

SCHOOL ZONE

McCreary Middle School Rogers Explorers 2025

Hayden Bryant, Kassidy Garland, and Jayden Watts are the 2025 Rogers Explorers for McCreary Middle School.

According to the website: <https://centeryouth-programs.com/rogers-explorers/>, the Rogers Explorers program is an intensive three-day, two-night program focused on cultivating skills in leadership, technol-

ogy, math, science, and community service. It is developed, coordinated, and supervised by The Center for Rural Development in partnership with University of the Cumberlands, Lindsey Wilson College,

Eastern Kentucky University, Morehead State University, University of Pikeville, and Union College.

Activities throughout the program are both educational and fun. Classroom projects are

very hands-on, so do not expect to be bored! Explorers actively participate in practical college courses, fine-tune leadership skills, and develop a network of friends and resources throughout our Southern

and Eastern Kentucky region. Students from The Center's 45-county service area may apply during their eighth-grade year. All lodging, meals, and program expenses (except transportation to and from the program)

are offered at no cost. Students were required to complete an extensive application outlining their community service, extracurricular activities, letters of recommendation, and an essay.

Jayden Watts



Jayden is the 14 year old son of Tasha Cox. Jayden is a member of the football team, baseball team, Gifted and Talented program, BETA Club, and is a student representative for Portrait of a Learner. He will be attending the Rogers Explorer Program at Lindsey Wilson College.

Kassidy Garland



Kassidy is the 15 year old daughter of Randy and Amy Garland. She is a member of the softball team, archery team, Gifted and Talented program, and BETA Club. Kassidy will be attending the Rogers Explorers program at Lindsey Wilson College.

Hayden Bryant



Hayden is the 14 year old daughter of Brandon and Keshia Bryant. Hayden is a member of the softball team, Gifted and Talented program, and BETA Club. Hayden will be attending the Rogers Explorers program at Union Commonwealth University.

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Caitlin Clark Inspires at Cumberlands' Excellence in Leadership Event

Williamsburg, Ky. – March 26, 2025

Earlier this week, more than 2,000 students and community members listened attentively as WNBA sensation Caitlin Clark shared advice from former Iowa Hawkeyes head coach Lisa Bluder: Be where your feet are.

"Whether it's a good day, whether it's a bad day: Give it your all. Enjoy the people you're around because it does go by incredibly fast," shared Clark.

These words of wisdom were particularly fitting for an audience consisting primarily of college students. Clark's ability to resonate with such a large audience was just one of the

many reasons this year's Excellence in Leadership Event was unforgettable.

President Larry L. Cockrum opened the conversation with Clark, stating, "Over the years, we've hosted legends like Shaquille O'Neal, Terry Bradshaw, and Drew Brees—but no one has generated more excitement than you." He wasn't exaggerating: community tickets sold out within three minutes of going live, and attendees lined up outside of the O. Wayne Rollins Center over two hours in advance to secure a good seat.

It's no surprise Clark drew an enthusiastic audience. At just 23 years old, she's collected numerous accolades, including 2023 WNBA Rookie of the Year, NCAA All-Time Leading Scorer (Men & Women), NCAA All-Time 3-PT FG Leader (Women), and 3x Academic All-American, among others.

When asked about her record-breaking reputation, Clark humbly responded, "Record-breaking is not something you seek out trying to do. You just play the game the right way, have fun with teammates, and all the success just follows that."

Cumberlands students were given the rare opportunity to ask Clark questions about basketball, leadership, and service. Her responses revealed a self-driven, relationship-focused leadership style that inspires those around her.

"Whatever I am doing,

I want to be the best at it," said Clark. "My drive to get better that's what motivates me."

Like most things in life, Clark simultaneously understands that basketball is a team effort.

"From a leadership perspective, you need to make sure you have good relationships with people so they know you have their best interests at heart," she explained. "It all starts with relationships, being intentional about that, building that bond with your teammates. You don't have to be their best friend, but you should make an effort to understand what drives them so you can help them improve."

As a leader on and off the court, Clark has faced her share of challenges. When asked about overcoming adversity, she advised, "The best way to overcome any challenge is to embrace it and let it make you better."

And as far as the haters? "I just want to beat them. The best way to do that is to be quiet and competitive. Show everything with your game, with the time that you put in to be great," she said. "Winning is what's going to make people upset, so just win."

Looking ahead, Clark shared her dual passion for basketball and community. She expressed a desire to win a WNBA Championship with the Indiana Fever and make an Olympic team. She also emphasized her dedication to using her platform to inspire young athletes.

"I hope I can be somebody that gives young people hope and joy. I want to show them you can achieve anything you put your mind to," she said.

Clark reminded Cumberlands' athletes that sports are not forever. "Basketball is great, but it's really fulfilling to use the platform I have to impact other people, and we've been able to do some of that through my foundation," she explained. "I'm passionate about education, sports, and nutrition. I want to make those accessible to young people. That's what I am most looking forward to once my playing career is over."

The Caitlin Clark Foundation works to uplift and improve youth and community lives. Currently, the foundation is partnering with Scholastic to provide books to youth in need and is building four sports courts for youth in underserved communities. Clark aims to expand the foundation's work in the future, including offering scholarships to help young people pursue higher education.

Cumberlands' Excellence in Leadership Series annually invites keynote speakers like Clark to bring impactful messages to its students and the general community, instilling integral leadership values. Former keynote speakers include Jon Dorenbos, Mel Robbins, Drew Brees, Laila Ali, Terry Bradshaw, Shaquille O'Neal, and others.

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