

# RISING STARS

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## Hard work and support are the pillars of this student's educational triumph

**W**hen Hannah Metts's school situation was doing her no favors, it was decided a change of scene might be beneficial. Hannah moved within her state of Georgia to Coffee County, GA, to live with her grandparents. In her previous district, Hannah had fallen two years behind, having been held back her fifth- and sixth-grade years. By her own admission, Hannah had been hanging out with the wrong crowd, and she didn't always have the best attitude toward school or her teachers.

Now an overage middle school student in Coffee County, Hannah was ready to try a different approach. She very much wanted to get back on track and graduate on time. But two years was a lot of time to make up. As it turned out, the district had a pathway and resources that were just what Hannah needed.

Hannah was nervous when she was invited to participate in the Star Academy. It was explained to her that the program emphasized self-directed learning and that if she stayed focused, the Star Academy's resources could help her cover eighth and ninth grade in the space of

one year. This would put her one year closer to her objective. But the environment and learning method were new to her.

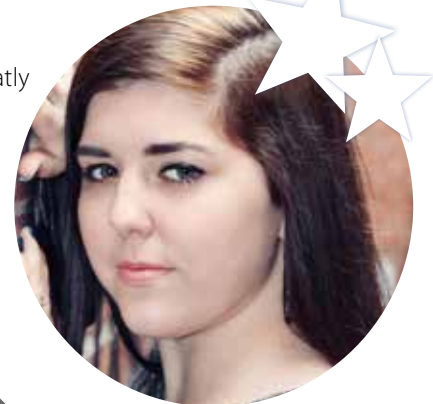
It wasn't long before Hannah saw the virtues of the program.

"It was exciting because I was learning new things. I was also learning how to use the computer more. I was able to do my own work on my own at multiple times of the day."

### Bonds of support

Hannah also benefited greatly from the support network of teachers and officials that cared about her and wanted her to succeed.

Principal Scott Gillis explained, "There were several times when she said, 'I can't do this.' But



*Graduate Hannah Metts recovered not one but two years thanks to a strong support network. She is pictured here with Wiregrass Star Academy case manager Ann Horner.*




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## A path forward

After first falling behind on her educational journey, Hannah Metts made an amazing turnaround through hard work, supportive teachers, and the help of her Star Academy program. But recovering two years and going on to graduate with her age peers wasn't the only great stride Hannah made for her future. During her years in high school, she and several other students took advantage of the opportunity to earn college credits through a program at Wiregrass Regional College and Career Academy.

Hannah took classes that earned her credits toward a degree for her planned career in criminal justice. Her area of special interest is forensic psychology. She said that she enjoys learning about why people think and act as they do. Case Manager Ann Horner

remembered that Hannah expressed an interest in this career as long ago as her time in the Star Academy: "When we would have goal-focused conversations, she was always interested in criminal justice. The investigation side of it is what intrigued her."

Through the Wiregrass Regional College and Career Academy, the Coffee County school district is investing extra effort in preparing students for life after high school. And as of this year, the Star Academy program is located on the campus of the Wiregrass Regional College and Career Academy, connecting young students more closely to the options for college credit that await them in high school. Read more about this in "New opportunities bring renewed attitude" in this issue. 



## Hard work and support are the pillars of this student's educational triumph (continued from page 1)

she had the support of her teachers and her mentors." These bonds of support are crucial. "When students are facing challenges, they've got to know the reason we're here is genuine."

Case Manager Ann Horner, one such mentor for Hannah, also underscored the importance of cultivating good relationships among students and school officials. She pointed to the relatively small setting of the Star Academy and of the high school in which the school within a school is embedded. "You develop a better relationship with them. The kids feel they can come to you and ask you for things that maybe they wouldn't in a bigger setting."

These bonds of trust enabled Hannah's teachers to reach her. Under their caring influence, she learned some valuable life lessons.

"Honestly, they didn't just teach me about school and education," said Hannah. "They taught me how to speak to people. . . . I had been disrespecting anybody and everybody. And they taught me that is not right and that you can talk to somebody and get the point through."

When asked to name one teacher or official who had a particularly strong effect on her, she listed five off the top of her head and then laughed, saying, "I just love all of them!"

## Success follows success

Hannah buckled down and graduated from the Star Academy, recovering one year and putting her halfway to her goal of graduating on time. Though she was still one year behind, her time in the Academy had given her valuable skills for success and a new sense of determination.

To cut to the chase, she did it. Hannah completed the three remaining years of high school in two years' time, proving that in some cases, lightning does strike twice.

"I just really wanted to graduate with my class and prove to everybody I wasn't a failure. . . . The teachers I connected with showed me the light at the end of the tunnel." 🚀

# New opportunities bring renewed attitude



**Suny McKaughan**

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Summer 2016 was a season of change for the Wiregrass Regional College and Career Academy (WRCCA) Star Academy (Rising Stars Academy) in Douglas, Georgia. The Star Academy, which is in its fourth year of operation in Douglas, opened its doors for classes on August 2 at a brand-new state-of-the-art building where a new attitude toward learning is prevalent.

The Wiregrass Regional College and Career Academy (originally known as the Coffee County Career Academy) opened in 2013 as part of Coffee County School System's goal to prepare high school graduates for "college, career, and life itself." A partnership with Wiregrass Technical College was forged that same year, and planning began for the amazing, innovative facility the Star Academy now calls home.

Star Academy students, or associates, as they are referred to at the Career Academy, still participate in their nontraditional, hands-on Star Academy coursework for their combined eighth- and ninth-grade year, but they now have the opportunity following their year in Star Academy to begin taking dual enrollment or technical courses either virtually or on the WRCCA campus. Students are eligible to earn an associate's degree, at no cost to their families, as they complete their high school education.



*The new Wiregrass Regional College and Career Academy facility helps put students one step closer to preparedness for life after high school.*

This is an incredible opportunity to ready Star students for success whether they plan to go directly into the workforce or pursue additional education. This plan supports the idea that our students have many different paths to becoming contributing members of the community.

Scott Gillis, principal of WRCCA, stated "The positive impacts on our Rising Star Academy students related to the new facility are very obvious. Students are working harder to be successful because they see firsthand the opportunities available by attending a high school on a college campus. The impetus for their increased effort is knowing they will have access to college credit with applicable skills and knowledge to prepare them for college, career, and life."

Way to go, Coffee County, for providing such an incredible opportunity to the Star students in your district! 🚀

## FEATURED SCHOOL:

# Lewiston Star Academy at Lewiston Public Schools

After extensive classroom renovations, the Lewiston Star Academy opened its doors to welcome students to their new location in the armory building across the parking lot from Lewiston Middle School in Maine. Students had already spent the preceding days away from the school campus working on team-building exercises that were designed to help students get to know each other as teachers and staff were introduced to the new program curriculum components. In addition to the four core teachers, this program also has a dedicated full-time dean as well as a full-time special education teacher and a part-time guidance counselor. The program is unique in the sense that students enjoy their core classes in the intimate setting of the Armory building while still having the opportunity to experience a little bit of high school as they eat lunch and experience their electives a short bus ride away at the local high school. After working with teachers and staff on Managing Student Behavior, Mike Robinson from Metis Leadership Group declared: "This Star Academy has the potential to be an exemplar!"



"I love working with this group of students! Each time I have visited the classrooms, I have seen students engaged and interested in the tasks they were working on."

– Kathy County, guidance counselor



**Start date:** August 31, 2016

**Location:** Lewiston, ME

**Program capacity:** 80

**Number of students enrolled:** 45

### Courses:

- » Grade 8 math
- » Algebra
- » Grade 8 physical science
- » Grade 9 Earth science
- » Grade 8 English
- » Grade 9 English
- » Grade 9 world history



"Great work with Pitsco Science Stage 1 (the scientific method). My students were very engaged."

– Laura Haines, science teacher



### Special features or offerings:

The plan is for students in the social studies classroom to study civics and government during the first semester, in which they closely follow the presidential election. The teacher is hopeful that students will get to participate in the actual voting process because the building where the program is housed is also a polling place.

## Nominate up to two students for scholarships

*Two \$500 awards will go to top Star Academy students; nominations due by March 17, 2017*

You've fought hard for your students. You've supported, guided, and motivated them. But at the end of the day, their success comes down to their personal decision to seize the opportunity put before them. Pitsco Education is going to honor two students who have committed themselves to turning their academic story around.

In April 2017, we will award two \$500 Pitsco Education Star Academy Scholarships to students who truly exemplify the ideals of Star Academy. Here are the details:


- **Scholarships:** Two \$500 scholarships will be awarded.
- **Eligibility:** Any student who is on track to complete the Star Academy program this academic year is eligible.
- **Nominations:** Each Star Academy site may nominate up to two students. Nomination forms will be sent to site administrators/officials in February 2017. The nominator must be either the site administrator or a teacher/official within the program. The nominator must detail the student's background and academic achievements and explain why the student deserves to win.
- **When:** The completed nomination form must be submitted via email by March 17, 2017. Winners will

be notified by April 14, 2017.

- **Presentation:** If desired by school officials, a Star Academy representative will present a certificate for the scholarship at a designated end-of-year event at the school.

The nonrenewable scholarship may be used at the college or postsecondary learning institution of the winning student's choosing and will be issued after the student graduates high school and enrolls in a college/postsecondary institution.

So, what are we looking for in top Star Academy students? To give you an idea, here is a comment from the nominator for one of the 2016 winners, Cora Baughman of Gordon Odyssey Academy, Winnsboro, NC: "She reaches and exceeds her goals and has a strong desire to give back to the world as she strives to become a US Navy Seal. Cora will be a first-generation college student majoring in a science field."

The triumphs of young people deserve to be celebrated and rewarded. Please consider nominating two students at your academy and join us in helping to pave their path to a bright future. If you have any questions about the scholarships, contact Communications Manager Tom Farmer at [tfarmer@pitsco.com](mailto:tfarmer@pitsco.com). 

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