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SRNS Partnership with Local School District Thrives Through Pandemic

AIKEN, S.C., March 15, 2022 – In hopes of strengthening local workforce job pipelines, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) partnered with the Aiken County Public School District (ACPSD) to increase the number of students participating in STEM-related Advanced Placement (AP) classes. A three-year agreement ended in 2019 with outstanding results; moreover, AP enrollment in targeted schools remains substantially high despite overall enrollment challenges.

TOTAL AP EXAMS ADMINISTERED										
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
SOUTH AIKEN HS	517	576	527	475	483	884	990	1050	857	769
NORTH AUGUSTA HS	423	387	359	338	317	658	940	899	848	739

The partnership, which included the National Math and Science Initiative, encouraged and provided incentives to students at South Aiken and North Augusta High Schools participating in STEM-related AP coursework. This would better prepare local students for post-secondary STEM performance and, over time, significantly increase the number of qualified candidates for positions at the Savannah River Site (SRS).

“The successful completion of AP courses leading to college credit is a recognized benchmark of success throughout public school systems in the U.S. Unfortunately, only a low percentage of students have been encouraged to participate,” said Kim Mitchell, SRNS Education Outreach Programs Lead. “An SRNS donation of \$364,000 helped fund this program at South Aiken and North Augusta High Schools on the premise that students who traditionally would not have been considered strong candidates for an AP program would



Kacee Poppy (left), a teacher for South Aiken High School's Chemistry Honors Class, provides assistance to Da'Taviah Mickens (center) and Hannah Stroman, as they work as a team on an experiment.

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benefit in several ways by participating.”

Mitchell explained research studies show that students who had previously been restricted from Advanced Placement coursework experienced a positive change in academic aptitude, attitude and self-image after participating in one or more AP classes.

To earn subsequent college credit, students must earn a score of 3, 4 or 5 on an AP exam. Scores of 1 and 2 are not considered eligible for college credit, although research has determined that scores of 1 and 2 still have distinct value.

“A new analysis of AP students who score a 2 on the exam shows that they are more likely than similar students to enroll in college and more likely to perform well in their introductory classes. And despite fears that a score of 1 or 2 will discourage students from taking further advanced courses, the opposite is true: most students scoring a 1 or a 2 in their sophomore or junior years proceed to take additional AP classes in following years, and the majority obtain improved scores on their subsequent AP Exams,” The Elective wrote, A Broader View of College Readiness.

“It’s a new paradigm that’s leading to highly constructive change within Aiken County high schools. The focus of this three-year effort was to radically increase the number of students electing to pursue an academic challenge,” said Mitchell. “The results of this program have been excellent. Teachers were provided the resources they needed, including valuable training. After engaging in a rigorous experience, hard-working students received \$100 rewards during large, festive celebrations.”

Mitchell also noted that there has been a ripple effect, in that much of the success obtained during the first three years of the program continues today, long after external funding ceased. “We value the opportunity to support local schools and influence our future workforce. It is rewarding to see the long-term impact of the collaboration,” she added.

“The partnership with SRNS has been of great value to South Aiken students, faculty and the community at large,” said Samuel Fuller, Principal at South Aiken High School. “Because of the investment in education made by SRNS, access to Advanced Placement STEM coursework has been made available to all students. This access has resulted in tangible outcomes with more students being prepared for -- and experiencing -- success in college.”

According to Fuller, the most valuable result of this partnership has been a shift in culture throughout participating schools. “Even during a pandemic, we have seen continued high levels of participation in Advanced Placement courses that far exceed what we experienced prior to our partnership with SRNS. This is evidence that we are truly an Advanced Placement Academy breaking down barriers and providing access and opportunity for all our students,” he added.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor-led company with Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, is responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site located near Aiken, South Carolina.