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Media Release

CCSD awarded \$12 million grant for Cultural Competency Training

Office of Strategy and
Communications

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Charleston, SC – Charleston County School District (CCSD) has been awarded an Education Innovation & Research (EIR) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. It is a five-year grant worth \$12 million.

The purpose of EIR is to generate and validate solutions to persistent educational challenges and to support the expansion of effective solutions. The grants encourage entrepreneurial, evidence-based, field-initiated innovations to improve student achievement and, rigorously evaluate such innovations.

This year, for the first time, the U.S. Department of Education sought projects centered on teacher choice in professional learning.

CCSD's grant project will focus on teacher choice in cultural competency training. Teachers will receive an allowance to choose their own professional learning. After attending training, teachers will provide feedback so the district can collectively build a resource bank of cultural competency training.

This professional development will serve as an extension of the Board of Trustees' plans to train all CCSD employees in Cultural Competency. Training at the district level will differ from the school level. For example, teachers and school administrators have more direct interaction with students and their families, while district leaders must develop wide-range strategies that benefit communities throughout the district.

"Empowering our educators with authentic professional learning of their choosing supports our commitment to developing our teachers while developing our understanding across cultural differences, inclusive practices, and conversations that will remove barriers faced by our students, said Dr. Abby Woods, a member of CCSD's Cultural Competency Team, who is serving as an advisor for the EIR grant.

The project will involve research to see if the training makes a difference in the classroom. The goal is to create a culturally competent learning

environment that adapts to and values diversity and institutionalizes cultural knowledge. Project outcomes include improved school climate, improved student engagement, and improved student achievement.

"This is an incredible opportunity for Charleston County," said Don Kennedy, CCSD's Chief Financial and Administrative Officer. "The innovative aspect of this project allows CCSD to explore our work on improving the cultural competency of our workforce and our students. The fact that the project strategies will be teacher-led ensures the greatest possible outcomes for preparing our students to live effectively in a multicultural world."

The initial schools chosen to participate in the project are from District 3 and District 23: 5,765 students and 433 teachers at Baptist Hill Middle/High, Camp Road Middle, E.B. Ellington Elementary, Harbor View Elementary, James Island Charter High, James Island Elementary, Jane Edwards Elementary, Minnie Hughes Elementary, Murray-LaSaine Montessori, and Stiles Point Elementary.

A team including teachers, principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches, developed the competitive grant application. Lakevia Mills, CCSD Teacher of the Year is a member of the grant team.

"This grant will allow teachers to have access to the latest methods, strategies, and pedagogy to help us deliver dynamic content to support diverse learners within our classrooms," said Mills.

The grant team met with community organizations to develop the project. Partners include Charleston Forum, Charleston Shared Future, College of Charleston's Avery Research Center, Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission, Sophia Institute's Social Justice Racial Equity Collaborative, South Carolina Department of Education, South Carolina State University, Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative, and YWCA.

According to Brian Duffy, Charleston Forum committee member, a recent survey of local residents done by Charleston Forum found an across-the-board recognition for the need for equitable access to quality education.

"The District's thoughtful and successful grant proposal is an important step toward reaching our community's goal," said Duffy.

"We are honored to be one of only 28 educational organizations throughout the country to be awarded the grant, and only five of those being school districts," said Karolyn Belcher, CCSD Chief Academic Officer. "This grant will allow us to tap into our greatest assets - our community and our teachers - to come up with new ways to consider the unique, diverse cultures of Charleston in our teaching and learning. I am excited to see what we learn."

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.