

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [ ] Title I    [X] Charter    [ ] Magnet    [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Dr. Tim Gott

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Palmetto Scholars Academy

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 7499 Dorchester Road

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City N Charleston    State SC    Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 29418-3310

County South Carolina

Telephone (843) 300-4118    Fax (843) 300-4123

Web site/URL http://www.palmettoscholarsacademy.org    E-mail tim.gott@palmettoscholarsacademy.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Mr. Elliot Smalley    E-mail ESmalley@sccharter.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name SC Public Charter School District    Tel. (803) 734-8322

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Jack Moore  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## **Part I – Eligibility Certification**

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2011 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
10. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
11. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 15 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 11 High schools
  - 7 K-12 schools
- 35 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
  - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
  - Suburban
  - Small city or town in a rural area
  - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	43	48	91
7	58	37	95
8	40	30	70
9	36	32	68
10	30	38	68
11	26	18	44
12 or higher	20	22	42
<b>Total Students</b>	253	225	478

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 5 % Asian
  - 20 % Black or African American
  - 3 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 69 % White
  - 2 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2015 – 2016 school year: 5%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	4
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	15
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	19
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	417
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.046
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 3 %  
13 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Urdu, Russia, French, German, Romanian, Tagalog, Chinese, Gujarati

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 0 %  
Total number students who qualify: 0

8. Students receiving special education services: 3 %  
14 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- 1 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 1 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 7 Other Health Impaired
- 5 Specific Learning Disability
- 0 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 3
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	28
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	1
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 17:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	97%	96%	97%	97%	86%
High school graduation rate	95%	100%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**  
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2016.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	20
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	11%
Enrolled in a community college	3%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	5%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	1%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.  
Yes    No X

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

PSA exists to meet the distinctive academic, social, and emotional needs of gifted learners.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

By lottery. Although the school's mission is aimed at students who are identified as gifted and talented, as a public charter school any student may apply and be accepted into the school.

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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Palmetto Scholars Academy (PSA) is a public charter school focusing on meeting the distinctive academic, social, and emotional needs of gifted learners. PSA opened its doors to grades six through eight in August of 2010. PSA was founded by the parent of two gifted middle school students who were not being adequately served through the gifted program at their local school. Each year, a high school grade was added to the school until August 2014, when PSA became a full middle/high school, serving grades six through twelve. PSA currently serves 482 students in the middle and high school grades.

Palmetto Scholars Academy is part of the state charter school district; therefore students can be from any county within the state of South Carolina. Current students reside in Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester counties. PSA follows state charter school law, and students are enrolled through an application and lottery system annually. As spaces open up throughout the year, students are also invited to enroll. Although the school's mission is aimed at students who are identified as gifted and talented, as a public charter school any student may apply and be accepted into the school. PSA's population currently includes approximately sixty-six percent state-identified gifted and talented students.

PSA was originally located in a small building that had formerly housed a children's day care center. The school consisted of seventeen classrooms (eight of those were modular classrooms), a computer lab, and a cafeteria. Despite the decrepit conditions of the old school building, PSA thrived. In February of 2016, PSA was moved to its current location, a new building with added classrooms, a gymnasium, stage, and two computer labs. Even though PSA's campus lacks some of the most basic features of a twenty-first century school building (a working kitchen and a media center, for example), PSA has consistently maintained high performance and rankings in both middle and high school state and national testing, as well in its annual state report card. PSA's focus on learning, rigorous curriculum, expansive focus on extracurricular activities, and emphasis on relationships and cultivating the social and emotional needs of students has contributed to PSA's success.

PSA implements a unique daily schedule in order to maximize student learning. The master schedule consists of a mixture of block classes and traditional classes. All students take daily forty-five minute math, language, and elective classes. This ensures that they experience the benefits of daily practice for the entire year in subjects that necessitate daily practice. Middle school students attend a ninety-minute English/language arts class all year, which ensures that students have the time needed to absorb the tremendous amount of PSA's rigorous curriculum. Social science and science are both taught in semester-long ninety-minute block classes, which allows teachers of those subjects to utilize student-centered curriculum focused on inquiry, collaboration, and problem-solving.

In its seven years of existence, PSA has formed a community and culture centered on learning, service, and leadership, all of which contribute to the success of our gifted and talented students. PSA implemented a House System during its third year of operation that has contributed greatly to the overall environment of the school. The goals and functions of the House system are: To establish small, permanent, cross-sectional, family-like, co-curricular groups, led by the school's faculty, that contribute to the personal security and social/emotional well-being of students; to increase the feeling of identity and belonging among individual students and increase the overall school culture at PSA; and to provide a system of accountability in which students hold each other responsible for their actions and contributions. Upon enrollment at PSA, students are placed with advisors and into one of the seven Houses. Their advisors and Houses stay the same throughout their time at PSA. Houses compete for points in the areas of academics, attendance, conduct, and service. In addition, House competitions take place on a regular basis. High school students that are part of "House Council," the student government organization, plan and implement many of the House activities, including a bi-weekly whole-school town hall.

PSA is also proud of its expansive athletic and extracurricular offerings and achievements. PSA is part of the SC high school athletic league, and the school currently offers volleyball, cross-country, basketball, and soccer to middle and high school students. Students may also participate in special programs in areas where they are passionate, including but not limited to robotics, cyber defense, National History Day, and Odyssey

of the Mind.

Special programs are a large focus every other Friday when students, teachers, administration, guidance, parents, and community members participate in LEAP days. LEAP days (Learning Enhancement and Achievement Program) allow PSA's students to plan their own schedules and explore their own passions and interests. LEAP day sessions include: Special programs and competitions, for-credit courses, workshops and seminars, field trips, clubs, and organizations.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum:**

Palmetto Scholars Academy's (PSA) core curriculum consists of five main areas: math, English, social science, science, and Authentic Research. The departmental philosophies in each of these areas, and the student outcomes, parallel with state and national standards as well as twenty-first century skills and best practices for teaching gifted. All of PSA's core courses are taught on an honors, accelerated level.

In the area of math, the departmental philosophy states that PSA students will develop and apply mathematical thinking and problem solving as involved citizens and community leaders. PSA uses an accelerated approach to the differentiation of mathematics for the gifted student. In alignment with state and national standards, student outcomes include: Making sense of problems and persevere in solving them; reasoning abstractly and quantitatively; constructing viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others; model with mathematics; using appropriate tools strategically; attending to precision; looking for and make use of structure; and looking for and express regularity in repeated reasoning. Core math classes include pre-algebra, Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Pre-Calculus, and Calculus.

English language arts (ELA) courses develop analytical readers, writers, and thinkers who read widely and deeply with a variety of text forms and who use writing to express understanding and convey real and imagined experiences. By the end of the PSA ELA experience students will: Read and write with a global perspective; become critical consumers of various media; develop understanding of concepts, themes, and issues fundamental to society and disciplines, and foster interrelationship recognition among disciplines; develop inquiry skills at a level of complexity, abstractness, and depth appropriate to gifted learners; develop abstract, complex and in-depth critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making skills; and develop proficiency in communicating abstract and complex ideas about relationships and issues. Core English classes include English 6/7, English 7/8, English I, English II, English III, English 101 and English 102.

The social science department enables students to develop an intellectual and cultural context that serves as a framework for future intellectual, civic, and ethical growth, and participation in civil society. By the end of the history/social science experience, students will: View the social sciences through inquiry of thematic concepts; recognize the value of primary sources in creating an authentic understanding of human history; examine the importance of the patterns and processes that have shaped cultural and social history; understand the interactions between humans and their cultural, social, economic and political histories to create the world in which they live; develop a global awareness of the increasingly complex society and their role in the world; and conduct document-based analyses to answer a question, while drawing on several sources, including primary and secondary, and synthesizing findings in an organized and analytical essay. Civics is an integral component of all social science courses at PSA. Discussing current events, as well as simulating government bodies, encourages students to think like local and global citizens and models how individuals can have an impact on their society. Core Social Science courses include Ancient History, Contemporary History, South Carolina History, Human Geography, United States History, Government, and Economics.

Science is collaborative, cooperative scientific inquiry. Scientific inquiry is the process of asking questions about the natural world and understanding how to answer these questions using evidence and research. At the core is the analysis of questions and knowing how different questions require different methods to answer. Inquiry fosters collaborative learning, research collection, scientific tool use, and inference development. By the end of the PSA science sequence, students will: Understand the value of collaboration in the sciences; use scientific tools accurately during science investigations; use the controlled scientific investigation and the technological design process to conduct a scientific investigation; recognize common science misconceptions; read above grade level science texts and write purposefully for scientific disciplines; demonstrate the habits of mind and communication skills of scientists; use mathematical and analytical skills to deepen their knowledge of the scientific process; and understand the impact of science in our society and the different perspectives of scientific methodologies. Core Science courses include Science

6, Science 7, Science 8, Biology, Chemistry, and Forensics.

PSA provides a unique experience to students by offering authentic research as a core curriculum area. Authentic Research prepares students to follow their interests and inquiries toward a logical conclusion leveraging an interdisciplinary approach across courses. An integration of courses will provide the background and content necessary to make the research relevant. The four-year experience develops the skills of inquiry, investigation, critical thinking, and communication that will support academic and professional pursuits, and developing expertise. By the end of the Authentic Research program students will: Demonstrate skills and habits of researchers in their chosen research areas; design, execute, and present original research or creative work in their area of interest; and develop an understanding of the resources (personal, institutional, technological) that support meaningful research.

The senior year provides a unique experience and opportunity for students to apply what they have learned throughout their time at PSA to participate in a Senior capstone as well as dual enrollment courses. All seniors are enrolled in dual enrollment courses through either Trident Technical College or College of Charleston. There are several reasons for the incorporation of dual enrollment courses during the Senior year at Palmetto Scholars Academy. The dual enrollment program offers our high-performing students with an affordable way to begin taking foundational college courses that are simultaneously earning them high school and college credit. Taking dual enrollment courses during the senior year of high school may also decrease the length of time it takes to earn a postsecondary degree in addition to helping students adjust to the academic expectations and social arena of postsecondary education. Immersing PSA seniors into a college environment also has a positive social and emotional impact on the transition from high school senior to college freshman.

As part of the authentic research experience, the Senior Capstone is an individualized culminating experience for students completed during their final year of high school. The Senior Capstone is similar to a college thesis and requires students to select a topic, conduct research, collect findings and results, create a final product, give an oral defense to faculty and experts, and present their work in a culminating showcase. The PSA Senior Capstone requires students to utilize the skills they have acquired throughout their high school experience at PSA in thinking critically and solving problems in areas for which they have an interest, passion, or emerging expertise. Students gain skills in communication, collaboration, problem solving, research, time management, and media literacy. These are all essential 21st century skills that will help prepare students for college and careers.

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Middle and high school students at Palmetto Scholars Academy (PSA) have an array of elective course offerings from which to choose in the areas of fine arts, physical education, and technology. Students in grade six may choose one elective to take daily; they can enroll in art, band, or chorus all year or choose physical education/health, drama, or computer as semester long electives. Students in grades seven through twelve may choose two electives to take each day. Foreign language is also a component of the curriculum for each student at PSA. Sixth and seventh graders take Latin all year. In eighth grade, students choose between Spanish and French. They study their chosen language through tenth grade and can choose to continue with a fourth year of study their junior year.

Physical education at PSA aims to provide students with the opportunity to experience a wide range of activities to enhance their active lifestyle. The class is a safe environment that will encourage students to develop skills necessary to participate confidently in various fitness activities. Health is a course that is designed to enhance the student's awareness of his/her own physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being. The SC State Department has set health standards for all SC students to become more health literate.

The emphasis of our technology program is to develop computer skills that are important for academic success. Units of study include office applications, keyboarding, Internet skills, research skills, and computer ethics. Students are exposed to web design, computer science principles, and social media. Technology is all around us and becoming comfortable in that environment is important to success in the real world. All of our middle and high school students participate in physical education, health, and

technology electives at some point in their coursework at PSA.

The arts program at PSA is derived from three disciplines, which can be identified as visual arts, drama, and music. There is a collective emphasis on maintaining high standards of curricular development and a dedicated focus on instruction that emphasizes fine arts. Based on contemporary data, students who participate in the arts show greater success in other areas of their academic growth. While this is worth mentioning, a strong arts education should be valued in and of itself as part of the pivotal role that it plays in the development of the whole child. As an essential part of a gifted curriculum, the arts allow students with higher-level cognitive ability to be challenged. Simultaneously students apply more complex reasoning skills such as interpreting, synthesizing, analyzing, problem solving, and creating in more abundant ways. In all cases, students have opportunities to pursue a more dedicated study in the arts after school with private instruction and clubs. Over half of PSA's students participate in daily fine arts elective classes.

At Palmetto Scholars Academy, students begin their foreign language study in the sixth grade with an introduction to Latin and continue their study of the language through seventh grade. Since mastering a classical language presents different challenges from learning a spoken language, students practice the language through, repetition, written composition, and listening exercises. These techniques, combined with a modern multimedia approach to learning grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, provide students with a strong foundation for learning Latin.

Once students enter 8th grade, they have the choice to select courses in Spanish or French. The goal is provide opportunities for students to think critically, communicate effectively, and expand their understanding of and appreciation for other cultures. Since students are academically gifted, flexibility is built into the program. Each course has objectives to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, although emphasis may be different from course to course. It is the World Language Department's goal to immerse students into the target language during class time and to offer them a full-language experience. As each level increases in depth, students are asked to make personal and relevant connections with the target language, to themselves, and the real world. Paired and small group activities are essential in the language classrooms to allow students to practice real-life scenarios (restaurant, airport, etc.), and they are encouraged to go beyond the classroom and school setting. Combining visual, auditory, and cultural input allows for the simultaneous practice of the four essential skills.

### **3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:**

PSA exists to meet the distinct needs of gifted learners, and teachers make every effort in their instructional practices and assessments to meet those needs. This begins with the broad expectations that both instruction and assessment will integrate higher levels of thinking, be student-centered, and be differentiated to meet the needs of PSA's diverse gifted population.

Teachers are urged to be facilitators in the classroom and challenge students to truly think at a deep level. Utilizing Depth of Knowledge, students are challenged to think strategically and utilize extended thinking. Both instruction and assessment motivate students to go beyond recalling information and apply the skills and concepts they learn. Inquiry and problem solving are key elements to this curricular equation. Teachers at PSA do not teach to a test, yet PSA continues to retain some of the highest test scores in the state. Each core curriculum department utilizes strategies and approaches in their instruction and assessment to meet the needs of the students and reach instructional goals.

In English, teachers employ inquiry based instruction based on reading via discussion, written responses, debates, and research papers. Assessments include reading quizzes, papers, reading responses, individual and group projects, discussion, debate, and peer review. Differentiated instructional strategies include options in paper topics, group presentations and assignments, multiple forms of instruction, and individualized paper and draft responses from instructors and peers. Seniors can choose a Literary Analysis as their capstone project.

In math, instructional techniques include discovery-based activities, real world applications, and limited direct instruction. Assessments incorporate quizzes, tests, projects, and some written assignments.

Differentiated instructional strategies include a variety of lesson structures, a mixture of individual, small group, and whole class work, and options in project presentations.

Science teachers use inquiry based instruction, labs and activities, and limited direct instruction. Assessments include labs and activities, projects, quizzes, and tests. Differentiated instructional strategies include varying levels of projects offered, multiple forms of instruction, and group work based on level of understanding of the topic. Students who show a passion in either math or science can choose Mission Design as their capstone project, which is a partnership project between PSA and the University of Alabama at Huntsville.

In the Social Science classes, teachers utilize inquiry based learning with a focus on debate, discussion, research, interactive, and some direct instruction. Assessments include quizzes, tests, projects, debates, Socratic Seminars, and research papers. Differentiated instruction includes multiple forms of instruction, variations in grouping, leveled projects, and opportunities for independent and accelerated inquiry based study. Seniors with emerging expertise in the Social Sciences may choose action research or National History Day as their capstone project.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### **1. School Climate/Culture:**

Palmetto Scholars Academy (PSA) engages and motivates students by placing instructional time as the highest priority. During the regular school day, the goal of PSA's administration is to allow teachers and students to benefit from instructional time with little to no non-instructional interruptions. Placing such a high priority on instructional time also helps teachers feel valued and supported.

Non-instructional time before school and on LEAP (Learning Enhancement and Achievement Program) Days is utilized in order to support student academics, social needs, and emotional growth. Advisory periods take place before school daily for fifteen minutes as well as forty-five minutes each LEAP day, which takes place every other Friday. Each student is part of one of seven Houses and is assigned an advisor from the House. Their advisor, as well as their House, stays the same throughout their time at PSA. Advisories are multi-grade level. Students are supported and nurtured not only by their advisors, but also by the other students within their advisories and their Houses. Houses can gain points for both individual as well as team achievements, which encourages students to work together in addition to celebrate individual accomplishments.

Teachers' and students' interests and passions are also supported through LEAP Days. The goal is to increase the positive environment of the school by showing teachers and students that their passions and interests are supported and important. Teachers and students are able to offer sessions in their areas of expertise. An English teacher, for example, who is a musician offers a session to teach students how to play stringed instruments. A math teacher who is also an aspiring artist offers a pastel painting session. Two science teachers who garden in their spare time offer sessions on sustainable living and container gardening. Students also offer sessions to other students in areas such as strings, basketball, and chess.

Through maximizing instructional time, implementing the House system, and offering LEAP Day every other Friday, PSA has been successful at building strong relationships. PSA teachers feel relationships has been the key component of student success. Students are able to build strong relationships not only with their instructional teachers, but also with their advisors and the teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, community members, and fellow students who are part of their advisories, Houses, and LEAP Day sessions. This has allowed students to form a diverse support system and form strong relationships that are vital to student accountability and success.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

Parents and members of the community founded Palmetto Scholars Academy (PSA). From its inception, parent and community involvement has been a vital component of PSA's success. Whether through serving on the board, the Parent Community Association, or volunteerism, parent and community involvement has played a large role in PSA's continued success.

PSA's Board of Directors is comprised of both parents and members of the community. Although the Board meets only once a month, members work tirelessly daily to ensure continued support of the school. Members of the Board worked to keep the school open the first year of operation when financial issues arose. The Board Chair's mother even put a second mortgage on her house so that teachers could get paid. It was also through the tireless efforts of Board members that PSA was able to secure a piece of land on Joint Base Charleston for its new location. Board members have worked to get various grants for the school in addition to chairing the school's various committees, including finance, budget, academic excellence, fundraising, and marketing.

The Parent Community Association (PCA) at PSA has worked vigorously to build community and fundraise for the school. As a charter school, PSA gets less funding per pupil than other local schools. The PCA has been able to contribute monetarily to both classroom and extracurricular needs. The PCA fundraises in various forms, such as selling gift cards and school spirit gear, selling popcorn, holding

raffles, and planning and implementing an annual auction. Through fundraisers, they have been able to support teacher needs in the classroom and provide assistance to extracurricular activities such as field trips, and help fund special programs such as Robotics, Mission Design, Odyssey of the Mind, and National History Day. PCA also plans community-building events such as ice cream socials and game nights.

PSA would not operate effectively if it were not for the day-to-day assistance and volunteerism of parents. From the very first day that PSA was open, parents were helping to serve lunches. For the first six years of operation, without a kitchen staff, parent volunteers served lunches daily. Parents regularly assist in cleaning and beautifying the school. One parent comes in frequently to help organize the lost and found, and parents often volunteer to assist in the front office area. Parent volunteers also teach bi-weekly LEAP Day sessions in the areas of karate, bee-keeping, cartooning with ink, mock trial, and ham radio. Special programs such as Robotics, Cyber Defense and Odyssey of the Mind are also coached and sponsored by parent volunteers. Parent coaches also lead the school's middle school basketball program, middle school soccer program, volleyball team, and soccer teams.

PSA has also enjoyed a positive relationship when working with the community. Community members have been active in participating in serving as judges in the school's science fair. Community members also served as speakers for the school's career day. Juniors and Seniors who are moving through the research and capstone components of the curriculum have also been able to work with mentors and organizations throughout the community.

### **3. Professional Development:**

At Palmetto Scholars Academy, we approach professional development in two ways, a whole group focus on teaching gifted learners and individualized professional growth plans for each staff member. In regards to the whole group focus, we begin our year with several days of training with the primary goal to increase the knowledge and skill level of all our teachers in terms of understanding the gifted learner and intentional classroom strategies to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs. We bring in local and national leaders in GT to provide workshops as well as utilize the expertise in our own staff. At many of our faculty meetings, a department will share their best practices.

In addition, we ask the teachers to develop an individualized professional growth that focuses on one of three things: extending their profound knowledge on their subject, increasing their skill level in the craft of teaching, or exploring options for increasing positive and effective relationships with students and staff. Our teachers have chosen multiple ways to do this: action research, professional courses, attendance of state and national conferences, departmental meetings to foster collaboration and cross discipline curricular development, and observations of other teachers. In the same way we aspire to provide differentiated content for our students, we are giving our staff the same option.

### **4. School Leadership:**

The best way to describe the leadership at Palmetto Scholars Academy is relational. Strong personal relationships across the student body, the staff, the parents, and the community allow PSA to be student-centered in our decision making and in maintaining a warm and supportive educational environment. The culture and climate allow for more of an autonomous, intrinsic approach to policies and procedures that thrive on personal responsibility and trust.

Our administrative structure presently includes a principal, an assistant principal, two school counselors, and three administrative assistants. Each of these provide critical elements in establishing the leadership presence in the building. As a charter school, PSA is responsible for not only the typical school responsibilities but must also incorporate most of the roles of a superintendent and central office. As such, the actual roles of each of the administrative staff is more expansive than most regular school settings. For instance, our bookkeeper is also our nurse. One of the school counselors is the athletic director. More significantly, the principal and assistant principal complement each other substantially. Where the principal focuses extensively on the external relationships of the school such as the board, the community,

and the state charter district, the assistant principal handles much of the internal workings such as discipline, curriculum and schedule development, and student activities. Together, they work in coaching and evaluating staff as well as handling the normal daily interactions. Our school counselors must handle both middle school and high school needs such as developing individual graduation plans, college counseling, crisis management, and other events that enhance the emotional and social dynamics of our school.

Ultimately, PSA strives to create a team environment to provide a consistent emphasis on maintaining the mission of meeting the holistic needs of gifted learners. They seek to empower teachers to have ownership of not only their classroom but their own professional growth. At faculty meetings and professional development opportunities, teachers are encouraged to share their thoughts and expertise to help build a common purpose in what PSA does. Likewise, student leadership is valued and promoted. The middle school and high school house councils are integral parts of the daily functions of the school.

Through these meaningful relationships, PSA is able to live out our motto: Empowering through authentic engagement. While our test scores are strong, it is not our focus. PSA wants to equip the students to be contributing global citizens.

## **Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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Our focus at PSA is on authentic engagement and meaningful relationships. In regards to authentic engagement, our students are encouraged to question and explore in their classrooms. While there is a need for a foundation of knowledge and comprehension of core content, our emphasis is on critical and creative thinking as well as strong communication skills. We want our students to take ownership of their learning through research and problem-based projects. Our teacher utilize a diverse set of strategies to address the multiple intelligences and learning styles of our students. For instance, on any given day, a class may be doing a Socratic seminar, a mock trial, student-led presentations, independent research, guest speakers, field trips, or labs. By doing this, we have changed the culture from test-centric to learning centered.

Just as important is our focus on relationships. We make an intentional choice to address the social and emotional needs of our students. Through our house system, Leap Day, and daily interactions we infuse fun into our culture. Our staff make a conscious effort to know every student in the building so that every child knows they are valued and supported. Our students also take direct interest in helping their peers feel connected and involved. Through our house system, we provide the opportunity for all grades to interact and build relationships. Our older students become role models and mentors for the younger ones, leading to a perpetuation of our school philosophy and climate.

With the dual emphasis on authentic engagement and meaningful relationships, PSA creates an environment that strives to meet the fundamental needs of students. Using the language of Maslow's theory, we are keenly aware that we must address the physiological, security, and relational needs before we can truly be successful with achievement. Our students are evidence that this approach is working.