

**For Immediate Release**

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# Media Release

## **CCSD a leader in social and emotional learning**

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**Charleston, SC** – Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is not a new concept to Charleston County School District (CCSD). While academics is always at the forefront of the mind of every principal, parent, teacher, and student, social-emotional wellness is the foundation for thriving (academically and emotionally).

All CCSD Child Development, Kindergarten, and first grade classes teach an SEL curriculum. Currently, 80 percent of elementary schools in CCSD facilitate a school-wide SEL program and 100 percent of all middle schools in CCSD have an SEL curriculum.

SEL is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

“It is always important to focus on mental wellness,” said Jennifer Coker, Executive Director of Alternative Programs and Services. “Even in this time of closure, all students still have access to the curriculum and through their teachers who are taking time each day talking with each student about how they’re doing. We’re providing self-care tips to our employees as well, which is critical.”

The curriculum is set up in units and teaches skills for learning topics such as empathy, emotional management, friendship, and problem solving. The curriculum gets a little more complex at each grade level as it continues to build the student’s understanding.

CCSD teachers are becoming more creative on how to continue social-emotional wellness outside of schools. SEL lessons are showing up in Zoom classes, daily morning news shows, and virtual small groups.

Studies show that SEL improves well-being and academic outcomes, builds positive school climate, and provides children with the necessary skills to excel in today’s workforce. Overall decades of research also proves SEL;

leads to improved behaviors and attitudes, less negative behaviors, and reduces emotional distress.

As a student, practitioner, and now coach, district climate coach Heather Anderson has facilitated SEL lessons in CCSD since 2013.

“CCSD is the only district in our state that has taken social and mental wellness head-on with evidence-based, research-driven practices,” said Anderson.

Anderson began teaching SEL lessons as a school counselor in 2013. Today, Anderson and the team of district climate coaches support all schools in the frameworks of SEL and PBIS (positive behavior interventions and supports.)

In addition, as the closure extends, district officials are looking at direct ways to collaborate with parents to ensure SEL lessons can be conducted at home.

“Parents are struggling in this time, too,” said Coker. “The Department of Alternative Programs (DAP) has created resources for families such as websites, pre-recorded access to SEL lessons, and other resources to support all families in this time of uncertainty. We have also added the [Family Support Line](#) to support families with any challenges they are facing during the extended closure. This was a collaboration between Intervention and Psychological Services, School Counseling Services, and DAP.”

According to Coker, CCSD’s Board of Trustees has fully supports the model. As part of the Mission Critical Actions approved by the board, more funding has been provided to expand mental health services to include SEL.

“We couldn’t do it without their support and funding, along with additional grant money,” said Coker.

Success of the program can be seen at Northwoods Middle School and Camp Road Middle School; both nationally recognized, resulting in access to a new, cutting-edge, evidence-based, data-driven curriculum.

To implement social-emotional learning, 15 to 25 minutes are set aside each day, once a week. In addition, five-minute extension lessons are done each day. SEL is not an intervention for at-risk students but rather a framework for systemic change. The impact on both academic success and mental wellness with fidelity of implementation is in the research.

Second Step’s SEL program, coupled with Mind Yeti (a mindfulness program that compliments the district’s SEL program) twice a day has completely transformed the life of 39-year veteran educator Lori Alexander, a teacher at W.B. Goodwin Elementary School.

"The impact that the implementation of the Second Step program has had on the climate of our kindergarten learning community-was felt from day one, as we built our Shared Vision and Code of Cooperation," said Lori. "The Social/Emotional skills that Second Step's lessons introduced to my students are life long and help them to become more emphatic and engaged citizens of our learning community."

"There are lots of ways to expand and grow SEL," said Coker. "Especially the piece that helps kids access academics. SEL teaches students the skills they need to not only access academics but achieve academic success."

For more information contact the Office of Strategy and Communications at (843) 937-6303.

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#### **About the Charleston County School District**

Charleston County School District (CCSD), a nationally-accredited school district, is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 87 schools and specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.