track. Now we are scaling these successful practices across the county and into our nonprofit and community agencies working to support children. It is thrilling to consider the success stories we will be sharing at our next celebration,” said Stockwell.

During the event, Stockwell reminded the crowd of over 100 attendees of SAM’s strategic focus areas: kindergarten readiness, early grades reading, middle grades math, high school graduation, post-secondary enrollment, post-secondary persistence, and post-secondary completion. A detailed report, SAM Chapter 4, was also released during the event and will be available on SAM’s website www.learnwithsam.org this week.

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*The Spartanburg Academic Movement is a nonprofit organization and a community movement working to improve economic mobility for all, anchored in academic achievement ...county-wide...cradle to career. Learn more at www.learnwithsam.org.*