



## **“Are You Willing to Do the Work to Be Great?”**

*Nearly 300 high school students explore purpose, preparation and college opportunities during the GEAR UP Achieve Region 8 Student Summit at Wallace Community College Selma.*

Greatness was not presented as a title, talent or distant dream inside the Earl Goodwin Theatre. It was presented as a choice—and a challenge.

“Are you willing to do the work to be great?”

That question guided nearly 300 high school students as they gathered at Wallace Community College Selma on Monday, September 14, for the GEAR UP Achieve Region 8 Student Summit, “Lighting the Way: From Vision to Victory.”

Hosted in partnership with GEAR UP Achieve, WCCS and Cool Speak, the summit gave students an opportunity to think seriously about their futures while exploring college programs, financial aid, scholarships, athletics and dual-enrollment opportunities available at Wallace.



*Nationally recognized keynote speaker Chris Collins challenges nearly 300 high school students to consider what it takes to achieve greatness during the GEAR UP Achieve Region 8 Student Summit at Wallace Community College Selma.*

## **Defining Greatness**

During his keynote presentation, nationally recognized speaker Chris Collins encouraged students to look beyond the idea of success and consider the work, discipline and purpose required to achieve it.

Rather than defining greatness for the students, Collins invited them to raise their hands and share what the word meant to them. Students who accepted the challenge received \$10 for participating, creating an energetic exchange that allowed their voices to guide the conversation.

One student described greatness as “being the best of the best” and becoming a miracle that could bring something meaningful back to her community.

Another said greatness meant “living life with a purpose or having a purpose in what you do.”

Other students connected greatness to believing in themselves, becoming better versions of who they already are and striving for success in every area of their lives.



*Students share their personal definitions of greatness after Collins invited them to speak about purpose, success and the futures they hope to create.*

Collins pushed the conversation further by asking students to move beyond broad goals and identify the daily actions required to reach them.

One student who hopes to excel in both school and basketball said his routine includes attending practice, listening to his coach and seeking advice from his teammates.

The exchange reinforced one of the summit's central messages: greatness requires more than ambition. It requires clarity, growth and consistent action.



*High school students participate in an interactive conversation about the habits, decisions and daily work required to turn their goals into success.*

### **From Vision to Action**

Following the keynote presentation, students rotated through a series of breakout sessions designed to turn inspiration into practical preparation.

WCCS representatives provided information about the admissions process, financial aid, scholarships, athletics and dual enrollment. Students also participated in a QuantHub activity, completed a GEAR UP Achieve session and toured the Selma campus with WCCS employees and Patriot Ambassadors.

The rotations allowed students to ask questions, explore academic and career pathways and see firsthand what their college experience could look like at Wallace.



*WCCS representatives introduce visiting students to admissions, financial aid, scholarships, athletics and dual-enrollment opportunities available at Wallace Community College Selma.*

The summit concluded with lunch in the James Mitchell Center and a closing session led by GEAR UP Achieve representative Shannon Luster.



Visiting high school students explore the WCCS Selma campus during one of four breakout rotations held throughout the Region 8 Student Summit.

### **A Wallace Story in Progress**

For WCCS Patriot Ambassador Michelle Pinkard, the message was personal.

Pinkard said Collins connected with students by speaking honestly about his life, background and the challenges he faced. She believes that authenticity helped his message reach students in a way they could understand.

“He resonated with a lot of students using his personal life, his personal background and his personal inspirations that he faced and went through to really touch the students,” Pinkard said.

She hopes students will carry his message beyond the summit and use it when making decisions about their own futures.

“I think that the students will really take what he said and use it in their life to mature, choose the right path in their life and not choose something that’s easy and go the wrong route,” Pinkard said.

Pinkard is also building a story of her own at Wallace. She is currently pursuing an associate degree in science and plans to continue into the college's nursing program before joining the United States Navy, following a path inspired by her military family background.

Her journey reflects the message students heard throughout the day: a vision becomes a victory only when someone is willing to take the first step and continue doing the work.





Students, WCCS representatives and GEAR UP Achieve partners come together for a day centered on clarity, growth, action and preparing young people for the opportunities ahead.

For the students who entered the Earl Goodwin Theatre with different dreams, backgrounds and definitions of success, the summit offered more than a motivational message. It gave them space to imagine what comes next—and a college campus where they could begin working toward it.

At Wallace Community College Selma, greatness begins with a decision, the future begins with a vision and **Your Story Starts Here.**