

My African American South Carolinian heroine is Dr. Laura Hickson, the first African American female Superintendent of Schools for Florence School District 3. Dr. Hickson is a vanguard of the Lake City, South Carolina community and has had an indelible impact on the lives of countless students and families. Through her unrelenting efforts, she has secured millions of dollars in grants and forged business partnerships to support local schools. She has expanded technical and career pathways, created STEM and creative arts pathways, and pioneered Early College and dual enrollment pathways into whatever opportunities our imaginations can take us.

I am inspired by Dr. Hickson in how she leads by listening to ensure that her efforts are always driven by the needs of students and families, teachers and staff, and always for the good of Florence District Three. I often wonder, “When does she rest?” I hear her sharing her vision at School Board Meetings, cutting ribbons at the opening of a Tutoring and Writing Center, and see her at school events cheering on our students. There are so many personal qualities that I not only admire about Dr. Hickson—integrity, tenacity, perseverance, courage, compassion, and leadership—but that I want to emulate in my life.

Dr. Hickson has not only served as a source of inspiration, but as an advocate for my future. Of the many initiatives that Dr. Hickson has brought to our community, I believe the most profound program to be the college planning cohort program that she began as an Associate Superintendent in 2014. She ensured that students in our community have choices—whether to pursue a career, enlist in the military, pursue a trade, attend a 2-year technical school, or pursue a 4-year college degree. The first cohort of students broke the chains of generational poverty for so many students which included our district’s first Gates Millennium Scholar, first University of Maryland - Baltimore County Meyerhoff Scholar (who was also the first Meyerhoff Scholar from the state), and provided a pathway for many first-generation students to attend college on full scholarships. Inspired by Dr. Hickson’s efforts, and with her support, I have followed her example of removing obstacles. I led the effort to create a chapter of the National English Honor Society and reinstate the Tri-M Music Honor Society chapter at our high school. Dr. Hickson took a personal interest in my efforts and was always an email or phone call away from ensuring funding and approval for bringing these honor society chapters to our school.

What Dr. Hickson has done for South Carolina and our local community serves as a continuing source of inspiration. She has ensured access to a high quality education for all students, serves as a daily role model, and is a beacon of hope. Many students, like myself, have been inspired to become leaders on a global scale so that we too can have a positive impact on Lake City, the state of South Carolina, and the world beyond our borders.