

## New Lowcountry Acceleration Academy promises diplomas to dropout students

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*Dr. Jacinta Bryant, a Charleston native and former Charleston County School District school psychologist, will be the director of the Lowcountry Acceleration Academy, which opens in August. The school aims to reengage students not experiencing success in the traditional high school setting and to help them to earn a diploma.*

By Andrew J. Whitaker [awhitaker@postandcourier.com](mailto:awhitaker@postandcourier.com)

**NORTH CHARLESTON** — Growing up on James Island, Jacinta Bryant understood the value of education at a young age.

Every morning on her way to school, Bryant’s mother would drive her past McLeod Plantation. She would watch as the white houses, formerly occupied by slaves, went by her window.

“My mom always said to me when we passed by, ‘You know what? Your ancestors were killed and severely beaten just because they wanted to learn to read and write,’” Bryant, who is Black, said. “There were grave consequences for them, but those consequences should be placed in a positive light for you. I want you to build from that foundation.”

Bryant carried her mother’s message and the reminder of her ancestry with her through her own schooling and into a career as a school psychologist and, later, director of special services at Colleton County School District. Now, she’s preparing to use that passion and drive to help students succeed at the new Lowcountry Acceleration Academy, a program that offers students an alternative path to a diploma.

Bryant, who has an educational specialist degree in school psychology and a doctorate in educational leadership, is the founding director of the academy, which is set to open in North Charleston in August.

The Lowcountry academy is part of the Acceleration Academies network, which has schools nationwide. The program operated the Charleston Acceleration Academy until 2019, at which point it decided to open a school that serves students throughout the Lowcountry.

“It’s going to serve not just students in Charleston County, but also students in Berkeley and Dorchester counties,” said Jeff Good, spokesman for Acceleration Academies. “It’s going to be located in North Charleston, but students will be coming from all over to attend.”



The academy will operate as a public charter high school and is free and open to all students, who are called “graduate candidates.” When a student drops out or decides to leave another school, they can [enroll in the academy](#) to have a more personalized and flexible curriculum that will get them a diploma.

Students will participate in a hybrid learning model by taking classes online. However, they’ll be required to be at the school, which is going to be on Rivers Avenue in Charleston, at least 12 hours a week.

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While there, the students will have access to teachers, or “academic coaches,” and mentors, or “graduation candidate advocates,” who will work with them one-on-one with their school work.

The required in-person time allows the students to have a personal connection to their schooling and those invested in their success, Bryant said.

“It is oftentimes the coaching, the mentoring that really pushes those students to excel,” she said.

The goal with the in-person schooling is also to provide flexibility for students who may be working a full-time job or have other responsibilities that prevent them from being able to attend school in person five days a week.

“Some kids work 60 hours a week and the only day they have to devote to school is Sunday,” Good said. “So our teachers and mentors make themselves available on Sunday.”

The program is completely free to the students, as Acceleration Academies receives per-pupil funding through the South Carolina Public Charter School District.

With her background in special education, Bryant has a passion for helping students who might not exceed in the typical public school environment. She’s especially focused on helping students of color graduate and get a job.

“African American males are not only dropping out but they are the highest percentage of our prison population,” she said. “We really want to focus in on students that have not done well academically, social-emotionally, and steer them in the right direction.”

The school plans to have around 350 students. Currently, Bryant is working to recruit those students to enroll in the fall.

In her recruitment efforts, Bryant is reaching out not just to local districts but to churches and other community centers in the Lowcountry. She hopes to find students who will really benefit from the academy’s flexible model.

Ultimately, the goal is to have students graduate with a regular diploma rather than a GED diploma, as there are more career and college opportunities for people who have a high school diploma.

“Our goal is to really align the individual needs of the student,” Bryant said. “That’s what education should be about.”

For further information on Lowcountry Acceleration Academy, visit: [charlestdiploma.org](https://www.charlestdiploma.org)

Original article:

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