

# MORE THAN A COACH

*CCHS head varsity football cheerleading coach Sophia Campbell wears several hats at CCHS, but her coaching and teaching philosophies are informed by her experiences as a CCHS student.*

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**Featured:** MIC DROP: Clarke Central High School science department teacher and CCHS Class of 2004 alumna Sophia Campbell participates in the CCHS 2024 Homecoming Pep Rally on Oct. 23. Campbell, CCHS's head varsity football cheerleading coach and science department teacher, established her expectations of her cheerleaders when she started coaching during the 2022-23 season. "A lot of (the cheerleaders), I've taught them inside of the classroom or coached them in track and field, so they know what to expect from me," Campbell said. Photo by Wyatt Meyer



**Featured:** CENTRAL ROUTING: Clarke Central High School Class of 2004 Alumna Sophia Campbell (second from left) poses alongside other seniors for superlative photos in the Gladius Yearbook. Campbell received three senior superlatives in her senior year: Class Clown, Biggest Flirt and Most Athletic. "I guess you could say I was a cool kid. I say I was like this ugly duckling, so I had to be funny. I felt like I was not the cutest thing, (so) I was just a goofball," Campbell said. Photo courtesy of the Gladius Yearbook

The last thing Sophia Campbell wanted to be when she grew up was a teacher.

Teacher parents, teacher aunts, teacher grandmother – the profession ran in the family.

"My family is teachers, my entire family. I said from childhood (that) I would never (teach). I actually wanted to be a physical therapist," Campbell said.

Growing up in Athens, Campbell attended Timothy Road Elementary School and Clarke Middle School. In 2000, she began as a student at Clarke Central High School, where she was a multi-sport athlete: running track, cheerleading and participating in step and dance teams.

"I was just a goofball. I was Class Clown of my class, Biggest Flirt and Most Athletic because I did cheer, dance team, step team (and) track and field. I was very busy," Campbell said.

After graduating from CCHS in 2004, Campbell left Athens to study biology at Savannah State University in Savannah, Georgia. In 2017, she returned to Athens with a plan to pursue her nursing degree at Athens Technical College.

However, it wasn't until 2019 that Campbell did the unthinkable: she decided to give teaching a try.

"I wanted to come back home, kind of reset, rethink what I wanted to do with my life. I was actually (in the) Athens Tech nursing program and sitting in a sociology class (and) I was like, 'I've always said I wanted to help people, and I'm realizing that maybe these kids really need more adults that actually care and think about their well being and their futures,'" Campbell said.

This motivation led her to a job fair for aspiring educators in March 2019 in CCHS's Mell Lobby. Following the fair, Campbell was hired by CCHS Principal Dr. Swade Huff to begin teaching biology for the 2019-20 school year.

"(Working at CCHS) was my dream. I wanted to come here and work for Dr. Huff. Mr. (Reginald) Thomas was here at that time as a Freshman Academy principal, he was my track coach, and I wanted to come back and work here and coach track and field with him," Campbell said.

Having been a student at CCHS, Campbell offers her own perspective on what it's like to be a Gladiator. Within the classroom, Campbell's sister Ashlea Carter, an Early Intervention Program teacher at David C. Barrow Elementary School, sees the personality and authenticity Campbell brings to students.

"She teaches in a way that students respond (to) and makes them want to learn because she builds those relationships with them and their parents," Carter said. "When kids get a hard class, after just one conversation (with her), they want to do well because it's Ms. Campbell."

Outside of the walls of Room 349, Campbell continues to immerse herself in the sports she participated in while she was a student. As the CCHS head varsity football cheerleading coach and former CCHS head varsity track and field coach, Campbell's authenticity is just as applicable on the sidelines on the track as it is in front of the whiteboard.

"Of course, we've all grown and matured even more, but she's still a loving young individual who loves her kids. She loves what she does," CCHS head varsity basketball cheerleading coach LaVerne Fortson said. "She has the passion to be a coach. She's hands-on. She helps (her cheerleaders) through any situation that she can, any difficulties that they have."

CCHS Class of 2023 alumna Na'Khia Jordan, a Georgia Gwinnett College sophomore, had Campbell as a biology teacher and track coach while at CCHS. According to Jordan, she visited Campbell's room often whether for advice, help with plans for the future or a simple conversation.

"She's a teacher, which I'm in school to be also, so she (is) one of the people who made me want to become a teacher, just because of the impact or influence that she (had) on me," Jordan said.

Campbell began coaching varsity football cheerleading in the 2023-24 season and continues to build connections by relating to students like CCHS varsity football cheerleading co-captain Dominique Bradford, a senior.

"We love Coach Campbell. She's a great teacher. She's a great coach. We love the way she carries herself, the way she just cares about us," Bradford said.

Although Campbell never thought she would become a teacher – she lacked the patience and wasn't scared to say whatever came to mind – her experience as a former CCHS student gives her a unique perspective on her student's lives.

"Our students need to be able to see themselves in their educators and their coaches, not that I can deter them from making all kinds of mistakes in life, but I feel like a lot of the advice and support that I can give might fit in the smallest little way," Campbell said.

Against all odds, Campbell has become the teacher she grew up rejecting. She is patient and eager to help her students grow, bringing an energy to the classroom that pays homage to both her family and connection at CCHS.

In her sixth year of teaching, Campbell hopes to not only teach cell structure and genetic coding, but also valuable lessons that will prepare her students, cheerleaders and mentees for their time beyond high school.

"(Teachers are) not raising kids. We're not taking the responsibility away from parents, but we do have a lot of influence," Campbell said. "We are more than just educators teaching content. We teach life."