



March 18, 2021

Dear VASC Families, Faculty, and Staff,

It has been our pleasure to assist Virtus Academy of South Carolina's (VASC) Board of Directors with their search for your school's new director. The Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina (PCSASC), as approved by the VASC Board, moved forward with a committee made up of board members, a teacher, a community member, and external school administrators to aid in the search.

The search committee, with the assistance of PCSASC, reviewed and vetted over 75 applications. After careful consideration, deliberation and review, the committee submitted a recommendation of four finalist candidates to the Board for approval during the March 16, 2021, Special Called Meeting.

PCSASC and the VASC Board of Directors is pleased to announce the following four finalists for the Director position:

- Brittany Hamilton
- Shemekia Nero
- Ashley Gedris Taylor
- Johnathon Wideman

Please see bios attached.

We are excited to invite the VASC community to join a virtual finalist forum via Zoom on Thursday March 25, 2021, at 6:30 pm. Link to Meeting: <https://zoom.us/j/96727222193>
Or listen via phone: 1-646-558-8656 Meeting ID: 96727222193#

Members of the VASC community are encouraged to submit potential questions or question topics for this portion of the search process for a new VASC Principal by using the following submission link: <https://forms.gle/gMbUaLaiyBUBP1pBA>

Please note that submissions must be general and that any submission that mentions specific names (i.e., a finalist or any personal name) will be disregarded. Should you have any questions about the search process, please do not hesitate to contact Joe Bowers, PCSASC Director of Operations, via email at Joe.Bowers@sccharterschools.org.

Submissions will be accepted until Monday, March 22, 2021 at 12:00 Noon.

Very truly yours,

Carol Aust,
Executive Director

Virtus Academy Principal Finalists



Mrs. Brittany Hamilton previously served Virtus Academy of South Carolina as the Assistant Principal, focusing on the areas of curriculum design and professional development, and most recently as Interim Principal for the 2020/21 school year. She led the school while moving into a new building and nearly doubling enrollment while navigating a global pandemic. She has extensive experience in Project-Based Learning and has been trained by the Buck Institute for Education, the premier PBL professional learning network. She has two Master of Education degrees from Columbia College, one in Divergent Learning and the other in Educational Administration and Leadership K12.

Mrs. Hamilton has been a professional certified educator for 14 years serving as a teacher in grades 4 and 6, a K-5 math interventionist, and as a school-wide technology and PBL leader. As an award-winning educator, she has experience leading professional development in curriculum, educational technology, and PBL at the local and state levels and educational technology at the national level. Mrs. Hamilton served as Technology Coordinator at Spaulding Middle School and modeled her classroom with the PBL design. During her time at Spaulding Middle School, Mrs. Hamilton was awarded Teacher of the Year for the 2013/14 school year, was named She Magazine's Extraordinary Woman Ability to Inspire in 2015, and received the International Society for Technology in Education 2017 award for Technology in Action. She also has extensive experience with Flipped Classrooms, teaching with DBQ's (document-based questions), and data-driven instruction.

As the Interim Principal of Virtus Academy, Mrs. Hamilton has helped shift the idea of education through a global pandemic. Under her leadership, Virtus Academy opened its first-ever Virtus Virtual School, implemented free food services for all students, qualified for Title I funding, began an athletics program for Middle School students, launched Vista After School Care, and added Latin and Dance to the curriculum. Furthermore, her passion for student leadership and service has launched Virtus Academy into the forefront of community service projects, such as Relay for Life, Angel Tree Christmas Giving, Valentine's for the Elderly, Kindness Baskets for Healthcare Workers, Cereal Box Drive, and multiple canned food drives. Mrs. Hamilton is excited to grow Virtus Academy's programs to include clubs and sports as the world finds its new normal. Most notably, she grew the PBL program from end-of-the-semester poster projects to daily integration of hands-on learning for students, including dedicating Title I funds toward a budding PBL program. With the funds, Virtus Academy students are in the process of building an outdoor learning space, a functioning garden, a recycling initiative, a movement in education initiative, a news program, and more featuring its brand new STEM Lab. Mrs. Hamilton's PBL experience had helped Virtus Academy toward its mission of advancing student achievement by preparing students for civic and career success through rigorous academics, leadership development, and project-based learning.

Virtus Academy Principal Finalists



Ms. Shemekia Nero was raised in Lamar, SC, graduating from Lamar High School, home of the Silver Foxes. Shortly after high school, she moved to Florence, SC and enrolled in Francis Marion University, graduating in 2000 with a Bachelor of Arts in English. She began teaching in 2002 and held various positions in education since that time. She was Center Director of a Sylvan Learning Center for one year, leaving to take a position as an Education Specialist with the Department of Justice's Federal Bureau of Prisons. In 2007, Ms. Nero began teaching English at West Florence High School, earning her teaching certification in 2009. In 2013, she transferred to the Alfred Rush Academy, Florence One's alternative school. Having the opportunity to teach in the middle school she attended, Ms. Nero accepted a position in Lamar at Spaulding Middle School in 2015. Two years later, she accepted a position with South Florence High School, where she taught English II and III, and was promoted to Assistant Principal in 2018. Through all of these opportunities, Mrs. Nero feels that she has gained a unique skillset

that will serve her well as a school leader.

Understanding the need to continue to grow professionally, Ms. Nero has also added on to her education. In addition to her Bachelor of Arts in English, she earned a Master of Business Administration in 2007 from Webster University. In 2016, she earned a Master of Educational Leadership from Coastal Carolina University, where she is currently working towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum Instruction and Assessment with an emphasis on Special Education. Ms. Nero takes a special interest in closing the achievement gap, which she hopes will be the primary focus of her dissertation.

As a school leader, it is Ms. Nero's goal to lead by example. In doing so, she sets high expectations while always striving for excellence. She aspires to a school culture and educational program conducive to student learning and development. She believes ALL students can learn by being provided with educational supports that align with their learning needs. She also feels that it is her responsibility to cultivate an environment that fosters the growth of the whole student, including academic, character and social/emotional development. Some of her past and present leaders have said the following about her:

- *"To see her in action is to see a natural leader."*
- *"Shemekia is a person of high intelligence and good character."*
- *"She is respected among her peers and teachers and has a natural way of engaging an adult audience."*
- *"Ms. Nero is a consummate professional and truly understands the day-to-day operations and the 'big picture' aims of a school."*
- *"Ms. Nero seeks out opportunities to improve our school environment and works tirelessly to improve both the academic and social/emotional experiences of our students."*
- *"Ms. Nero demonstrates the ability to connect with parents and students from a variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds."*

Ms. Nero is the mother of Sabien, Langston and Baxter (the family's golden lab). When she is not working or studying, she enjoys reading, traveling, completing DIY projects and taking care of her flowers. The following is one of her favorite quotes: *"She was powerful, not because she wasn't scared but because she went on strongly, despite the fear."* Harper Lee

Virtus Academy Principal Finalists



Mrs. Ashley Gedris Taylor grew up in Hartsville, South Carolina and is a graduate of Hartsville High School. She earned her Bachelors of Science degree from Winthrop University in Elementary Education as a Teaching Fellows Scholar. She went on to teach 4th and 5th grades in Darlington County School District where she was named the District Teacher of the Year in 2010. She also earned a master's degree in Instructional Accommodation from Francis Marion University and became a mentor teacher and certified evaluator in the elementary setting. Mrs. Taylor moved on to become a Reading Coach and Master Teacher as she worked toward her add-on licensure in Educational Leadership through Wingate University. During that time, she also served as the Marlboro County School District Induction Teacher Facilitator providing support, guidance, and feedback on first year teachers' experiences in their own classrooms. Mrs. Taylor was a presenter on developing leadership habits in students at the Francis Marion Center of Excellence Summer Institute. She also received Project-Based Learning

training through the Buck Institute during her time as a Master Teacher. She went on to be named Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction between two schools, one elementary and one middle school. From there she was named interim principal of a performing arts magnet middle school and went on to become a principal in Marlboro County which is the role she currently serves in. She has also served on the South Carolina Department of Education 4.0 Teacher Evaluation Rubric Committee as well as elementary subject standards committees. Mrs. Taylor has recently been chosen to present at the South Carolina Association of School Administrators Innovative Ideas Institute this summer on the topic of "Leading with Love". Mrs. Taylor has been an educator for 14 years and has served in the roles which have prepared her to be the instructional leader she is today.

Mrs. Taylor believes that education should focus on the whole child and finds that much of the importance of education is built upon building relationships between all stakeholders in education. She believes allowing students to have leadership opportunities throughout their educational journey will further develop their success as future leaders of tomorrow.

Virtus Academy Principal Finalists



Mr. Johnathon Wideman currently holds South Carolina certification for administration (elementary and secondary), as well as, Florida. He was selected to participate in the Foundations of School Leadership Program offered by the South Carolina Department of Education, as well as, the Leading Edge Leadership Program offered by Charter School USA to advance his leadership skills. He has a Master's degree in Educational Administration K-12 (University of Scranton), a Master's degree in Divergent Learning (Columbia College), a Bachelor's of Art in Elementary Education (Coker College), as well as, an African American Specialization (Coker College). He has teaching experience at the elementary and middle school level, as well as, experience teaching high school equivalent courses for adult learners who desire a General Education Development (GED) credential.

In his current role as an assistant principal, Johnathon has a wonderful opportunity of leading passionate educators at Four Corners Upper School.

He has seen the school's enrollment increase from being under enrolled to overenrolled with a waiting list, increase of educational commitment from parents and community partners, increased retention of faculty and staff, and commitment of faculty and staff to professional growth. Understanding the dynamics of school growth, it is important to remember it takes a village. Everyone has a part in the success of the school, even administrators. What he loves most about Four Corners Upper School is the hands-on approach of the administrative team. Being part of an administrative team that is involved in tutoring sessions after school, Saturday academic boot camps, as well as, pulling small groups to support underachieving students academically, Johnathon has seen outstanding academic achievement in the school grade at Four Corners Upper School (F (2015) to B (2019)).

Throughout his professional career Johnathon has assumed many leadership roles besides that of an assistant principal. He was a classified administrator for Emmanuel Christian School, Lead PBIS teacher/coordinator, grade level chair, ETHOS science chair, advisor for extracurricular activities, and a mentor/supporter of the Gentlemen's Club. He has served as a cooperating teacher for Francis Marion University (student teaching candidates), as well as, an intern mentor for Phoenix University's Administration and Supervision program.

In his spare time, Johnathon likes to read, travel, spend time with family and friends, cook, and serve his community. Currently he is reading *Dark Horse* by Ogi Ogas and Todd Rose. His travels have taken him to several states within the USA, as well as, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and the Cayman Islands. He is looking forward to expanding his travels to Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa. Family is extremely important to Johnathon, especially as he gets older. After the passing of his grandmother on Thanksgiving Day (2019), he realized every moment or opportunity shared with his loved ones is a gift from God. One of his favorite pastimes is cooking. He enjoys cooking for others and building relationships with his school family, community, and church. When he has the opportunity to engage in community events, it warms his heart. Whether it's feeding the homeless, tutoring and mentoring disadvantaged students, or being a listening ear to individuals that have experienced hardships, trauma, and/or lost in life, he finds great joy in serving others.