



Polaris Tech

CHARTER SCHOOL

News Release

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Polaris Tech a state leader in trauma-informed school movement

Polaris Tech is becoming one of the first “trauma-informed schools” in South Carolina with training that started August 2 with a leading expert in the field. Training will continue through the new school year.

The trauma-informed approach helps school staff recognize signs that a student may have been affected by traumatic stress – anything from family deaths or divorce to abuse, homelessness or drugs.

“This trauma-informed training is tremendously important to our staff, but mostly to our students and families,” said Dr. Melissa Crosby, executive director at the no-tuition charter school in Ridgeland, SC. “Students of all walks of life have experienced adverse childhood experiences, and it can directly impact their ability to learn.”

Friday, community leaders joined the school and Board of Directors for a kick-off breakfast to learn more about the trauma-informed movement. The rest of the day focused on training, including elements from the movie “Paper Tigers.”

The film follows six troubled teens over the course of a year at Lincoln Alternative High School in rural Washington state. Considered a last chance before dropping out, many students come to Lincoln with a history of behavioral problems, truancy, and substance abuse. Then, in 2010, Principal Jim Sporleder learned about the science of what a rough childhood does to a developing brain.

“Stressed brains can’t learn,” was his takeaway from an educational conference. He returned to his school convinced that traditional punishments such as suspension only worsened students’ problems.

Sporleder invited his staff, as well as the students, to learn about the Adverse Childhood Experiences study, which showed that stressful events during childhood –divorce, domestic violence, or living with someone with a mental illness – greatly increase the risk of problems in adulthood.

Friday, Sporleder took his message to the Polaris Tech team for training. “It is exciting to see such progressive leadership in the trauma informed movement at Polaris Tech,” he said. “The Board and staff are going to see great growth and progress in their student population.”

The study showed that addiction, suicide and even heart disease can have their roots in childhood experience. Out of school suspension became a last resort as the school formed an in-school suspension program, keeping the kids in contact with the staff and caught up with their homework. They also established a health center on campus so the students would have ready access to pediatricians and mental health counselors. The biggest challenge for the teachers was to consider the source of the kids’ behavior.

“Our navigators (teachers) inherently know that a child comes to us with experiences from the family and the community, but sometimes we get isolated into our little bubble at school and forget about the outside influences,” Crosby said. “This training is going to help us keep those influences front and center as we work to help our students learn and achieve great things.”

For more information about trauma informed schools and the “Paper Tigers” project, visit <https://traumaawareschools.org/traumaInSchools>

Polaris Tech is a state-approved charter school serving middle and high school students from Jasper County and the Lowcountry. It is a free school (no tuition), that focuses on preparing young people for successful work and college.

The Polaris Tech academic emphasis is on six career areas, starting with: Aerospace, Health Sciences and Business Management. Polaris Tech continues to accept student applications for the 2019-2020 school year for students who will be in grades 6-11. Applications are available online at www.polaristech.org.

The newly-constructed school is located on Grays Highway across from the Ridgeland Airport.

To keep updated about Polaris Tech Charter School, follow them on Facebook and at www.polaristech.org. For specific questions, email info@polaristech.org or call 843-645-0605.

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