



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
Nov. 10, 2020

**CONTACT:** Emily Davis  
517-803-3745  
[pr@hillsdale.edu](mailto:pr@hillsdale.edu)

David Withun  
904-288-7732

**Florida Gov. DeSantis visits Jacksonville Classical Academy**

*American classical education highlighted on tour;  
Teachers share unique curriculum, classroom experience during press briefing*

JACKSONVILLE, Fl.—Governor Ron DeSantis toured [Jacksonville Classical Academy](#) (JXC) on Oct. 20, to observe classes and to discuss transitioning students from distance learning back to in-person instruction. The governor was joined by Richard Corcoran, Florida Secretary of Education; Ambassador John Rood, JXC school board chair; and Dr. David Withun, JXC head of school.

Gov. DeSantis visited classrooms and observed JXC’s American classical education, which emphasizes human virtue, moral character, and responsible citizenship through content-rich curriculum and teacher-led classrooms. The school partners with Hillsdale College and its [Barney Charter School Initiative](#) (BCSI), which advises on this unique curriculum to American classical K-12 charter schools across the nation, including six in Florida.

During his visit, Gov. DeSantis observed classical education in a Latin lesson in a sixth-grade classroom and in a phonics lesson in a first-grade classroom. In addition, Gov. DeSantis visited with students during their lunch periods.

After the tour, JXC teachers joined the governor and the tour group for a press briefing. Hattie Anthony, a kindergarten teacher, and Nick Barker, a fifth-grade teacher, joined the governor and shared their observations on American classical education and its impact in their classrooms.

“The most important thing that’s happening in this building is happening in the classrooms,” said Dr. Withun during the briefing. “It’s important that they have the opportunity to teach students in the least restrictive environment possible, and to teach them in person. There’s nothing that can replicate the relationship between students and teachers in a classroom. We are doing it in a way that is both reasonable and safe and meets the needs of all of our students.”

Barker emphasized the challenging time our nation is facing and the window this opens up for teachers. “I love that I can teach challenging content,” he said. “Our students have a lot of questions. We have a great opportunity to point students to good, interpersonal virtues, and we can learn how to engage in society with perseverance and courage and honesty.”

After visiting classes, Sec. Corcoran described the importance of teaching fundamentals, especially phonics, as a “disruption” in modern public education. He described the phonics approach at JXC as “amazing,” and stressed that the method is successful in teaching students to read by third grade, which then sets them on a pathway of “reading to learn.”

“What matters—what educates those kids—is what you are doing, which is getting to those fundamentals,” Corcoran said.

Photos of the tour are [available here](#). Video of the press briefing is [available here](#). Mr. Barker’s comments begin at 28:00. Miss Anthony’s remarks begin at 30:30.

### **About Jacksonville Classical Academy**

Jacksonville Classical Academy (JXC) is a tuition-free, public charter school and member of the Barney Charter School Initiative (BCSI) at Hillsdale College, whose mission is to promote the founding of classical charter schools that provide public-school students with an excellent education in the liberal arts and sciences. JXC is a Licensed User of the Hillsdale College K-12 Curriculum and receives training from Hillsdale’s BCSI. For more information, go to [jaxclassical.org](http://jaxclassical.org).

### **About the Barney Charter School Initiative**

Hillsdale College’s Barney Charter School Initiative (BCSI) promotes the founding of tuition-free, public K-12 classical charter schools and excellence in their teaching and operations. BCSI advises more than 24 American classical education schools nationwide. BCSI schools train the minds and improve the hearts of young people through a content-rich curriculum with instruction in the principles of moral character and civic virtue. For more information about BCSI or American classical education, visit [hillsdale.edu/educational-outreach/barney-charter-school-initiative](http://hillsdale.edu/educational-outreach/barney-charter-school-initiative).

###