

JULY 2021

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



SC Governor's School
for Agriculture
AT JOHN DE LA HOWE

FROM THE PRESIDENT

TIMOTHY KEOWN

Dear Aggie Family,

These "old dog days of summer" have been in full effect this July here on campus! Even in the sweltering heat, we've had a tremendous growing season in our produce garden, corn variety test plot, and with our livestock herd. Some parts of the state have been dry, but we are fortunate to have had plenty of rain to keep everything green and growing around here.

Our campus has been overrun with campers almost every weekday in July. The campers and their chaperones were pleased with their experience here. We hosted the Aggie Adventure Camp for rising 8th and 9th graders. Each of these students excitedly proclaimed our school as their high school destination. We also had the honor to host the Farm Bureau Youth Leadership Conference. I would like to thank **SC Farm Bureau President Harry Ott**, and his talented team for choosing us to host your rising leaders. A special thank you to **Stephanie Sox**, **Elizabeth Wood**, and the **Farm Bureau Women's Committee** for making this camp possible. **Kinsley Miller**, the Director of our Education Center, did a fabulous job planning our summer camping events. Stay tuned for more Education Center opportunities this Fall!

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE

SC FFA LEADERSHIP CAMP

Eight students along with their Chapter Advisors attended FFA Leadership Camp in North Myrtle Beach, SC this month! **Congratulations** to our Aggies on their award winnings and a great time spent.



HEIDI TRULL OF GRITS AND GROCERIES

Thank you to Heidi Trull of Grits and Groceries for visiting our campus! Heidi has developed her southern dishes through years of training and experimentation and has championed farm-to-table food for decades. Her food has received rave reviews in *Gourmet* and *Southern Living* and she was featured on CBS Sunday Morning.



We look forward to hosting cooking workshops with Heidi at our school next year through the Education Center. Be sure to stay tuned!

FROM THE PRESIDENT

TIMOTHY KEOWN

Renovations to our residential halls and school building have continued over the summer. We are opening three new residential halls this fall – Savannah, McCormick, and Abbeville. In addition, we are in the early planning phase of the total renovation of de la Howe Hall (the large building in the center of campus). We hope to have this project underway by the early winter months of this upcoming semester. If the construction stays on schedule, students may be in those classrooms by August of 2023.

As some of you may have read, the procurement methods of the campus renovations were scrutinized by former employees who then expressed their concerns to the Post and Courier. In an effort of transparency, I invited the **State Inspector General, Brian Lamkin**, to come to our campus and investigate the claims. He and his team conducted a thorough investigation and released his report to me last week. He made several recommendations for our staff and conducted a procurement workshop. The report is in this newsletter – please take a moment to read it. Please note his recommendations have already been implemented. Our staff and I are dedicated to learning the extensive procurement guidelines of the state. This campus needs much more renovations to be complete. Many of the buildings have not been updated since the 1960s or 1970s. It is no secret that this project would be expensive on the front end, but the rewards will pay back dividends in the decades to come. Our Aggies are the future of agribusiness in South Carolina and beyond – I truly believe that! If anyone has questions about this report, please don't hesitate to email me at Timothy.Keown@delahowe.sc.gov or call my office at (864)391-0470.

In closing, our Aggies move in on August 14th. Our staff and I are overly excited to see our returning students and our new Aggies! We have just a few student spaces available for the Fall, so send them our way if you know of a potential student. If you thought last year was exciting, wait until you see our schedule of events for this rising year! In October especially, we have an "AGtivity upon AGtivity." Please visit us anytime; we love showing off our campus and especially our exceptional students.

GO AGGIES!



NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION

ADMISSIONS & RECRUITMENT

Thank you to all who attend the 2021-2022 Orientation for the SC Governor's School for Agriculture. We are excited to welcome our second class of Aggies to our campus! Our incoming Aggies were greeted by faculty and staff and spent the entire day learning about what our school has to offer this year. Aggies attended sessions regarding academic success, agricultural classes & animal policies, residential life, and student activities. Our Student Ambassadors guided families through campus and spoke one-on-one with families about their experience at JDLH. It was an active afternoon ensuring our Aggies were prepared for Move-In Weekend in August!

As the 2020-2021 recruiting season comes to a close, it was good to take some time to reflect on the last year. With the many variables facing families, parents and their students had some complex decisions to make this school year. We felt fortunate to be able to offer them this new opportunity and experience and be selected to educate the 2021-2022 incoming class.



Over the past year, every time we spoke with a family, they wanted to know **what makes this school different**. Without hesitation, it's the environment. It's the overwhelming support amongst faculty, staff, and students.

During Orientation, our Custodian, **Mr. Galloway**, mentioned that we are here for each other regarding making the day a success for our new Aggies. **"We're here for each other"** is not just a phrase at the SC Governor's School for Agriculture. It is threaded through our campus mission but also our agricultural mission.

If anyone has ever touched agriculture, they know the bond and commitment that threads the agricultural community is a strong one. We are committed to strengthening the networks of education and agriculture through the School and our students. That is what makes our school different. We are here for each other. We are here for our students. We are here for our community.

Welcome to the Aggie Family!





The Education Center

AT JOHN DE LA HOWE

KINSLEY MILLER

THE AGGIE ADVENTURE

The Education Center wrapped its summer programs in July with The Aggie Adventure. This 4-day, 3-night summer camp was designed for rising 8th and 9th-grade students with an interest in all things agriculture. These campers were immersed in many aspects of agriculture: equine, animal science, forestry, shooting sports, welding, tractors and equipment, and more. We want to thank our 10 campers for spending the week with our students and staff and seeing what it's like to be an Aggie at the South Carolina Governor's School for Agriculture!





The Education Center
AT JOHN DE LA HOWE



SC FARM BUREAU YOUTH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE



The SC Farm Bureau held their 2021 SCFB Youth Leadership Conference on July 25-29! 35 rising juniors and seniors from across SC joined us for four days on our campus. The conference allowed students to gain valuable leadership skills and a better understanding of South Carolina agriculture. We had four of our students who were selected to participate in this conference and represent their counties: **Colette Alston, Elsa DeRosa, Trey Haddon, and Allyson Wright**. Our agricultural education teachers and staff had a great time assisting with this event by hosting various workshops and activities. Our Principal, **Gregory Thompson**, was even the keynote speaker!

A special congratulations to **Elsa DeRosa** who was nominated to return as a group leader next year and "Most Likely to Succeed"! Congratulations to **Trey Haddon** who received the "Most Likely to be a Farmer" superlative!



Be sure to check out the rest of the pictures from this week at <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmWgxJcc>.

UPCOMING CAMPUS EVENTS

MOVE-IN WEEKEND

AUGUST 14-15, 2021

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

AUGUST 16, 2021

SCHOOL PICTURE DAY

AUGUST 24, 2021



COMPLETE AND SUBMIT ALL OF YOUR ENROLLMENT DOCUMENTS!

All forms can be found on our website here:

<https://delahowe.sc.gov/admissions/enrollment-documents-2021>

Dear Student,
Your school photographs will be made at John De La Howe on the following date and time:



DATE: Aug 24th 2021

TIME: Underclassmen 3:00 – 3:30
Seniors 3:30 – 4:30

PLACE: Shiflet Building basement

Underclassmen: NO sitting fee required!

Underclassmen please dress your best for your photograph

Seniors: \$20.00 sitting fee at the time your photographs are made (correct change or credit card)

Seniors: A **TUX** for boys and a **DRAPE** for girls will be provided. Should you not feel comfortable in wearing our provided clothing for your yearbook photo, you may bring your own.

- Additional poses will be made with different backgrounds in your own casual clothing. Please dress your best!

Social distancing and sanitizing protocols will be followed.

School Picture Day

School photographs will be taken this day on campus for underclassmen, faculty/staff, and senior portraits.

For more information, visit:

<https://delahowe.sc.gov/our-community/student>

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



**SC Governor's School
for Agriculture**
AT JOHN DE LA HOWE



South Carolina Governor's School
for Agriculture at John de la Howe



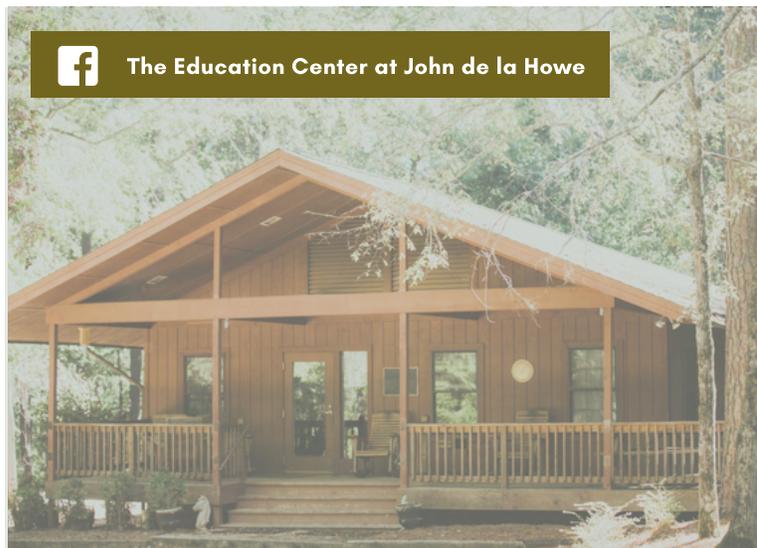
@JDLHSchool



@delahowe_



/john-de-la-howe



The Education Center at John de la Howe



@jdlh_admissions



South Carolina Governor's
School for Agriculture Library



Governor's School FFA & 4-H



@jdlh_ffa_4h



South Carolina's Governor's
School for Agriculture Field
Trial Team



State of South Carolina
Office of the Inspector General

SENT ELECTRONICALLY

July 19, 2021

OIG File No.: 2021-5234-PI

Timothy Keown, President
SC Governor's School for Agriculture
at John de la Howe
192 Gettys Road
McCormick, SC 29835

Re: Review of Procurement Services Practices and Procurement Training – SC Governor's School for Agriculture at John de la Howe (JDLH)

Dear President Keown:

The South Carolina Office of the State Inspector General (SIG) conducted a limited scope review of the procurement services practices of JDLH at your request following a series of newspaper articles in the *Post & Courier* and the *Index-Journal* regarding construction projects at the school since 2018.

The scope and objectives of the review were:

- Determine if JDLH staff adhered to JDLH procurement policies;
- Determine if JDLH staff violated the state's Consolidated Procurement Code (CPC); and
- Identify procurement training provided to JDLH staff.

Executive Summary

Background

In 2018, the SIG conducted a limited scope review of JDLH's procurement practices at the request of two state senators. At that time, the SIG identified numerous wasteful procurement practices by JDLH staff that unnecessarily exposed the school to risk of fraud and abuse. In addition, the SIG identified the staff's disregard for the procurement policies and procedures implemented by Sylvester Coleman, the recently appointed chief financial officer (CFO).

Chief among the wasteful practices identified was the staffing level of 53 employees for 25 students in a school that had its state certification rescinded by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE). During the course of that review, the interim president of JDLH resigned.

Subsequently, various JDLH board members either resigned or were not re-appointed to their positions.

In July 2018, Sharon Wall, a retired superintendent of education and former chair of the South Carolina Board of Education was appointed as JDLH's interim president with the mandate to correct the waste and mismanagement issues at the state agency/educational institution.

Based on her initial 90-day assessment and recommendation the school was temporarily closed and the students were dispersed back to the Departments of Juvenile Justice or Social Services, or absorbed in the students' home school districts. Wall implemented a reduction-in-force plan in coordination with the Division of State Human Resources with the goal of reopening the school within two years as an agricultural school consistent with its original intent and obtaining SCDE certification for the school.

In order to meet this challenge, a multi-million dollar, campus-wide renovation of buildings and housing was initiated in multiple phases. Simultaneously, a revised curriculum focused on agricultural education was developed and a student and faculty recruitment plan was implemented.

Over the course of two fiscal years (2019 and 2020), renovations were completed in student housing and temporary classrooms sufficient to handle the initial class of 38 students and reopen in August 2020 for the 2020-21 school year. In December 2020, Governor Henry McMaster signed legislation creating the SC Governor's School for Agriculture at John de la Howe. Current renovations in student housing, classrooms and other facilities at JDLH will support the 75 students slated to arrive on campus in August 2021 for the 2021-22 school year.

Procurement Services Review

The SIG interviewed JDLH leadership, educational staff, maintenance supervisors, and procurement services personnel to gain insight into the procurement issues set forth in the newspaper articles.

Initial renovations of student housing began with the Huguenot house performed by JDLH maintenance staff. Wall subsequently hired a Director of Facilities and Campus Projects who had experience as a general contractor to oversee renovations. Following his initial assessment of JDLH facilities and operations it was determined that outside contractors were needed in order for the JDLH maintenance staff to focus on the general maintenance and upkeep of the campus.

In addition to individual contractors overseen by the Director of Facilities for smaller scale renovation projects, the Director of Facilities engaged the state engineer's office to procure an outside general contractor to construct a new front entrance to the campus with security features and the installation of a new fire suppression system at the campus.

During the course of the fire suppression work, the general contractor tore up sidewalks that were also slated for repair. The state engineer's office notified the JDLH Director of Facilities the budget had remaining funds that could be utilized by the general contractor to replace the sidewalks. However, the estimate provided by the general contractor (\$79,919) was excessive for a change order based on the Director of Facilities' opinion. As a result, the Director of Facilities

utilized the JDLH procurement services office to issue a request for quotes to replace the sidewalks in two phases (demolition and installation).

Four contractors submitted quotes for the projects, with the two lowest quotes being equal in cost. The quotes were submitted to the JDLH procurement services office, which administered the opening of the bids and the awarding of the contract. As reported in the news articles the JDLH procurement services office awarded the contract to Faith Construction, whose owner was a business associate of Scott Mims, a JDLH maintenance supervisor, in an unrelated business venture. The JDLH procurement services office selected Faith Construction on the criterion that JDLH received the Faith Construction quotes first.

The two phases of the contract cost \$33,000 and \$37,000. Taken separately, the cost for each phase of the project was within JDLH's procurement authority (\$50,000); however, when combined as a single procurement, the \$70,000 total exceeded JDLH's authority. A procurement that exceeds an agency's procurement authority requires the Division of Procurement Services to handle the procurement process.

JDLH leadership advised the SIG the sidewalk renovations were conducted in two phases because the JDLH staff was undecided on which areas of the campus were to return to natural sod instead of being replaced with concrete. Regardless, the separation of the project that required two separate quotes gave the appearance of the intent to circumvent JDLH's limit on awarding a procurement for each phase by keeping the cost under its procurement authority of \$50,000.

Finding #1: South Carolina Code of Laws, §11-35-1520 (9) (e) states, *"In all other situations in which bids are tied...the tie must be resolved by the flip of a coin witnessed by the procurement officer. All responding vendors must be invited to attend."* The awarding of the contract to Faith Construction based on being the first vendor to submit the quote to JDLH failed to follow state procurement law.

Recommendation #1: JDLH procurement services should adhere to the Consolidated Procurement Code in the awarding of contracts that fall within its procurement authority.

Finding #2: Scott Mims, a JDLH maintenance supervisor, maintained a business association with Shannon Philpott, owner of Faith Construction, in an unrelated business venture, which he failed to disclose to JDLH leadership and the procurement services office. As a result, the JDLH procurement services office unknowingly awarded the contract to Faith Construction, thereby causing the appearance of a conflict of interest in a procurement matter between Mims' supervision of the sidewalk renovations contract awarded to Faith Construction even though Mims had no decision-making authority in the contract award.

Recommendation #2a: JDLH leadership should conduct a review of the agency's code of conduct with staff and ensure all staff affirm they have read and understand the agency's code of conduct.

Recommendation #2b: JDLH leadership should contact the State Ethics Commission and request ethics training for all staff.

Finding #3: The JDLH procurement services office's award of two separate procurements to Faith Construction appeared to circumvent JDLH's procurement authority of \$50,000.

Recommendation #3: The SIG should contact the Division of Procurement Services and request a procurement onsite audit of the JDLH procurement policies and practices.¹

Other Procurement Services Observations

The SIG conducted a sampled review of current JDLH procurement files to compare the process and procedures outlined in the JDLH procurement guidelines policy and the actual practice. The SIG identified the following concerns and made recommendations to address these issues with JDLH leadership and staff:

Requisition Approval Process

The final approval in the requisition process was the CFO instead of the JDLH president. The JDLH requisition process reviewed by the SIG was:

- a purchase requisition form is created and signed by the requestor who forwards the requisition for supervisory approval;
- the department head or first line supervisor approves the requisition and forwards to the JDLH president for approval;
- the JDLH president approves the requisition and forwards to the JDLH CFO for approval and procurement processing; and
- the JDLH CFO approves the requisition and initiates the procurement process.

This approval sequence affected the CFO's ability to independently identify procurement issues not in compliance with the CPC prior to the JDLH president's approval of the requisition. In addition, this approval process placed the CFO in the position of countermanding the approval made by the JDLH president who is the CFO's supervisor, and placed the agency at risk of non-compliance with state law (CPC) if the CFO allowed a non-conforming procurement to move forward. The CFO is the procurement authority for the agency and the person who interacts directly with the Division of Procurement Services on procurement matters.

Finding #4: The SIG confirmed with the Division of Procurement Services the agency head should be the last person in the approval process so that the CFO can work directly with the requester to ensure the requisition complies with the CPC and the agency head can rely upon the CFO's expertise in procurement matters.

Recommendation #4: The JDLH leadership should amend the procurement approval process to have the CFO as the second approver and the JDLH president as final approver in the requisition process.²

¹ The SIG requested this audit during the course of the SIG's review. The SIG notified the JDLH leadership and staff of the forthcoming audit during the SIG's training session on 6/16/21.

² The SIG discussed this observation with the JDLH president who made an immediate correction to the approval process to ensure the CFO reviewed all procurements prior to his approval.

Improper Handling of Vendor Quotes

The SIG identified procurements wherein the requester received quotes directly from potential vendors and then provided these as part of the requisition package for approval. This does not comply with the JDLH procurement policies.

JDLH procurement policies require that all vendor quotes for purchases be sent to a dedicated email address or physical address under the control of the JDLH procurement services office. This process is to ensure quotes are kept confidential until a selection is made. It also ensures the quotes are from a vendor who has registered with the state. JDLH is unable to process payments to vendors who are not registered state vendors.

In one example, an educational staff member submitted a quote for the purchase of certain agricultural materials from a regional vendor that had a familial relationship to the staff member. Even though the vendor was a statewide-approved vendor and had provided services to JDLH in the past, this presented the appearance of a conflict of interest for the staff member. Fortunately, both the CFO and the JDLH president recognized the issue and cancelled the requisition.³ The JDLH procurement services staff took control of procuring the agricultural materials for the school.

Finding #5: The SIG's review of JDLH procurements identified instances where JDLH staff failed to adhere to the JDLH procurement policies in obtaining vendor quotes.

Recommendation #5: JDLH leadership should provide training to all staff on the policies and procedures for procurements and requisitions.⁴

Procurement Training

Based on the SIG's review of JDLH's procurement services records, policies, and staff interviews, the SIG determined that new educational staff had not received direct training on the school's procurement process. While the procurement policies and a PowerPoint slide presentation were available to all JDLH staff for viewing and reference, the SIG determined the materials had not been updated since February 2020, which was five months prior to the hiring of new educational staff and six months prior to the re-opening of the school after a two-year hiatus. On 6/16/21, the SIG provided a two-hour training session for all JDLH leadership and educational staff on JDLH procurement policies and the CPC. A question and answer (Q&A) session followed the formal training session.

Observation: Based on the Q&A responses, the SIG identified the JDLH staff lacked an understanding of the state's procurement process. Interviews conducted of educational staff identified a lack of confidence in JDLH's procurement services office ability to complete their procurements in a timely manner that resulted in the educational staff trying to manage most of the procurement process before a requisition was sent forward for the necessary approvals.

³ This issue was identified by the CFO and brought to the attention of the JDLH president because of the immediate change in the requisition approval process previously identified in Finding #4.

⁴ The JDLH president subsequently requested the SIG to provide this training to JDLH staff. This training was completed on 6/16/21.

Recommendation #6a: JDLH leadership should ensure that all staff adhere to the established procurement process and work directly through the JDLH procurement services office to ensure timely acquisition of inventory and payment of invoices.

Recommendation #6b: JDLH leadership should provide annual procurement training, at a minimum, to JDLH staff.

I want to thank you and the JDLH staff for the courtesies and assistance provided to the SIG staff during the course of this review. I have attached your response to this summary report for the recipients of this letter to review.

If you have any questions regarding this review do not hesitate to call me. Additionally, the SIG's office is always available to assist the school in future training endeavors or program reviews. I may be reached at (803) 896-1287 (direct) or (803) 605-3161 (cell).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian D. Lamkin" followed by a stylized flourish.

Brian D. Lamkin
State Inspector General

CC: Hugh Bland, Chairman, SC Governors School for Agriculture at John de la Howe
Delbert Singleton, Director, Division of Procurement Services, SFAA
George Kennedy, State Auditor, Office of the State Auditor
Mark Plowden, Deputy Chief of Staff, South Carolina Office of the Governor



SC Governor's School for Agriculture

AT JOHN DE LA HOWE

July 19, 2021

Re: Response to Your Findings and Report at the SC Governor's School for Agriculture at John de la Howe (JDLH)

Dear Inspector General Lamkin:

When the news article from the *Post and Courier* was released, I contacted you about coming here to investigate the matter. Since many of the concerns were prior to my coming here, I did not know much of the back story. However, you acted immediately and formed a team from your staff to come to our campus, where you interviewed several members of our staff as well as investigated multiple procurement documents.

You and your staff performed a thorough investigation. You made several procedural recommendations that I immediately enforced. Mainly, I am now the last person to approve any procurement. Previously, our procurement officer was the last person to approve. As a new agency head, you also gave me an exuberant amount of leadership suggestions that I am incorporating.

My staff and I are dedicated to this agency/school and to the great state of South Carolina. Your report will help us to achieve transparency among our legislators, board members, taxpayers, and other stakeholders. We will take all of your suggestions and adhere closely to them. In an additional effort to train our staff in procurement, I have asked John White with SFAA to conduct a workshop for all of our staff on August 10, 2021.

After you finished your investigation, I asked you to present a workshop to all of our department heads and other employees with purchasing authority. You and your staff readily agreed – thank you. Your workshop was very informative and well-received by all. Many of our new employees came from a typical school district that handles procurement much differently than a state agency.

In closing, I accept your findings and recommendations found in this report. We will learn from this, move on, and continue to make South Carolina proud of our agency/school – more importantly, produce a great product with our students who will become the future of the agricultural industry in South Carolina!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Timothy R. Keown'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Timothy R. Keown
President