

Focus ON CCSD

News for, by and about Charleston County School District,
the state of South Carolina's premier school district where *Students are the Heart of Our Work.*

Volume 4 | Edition 4 | April 2021

SAMUEL WINS SPELLBOUND! AGAIN



Keerthana Samuel accepts trophy



Samuel, pictured here in the 2020 competition, is a two-time district spelling bee champion.

Keerthana Samuel, a seventh grader at C.E. Williams Middle School was victorious for the second time in the Spellbound! regional spelling bee March 25, 2021 at the North Charleston Athletic Center.

In 2020, Samuel won the bee but was unable to compete in the national competition due to COVID-19.

The pandemic changed the way this year's Spellbound! was conducted. Instead of competing against 50 other students, only 14 were invited to participate so as to properly follow COVID-19 protocols.

Samuel was able to correctly spell the word "facade" and was named the champion.

"Leading up to the regional spelling bee, my parents would help me prepare from the given spelling list," said Samuel. "The preliminary round and rounds after will be much more difficult, considering there are more words they can use to ask the spellers, and

only a certain amount of students can progress to higher rounds. There will be tough competition, but I'll try my best."

She will now participate in and advance through preliminary rounds, quarter-finals and semi-finals before reaching the Scripps National Spelling Bee competition July 8, 2021 in Disney World. She will again only compete against 14 other contestants rather than the traditional 300.

"We are very proud of Keerthana," said C.E. Williams Principal Kevin Smith. "As a sixth grader, she handled the pressure of the competition and prevailed only to have the National Bee cancelled due to the pandemic. For her to return to the competition and emerge from a field of very talented and dedicated competitors as a seventh grader, is admirable. No matter the outcome, she has proven her ability to take on great challenges and that will help her well beyond the Spelling Bee."

Teacher and Staff Salary Increases

The Board approved a Step increase for all teachers and district staff members who are eligible for a Step increase as well as a two percent cost of living adjustment (COLA) for all district employees for FY2021. The increases are retroactive to July 1, 2020; lump sum payments will be made to teachers retroactively with the April 30 payroll, hourly employees with the May 14 payroll, and exempt administrators with the May 28 payroll. Pay adjustments for the remainder of the fiscal year would be incorporated in salary schedules and distributed across remaining pay periods.

The starting teacher (Step 0) salary in CCSD will now be \$39,675. The total cost for all increases is \$12,726,338; the Step and COLA for teachers totals \$8,557,185 and \$4,169,153 for non-teachers. The CCSD Board approved almost \$4 million in the FY21 budget for this purpose. The remaining \$8.7 million cost will be covered from additional state revenue the district receives in FY21 that was not in the current year's budget. These are recurring costs that can be sustained in future years and have been incorporated in the district's multiyear financial plans.



Phase V Capital Projects

The Board approved three waves for the Phase V Capital Program, which will start on January 1, 2023. Highlights include construction of the new Malcolm C. Hursey Montessori School on the Ronald McNair campus in the first wave and building a new facility for Morningside Middle School (subject to future approval of an alternative means of funding) in the second wave.

CCSD Virtual Learning options announced for 2021-2022 school year

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is preparing for the new 2021-22 school year in August with two modes of instruction: in-person for the vast majority and a K-12 virtual program for a limited number of students.

The growing availability of the COVID-19 vaccine, expected continuation of the decline in virus transmission rates, and proven protocols that have helped keep schools safer and healthier have led to an expectation for a near full return to in-person instruction for students on August 18, 2021.

This means that after this June, CCSD will no longer offer the online learning (also referred to as temporary remote) option where students remain at home but are included in a class made up of both in-person and online students taught by a teacher at their neighborhood school. Students will either attend school



2021-2022 Virtual Learning

in-person or enroll in the K-8 virtual academy option.

The CCSD virtual academy option will be offered for a limited number of students in grades K-8 for the upcoming 2021-22 school year.

Currently, around 75 percent of CCSD students are learning in-person five days a week; around 24 percent of CCSD students are online learning remotely from home, and around 1 percent are enrolled in the current CCSD Central Virtual Academy.

High School students interested in committing to a full-time virtual school program will work with their home school counselor to schedule the appropriate online courses to ensure on-time graduation. Application through the district is not required.

For questions about the CCSD Virtual Academy email virtualacademy@charleston.k12.sc.us.

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Charleston > excellence is our standard
County SCHOOL DISTRICT

ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR PRE-K/CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Why Enroll Now?

- 85-90% of brain development happens during a child's Pre-K years (Rauch Foundation)
- Stimulating classroom experiences foster optimal brain development
- Provides preparation for kindergarten

Benefits for Your Family

- The programs are no cost to families
- Full-day program provides a safe and healthy learning environment for children

Enrollment Requirements

- Child must turn 4 years old by September 1, 2021
- Child will participate in a screening
- Charleston County resident



HOW TO APPLY

Apply 2 ways:

1. Online at ccsdschools.com/earlylearning/applications
2. Fill out paper application

FOR MORE INFORMATION

visit
www.ccsdschools.com/prek
or call
843-937-7916 *Phone availability will be limited
or email
ccsdprek@charleston.k12.sc.us

ESTÁ ACEPTANDO APLICACIONES PARA LOS PROGRAMAS DE PRE-K/DESARROLLO INFANTIL

¿Porqué matricularlo ahora?

- EL 85-90% del desarrollo cerebral de un niño sucede durante los años de pre-Jardín de infancia (Rauch Foundation).
- Las experiencias estimuladoras del salón de clases fomentan un óptimo desarrollo del cerebro.
- Le provee una preparación para el Jardín de Infancia.

Beneficios para tu familia

- Los programas son sin costo alguno para las familias
- Los programas de día completo proveen un ambiente de aprendizaje seguro y saludable para los niños.

Requisitos de matrícula

- El/la niño(a) debe cumplir los 4 años de edad para el 1 de septiembre de 2021
- El/la niño(a) participará en una evaluación
- Residente del condado de Charleston



CÓMO APLICAR

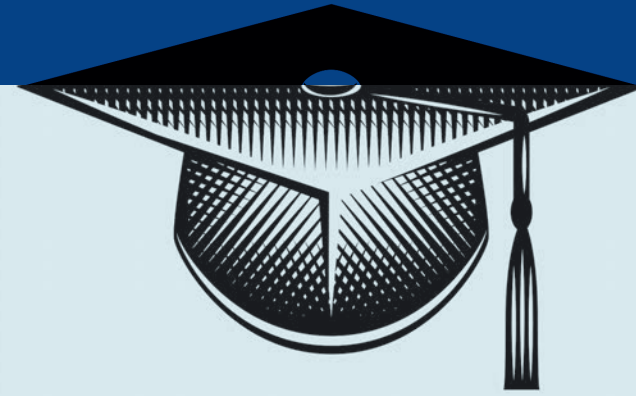
Aplicar 2 formas:

1. En línea en ccsdschools.com/earlylearning/applications
2. Complete la solicitud en papel

PARA MÁS INFORMACIÓN

visite
www.ccsdschools.com/prek
o llame al
843-937-7916 *La disponibilidad del teléfono será limitada
o escriba a correo electrónico
ccsdprek@charleston.k12.sc.us

CCSD HIGH SCHOOLS WILL HOLD IN-PERSON GRADUATION CEREMONIES



The schedule for Charleston County School District (CCSD) high school graduation ceremonies has been finalized. Each school will hold an outdoor, in-person ceremony using COVID-19 protocols.

The following list includes the dates, times, and location for each school's event:

Academic Magnet High School

9:00 a.m., Thursday, June 17, 2021, District 4 Regional Stadium (in North Charleston)

Baptist Hill Middle High School

9:00 a.m., Friday, June 18, 2021
Brockington Herne Stadium (Baptist Hill's campus)

Burke High School

6:00 p.m., Thursday, June 17, 2021, Johnson- Hagood Stadium (The Citadel)

Charleston Charter School of Math and Science

7:00 p.m., Saturday, June 5, 2021
Johnson Hagood Stadium (The Citadel)

Charleston County School of the Arts

7:00 p.m., Thursday, June 17, 2021
District 4 Regional Stadium (in North Charleston)

Early College High School

9:00 a.m., Friday, June 18, 2021
District 4 Regional Stadium (in North Charleston)

Greg Mathis Charter High School

6:00 p.m., Thursday, June 17, 2021
Hibbie Ayoub Stadium (Garrett's campus)

James Island Charter High School

9:00 a.m., Friday, June 18, 2021
Floyd E. Hiott, Jr. Memorial Stadium (James Island's campus)

Military Magnet Academy

6:30 p.m., Saturday, June 19, 2021
District 4 Regional Stadium (in North Charleston)

North Charleston High School

11:00 a.m., Saturday, June 19, 2021
District 4 Regional Stadium (in North Charleston)

R.B. Stall High School

6:00 p.m., Friday, June 18, 2021
District 4 Regional Stadium (in North Charleston)

St. John's High School

7:00 p.m., Saturday, June 19, 2021
Robert Biggerstaff Field (St. John's campus)

Septima P. Clark Academy

9:00 a.m., Saturday, June 12, 2021
Hibbie Ayoub Stadium (Garrett's campus)

Wando High School (three ceremonies)

6:00 p.m., Friday, June 18, 2021
9:00 a.m., Saturday, June 19, 2021
6:00 p.m., Saturday, June 19, 2021,
District 2 Regional Stadium (Wando's campus)

West Ashley High School

9:00 a.m., Saturday, June 19, 2021
Wildcat Stadium (West Ashley's campus)

School staff members will share more details, including rain dates, directly with their seniors and their families once their specific plans are complete.

SCACA HONORS LATE WANDO ICON, BOB HAYES

The South Carolina Athletic Coaches Association (SCACA) recently announced that Bob Hayes, former athletic director and football coach at Wando High School, has been posthumously elected to the SCACA Hall of Fame. He will be inducted with the rest of the Class of 2021 on July 25, 2021, during the SCACA's Annual Awards Ceremony at the Greenville Convention Center.

Hayes passed away at the age of 60 last June.

“Bob Hayes was a pillar of the CCSD community and the South Carolina High School League but especially the Wando High School Community – our students, our athletes, our faculty and staff,” said Wando’s principal, Dr. Sherry Eppelsheimer. “It is impossible to describe how much he meant to all of us. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with Bob for 13 years and call him a true friend. He stood for all that is great about our school: commitment to students, athletes, family, and staff along with a dedication to excellence and an amazing work ethic.”

Hayes graduated from Coral Gables High School in Coral Gables, FL, then came to the Palmetto State to play football at Furman University. After graduating college, he spent 37 years in the coaching profession, including 33 in the Lowcountry, first at Stratford High School then the last 20 years at Wando High School. He served as the Warrior’s athletic director from 2000-2020 and the head football coach from 2000-2009.

During Coach Hayes' tenure at Wando, the Warriors captured 53

state championships in various sports and seven Carlisle Cups (which recognizes the state’s most successful athletic program). He was an assistant coach at both the North-South All-Star Game and the Shrine Bowl, and won many other accolades including SCACA Athletic Director of the Year in 2017-18.

Hayes was a 33-year member of the South Carolina Athletic Coaches Association, and a 13-year member of the Board of Directors, serving as president of the association in 2007-08. He was also a 20-year member of the South Carolina Athletic Administrators Association.

In May of 2020, Charleston County School District (CCSD) and its Board of Trustees honored Coach Hayes by naming the field at the District 2 Regional Stadium, built on Wando’s campus, “Robert E Hayes Field” in recognition of his dedication to the high school, the Mount Pleasant community, CCSD, and South Carolina.

“Bob participated in countless meetings as we worked through the planning, design, and construction of the District 2 Stadium,” added Dr. Eppelsheimer. “I am thankful the field at the District 2 Regional Stadium bears his name so everyone will know about his legacy and contributions to Wando. We lost a good man too soon, but we’ll continue to celebrate his legacy.”

Four other coaches will be honored as Hall of Fame inductees at the 2021 SCACA banquet including Dr. Jerry Brown, Delmer Howell, Mike Srock, and James “Nate” Thompson.



Bob Hayes

East Cooper students win Bookmark contest

Four Whitesides Elementary School and two Mount Pleasant Academy students won and placed in the South Carolina Book Award Bookmark contest sponsored by the South Carolina Association of School Librarians. Students from all over South Carolina submitted bookmarks based on their choice of one of the South Carolina children’s or picture book award nominees.

Whitesides — Annalise Asper in second-grade placed 3rd in the picture book category. Michelle Riggs in fourth-grade placed 1st in the picture book category. Khushi Malik in fourth grade tied for 1st in the children’s book category. Elise Bohrnstedt placed 3rd in the children’s book category.

MPA — Amerson Johnston in second-grade placed 2nd in the picture book category. Eli Beals in fourth-grade tied for 1st place in the children’s book category.

Bookmarks were submitted by the school librarians, Kim Livingston at Whitesides and Tiffany Anderson at MPA.



Annalise Asper

Michelle Riggs

Khushi Malki

Elise Bohrnstedt

Amerson Johnston

Eli Beals

Wando’s yearbook receives another prestigious honor



Wando High School’s yearbook, known as Legend, is earning legendary status outside South Carolina. The Warriors’ publication was named the 2020 Scroggins Award winner by the Southern Interscholastic Press Association (SIPA). Essentially, Wando’s yearbook is the top yearbook in the South. The news comes four months after the Warriors received significant national recognition through the Quill and Scroll Yearbook Excellence Contest.

Wando has earned SIPA’s Scroggins Award for the first time, which also goes to the top student newspaper, broadcast program, and literary magazine. The announcement came during the organization’s annual conference and workshop.

SIPA is a scholastic journalism organization that started the University of South Carolina almost 100 years ago and now represents all student media throughout the Southeast region of the United States.

During SIPA’s annual conference, student media organizations enter their work in a variety of contests.

Wando’s 2020 volume of Legend, with the theme “Decide to Rise,” earned Best in Show of all yearbooks represented at the SIPA conference. The Legend staff also broke their previous year’s record in individual awards, picking up 43 total awards, including 19 first-place honors. The closest competitor to Wando’s yearbook staff this year had 14 awards and five first-place recipients.

The following is a list of first-place awards from Wando in this year’s SIPA conference:

- **Academic Copy** - Samantha Finkenberg
- **Community Copy** - Mary Michael O’Hara
- **Clubs Copy** - Lily Higgins
- **Theme Copy** - Merritt Redden
- **Club Photo** - Anna Jane Morrall - Club Photo
- **Environmental Portrait Photo** - Joseph Grech
- **First-year Student Photography** - Olivia Estoppey
- **Sports Reaction Photo** - Joseph Grech
- **Photography Portfolio** - Joseph Grech
- **Alternative Copy Spread** - Katie Brown
- **Club Spread** - Harper Duffy
- **Endsheet Design** - Brynn Burke, Alexis Kramer, Olivia Potter
- **Opening Spread Design** - Brynn Burke, Alexis Kramer, Olivia Potter
- **Section Divider** - Brynn Burke, Alexis Kramer, Olivia Potter
- **Sports Spread** - Carlyn Garner
- **Student Life Spread** - Katie Brown
- **Yearbook Design Portfolio** - Clara Barresi
- **Best Overall Team On-Site Production** - Clara Barresi, Lily Higgins, Anna Jane Morrall, Millie Rice
- **Best Design Team On-Site Production** - Clara Barresi, Lily Higgins, Anna Jane Morrall, Millie Rice

The historic Legend volume and the 52-person staff were led by editors-in-chief Legare Kerrison, Erin O’Leary, and Merritt Redden (now freshmen at Tulane University, Centre College, and Clemson University, respectively).

Chapman awarded Good Citizen Award for Eagle Scout project

Owen Chapman was awarded the Daughters of the America Revolution (DAR) Good Citizen Award, in part for his Eagle Scout project collecting hearing aids for refurbishment and distribution to those in need.

Chapman, a senior at Academic Magnet High School, explained that the hearing aid collection drive was part of the overall public service announcement of “Hearing Loss Awareness.”

Chapman suffers from hearing loss and since he was two-years-old, has undergone 11 surgeries. He now has prosthetic hearing bones.

Through his collection drive he was able to donate 63 hearing aids and donated them to the Lions Club Vision and Hearing Services where they will be refurbished and distributed.

This year-long effort began with public service announcements airing on various radio stations in the area. Initially collection boxes were going to be placed around town but COVID-19 thwarted that. Instead he personally conducted a reach-out and collection campaign.

“Despite COVID-19 it turned out very successfully,” said Chapman. “I’m pleased with the collection totals and I appreciate everyone who supported me. I am also honored to be recognized by DAR.”

Chapman is undecided on where he will attend college and is weighing his options. He hopes to major in international economics, or something similar.



Owen Chapman

“Despite COVID-19 it turned out very successfully. I’m pleased with the collection totals and I appreciate everyone who supported me. I am also honored to be recognized by DAR.”

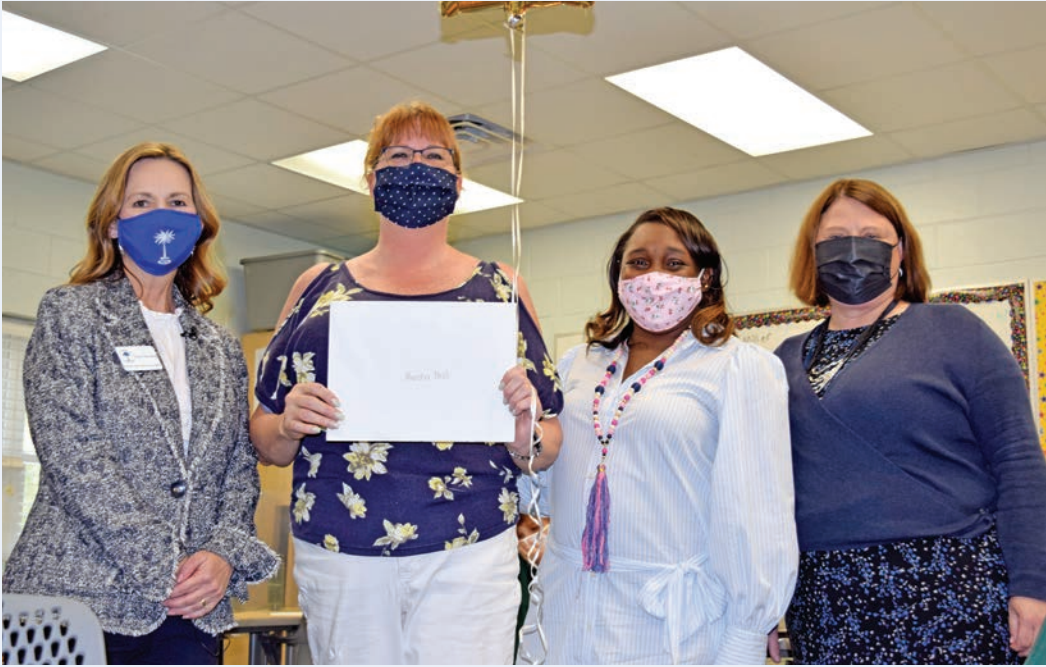
— OWEN CHAPMAN
ACADEMIC MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL
SENIOR

MARSHA NEAL WINS PSTA SCHOLARSHIP FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Deer Park Middle School teacher Marsha Neal has been selected as one of ten winners of the 2021 Dr. Elizabeth Gressette Professional Development Scholarship. The scholarship is sponsored by Palmetto State Teachers Association’s (PSTA) Foundation for Professional Development and is awarded annually to encourage and support PSTA members in pursuing advanced degrees. Applicants must be a PSTA member for at least three years and be currently enrolled in a higher education program to apply for the scholarship. Neal is a sixth grade math and science teacher at Deer Park. She is pursuing a Doctorate of Education degree at American College of Education.



Marsha Neal



Marsha Neal won a \$1500 professional development scholarship

The scholarship winners were each awarded \$1,500 and will be recognized at the Palmetto State Teachers Association Annual Business Meeting on May 1, 2021.

“We are extremely proud of Ms. Neal and her devotion to lifelong learning,” said Shanitra Deas, Principal of Deer Park Middle. “Every day we remind our scholars to put their futures into focus. As we continue to focus on college and career readiness, Ms. Neal provides an example to our scholars that learning never stops.”

Palmetto State Teachers Association is the largest professional education association for teachers in South Carolina. Dr. Elizabeth Gressette, a former public school kindergarten teacher, was the founding member of PSTA in 1976. PSTA provides professional benefits to support its members throughout their careers in education. More information can be found at www.palmettoteachers.org.

Cooper River CAS hosts school and community blood drive

Cooper River Center for Advanced Studies (CAS) hosted a school and community blood drive in March. This was the first of two blood drives planned for this year; the next one is scheduled for May 5, 2021.

Dr. Tawnya Cox, Cooper River CAS health science teacher, has been organizing school blood drives for the last four years at North Charleston High School where she is a former teacher. Dr. Cox partnered with the American Red Cross to host community blood drives at the new CAS, so her students could get hands-on experience.

“The blood drive is part of our vision to integrate the skills our students are learning back into our community,” said Principal Vanessa Brown. “We promised our students real-world training and this is an example of how our students gaining relevant industry education. I am proud to know that the Cooper River Center can sponsor community service projects like this and many others that will positively impact the lives of our students and the families we serve.”

In the past, the effort enabled Cox and her students to give back to the community. It also allowed her to surprise one lucky senior with a scholarship from the Red Cross. Scholarships are awarded based on the number of units of blood collected. They will not meet that threshold this year, due to limited slots available, but Cox is already planning for next year.

COVID-19 has limited the number of blood donors that could be accommodated. Cox is confident that next year the blood drive will return to normal. Traditionally that would mean her health science students not only host the blood drive but handle recruitment among their peers and the community and run the operation from registration to collection.

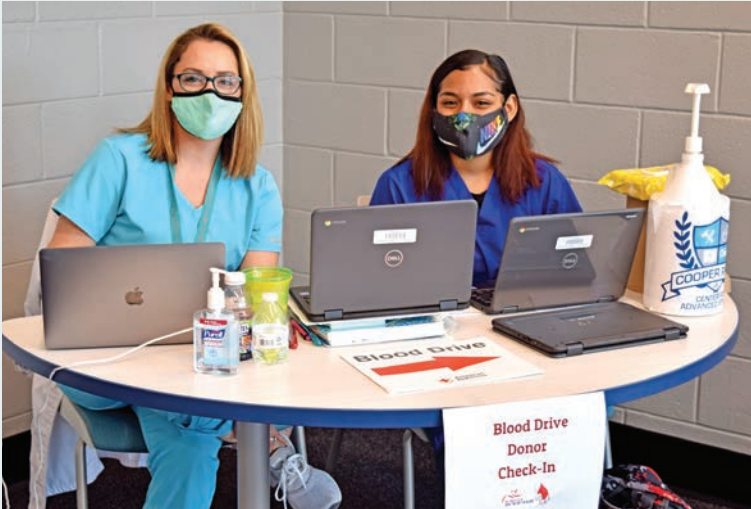


Red Cross Blood Mobile

Jade Reyes is a senior in Cox’s class and plans to pursue nursing. By taking pharmacology classes at Cooper River, she has secured all the certifications she will need to work as a pharmacy technician upon successful completion of her exam. She was on hand Tuesday as a volunteer for the blood drive and as a donor. Reyes said she was appreciative of the hands-on experience.



Dr. Cox and her health science students man the registration table



Dr. Cox and student Jade Reyes

STAPLES MAKES DONATION OF SCHOOL SUPPLIES TO DISTRICT



TOP ROW (l to r): Mary Ford – 250 bags; In store promotions; Sanders Clyde Elementary – 450 bags, binders, pens, dry erase boards, glue
BOTTOM ROW (l to r): Staples stores across the Lowcountry donated to dozens of CCSD schools; Paul, Brian Begley store manager in Mount Pleasant binders pen dry erase boards and glue etc.; Chicora Elementary – 350 bags

Four Staples stores across the Lowcountry made significant donations to schools in Charleston County School District (CCSD) through their annual “School Drive.” This year, with their customers’ help, the local Staples stores in Mount Pleasant, West Ashley, North Charleston, and Summerville donated over 3,000 bags to elementary and middle schools. Supplies donated include binders, pens, glue, folders, and art paper.

According to Morningside Middle School Principal Michael White, supplies like these are a necessity.

“We are so truly appreciative of this donation, and we are looking forward to a continued and expanded partnership with Staples,” said White.

Morningside received over 400 bags of supplies that contained folders, glue, pens, markers, tissues, hand sanitizer, and banner and poster paper.

Paul Ferreri, General Manager of Staples store #1583 on Folly Road, worked with Michelle Wright, Procurement Agent for CCSD, to identify which schools had the greatest need for supply donations.

In addition to Morningside, schools such as Chircora Elementary School, HarborView Elementary School, Mary

Ford Early Learning and Family Center, Oakland Elementary School, Sanders-Clyde Elementary school, and James Island Elementary School all received bags for each student – in many cases, over 300 per school.

“Charleston County School District is so thankful for the generous community partners in the Lowcountry that support our students and families,” said Wright. “Staples and their customers went above and beyond to collect and donate these much-needed supplies. That kind of generosity is so appreciated.”

The drive continues throughout the year at all Charleston area Staples stores. Customers have the option to donate a \$5 bag of supplies that will be set aside for donation at a later date.

“We chose to do a year-round event so that we can kick next school year off with the supplies already on hand,” said Ferreri.

Each store handles its collections differently, Ferreri explained. For example, in Mount Pleasant, the store partnered with the Mount Pleasant Police Department (MPPD) and hosted a “Fill the Cruiser” event. Customers donated enough to fill three police cars.

Brian Begley, General Manager Staples store #826 in Mount Pleasant, said they have established a solid relationship with

MPPD that makes collections like this possible.

“It is fantastic working with the community,” said Begley. “What is even more heartwarming is going to the schools and seeing the kids and the staff when we present the donations. They are so thankful and appreciative of anything we can do to help students get supplies.”

Ferreri said the generosity shown by the community has been overwhelming.

“Each school has varying needs,” said Ferreri. “By working with the district, we were able to pinpoint those so that our donations made sense for their school community. The core value at Staples is to support our communities – local businesses and schools. We like to partner with the community because a thriving community makes us thrive.”

Mary Ford Early Learning and Family Center Principal Ruth Taylor is thankful for their contribution.

“Because of the generosity of Staples, we were able to stock our student supply room to offer items needed in the classroom to support teaching and learning,” said Taylor. “The Mary Ford families and staff are indeed grateful to Staples for thinking of us, especially during this challenging time when COVID-19 has prevented some acquisition of resources for some students.”

West Ashley High robotics team wins state tournament championship

ROBOTICS TEAM 9623Z TOOK THE TOP SPOT AT THE VRC HIGH SCHOOL STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS



West Ashley High School’s robotics team, 9623Z - Zulu, competed at the VEX Robotics Competition (VRC) High School State Championship in Greenville, SC, and came away as the 2021 Tournament Champions. The victory secured West Ashley’s spot in the World Championship in May.

“I always set the expectation for my teams to qualify for the state championship,” said West Ashley Robotics Coach Nicholas Holmes. “Nationals and Worlds are different but State is kind of mandatory here at West Ashley Robotics. The last time we won was in 2016 and this time felt about the same as that, amazing! We work so hard all year to get to this point and we have had it slip through our fingers a few times. It was also special because the team that won in 2016 came to cheer on our teams this year. It was nice to have everyone there.”

West Ashley’s robotics team 9623Z - Zulu was named the Tournament Champions in the final alliance round with Palmetto Scholars Academy’s robotics team 9447H.

Team 9623Z includes seniors Oriana Perez and James Thorne, junior Brandon Gillner, and sophomores Karl Brenkert and Syniah Brown. The team also received the Innovate Award, which goes to the team whose unique engineering element demonstrates a group that thinks outside the box.

West Ashley High robotics team 9623X - BotX also participated in the state competition and finished in ninth place. The team consisted of seniors Gavin Wilgus and Khue Nguyen, juniors

Emily Taylor and Sullivan Markland, and sophomore Charlie Stavros. Nguyen’s coding skills helped them receive the Think Award which is given to a team with impressive and effective autonomous programming.

Gillner relates being a part of the robotics team to joining a sports team or another group where everyone matters and it takes the collective team to get things done well.

“It’s a sense of duty to perform and be the best and produce the best robots and win,” said Gillner. “My favorite part of being on the robotics team is when the countless hours after school that are put in around friends pay off, and you are able to say that you got to the place you are because of your whole team.”

This year, robotics teams competed against each other in a game called “Change Up.” Teams form an alliance made up of two robots that work together in a timed challenge to put 32 balls in the nine goals located around the field.

One goal equals one point. However, if teams create a connected row of goals in any direction (horizontally, vertically, diagonally), that team receives six bonus points.

Part of this year’s learning curve dealt with training themselves how to function in a COVID-19 world. Typically, the West Ashley Robotics Team consists of roughly 36 students building six robots, but due to current restrictions, the team is down to ten students and two robots. Despite a virtual start to the season,

there were a few advantages. The team was able to compete with groups from all over the world without ever leaving their classroom.

Team members accepted the changes considering they initially thought they wouldn’t compete after the shortened 2019–2020 season. They received the go-ahead to compete after implementing new safety precautions and other COVID- related safety measures.

“Mr. Holmes went above and beyond to ensure we have a season but that meant we would have to implement new restrictions,” said Perez. “It also meant making the team would be hard and that we had to work harder than ever before due to our season starting two months later than normal. We were determined to do well and make it the best we possibly could.”

The students agreed the greatest part of this season has been watching their hard work pay off.

“When I heard we won, I was in disbelief,” said Brenkert. “But I also felt an overwhelming sense of relief and accomplishment. I was incredibly excited that everything that we’d gone through all year paid off. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I’ll never forget! It taught me that hard work does pay off.”

Team 9623Z will represent West Ashley High at the World Championship from May 17-22, 2021. The event was originally scheduled to be in Dallas, TX but will now be run virtually.

Students at St. John’s building relationships with police officers one conversation at a time



Ofc. Jose Bordallo and senior Bruna De Jesus

St. John's High School students are having honest and frank conversations with members of the Charleston Police Department (CPD). These talks, called Community Circles, are part of a department initiative that puts officers in front of Charleston County School District (CCSD) students so that a structured dialogue can be used to bridge the gap between communities and law enforcement.

Master Police Officer Adam Deming is in his fourth year as the School Resource Officer at St. John's and facilitates the Community Circles. The idea came about last year before COVID-19 shut down schools and before the nation witnessed the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota in May of 2020. Floyd's passing was the latest in a series of high-profile killings of unarmed Black people by police in the country.

According to Deming the Community Circles were designed simply to provide a safe place for open discussion where students could ask questions, not just of him but of other police officers as well.

"I wanted the students to come and share and feel that they could be open and comfortable," said Deming. "There will be instances where a student may interact with law enforcement outside of school and I want them to have a positive experience with the next officer they come in contact with."

At St. John's the theme is "stronger together." Principal Steve Larson believes in giving his students a voice and with this endeavor, he hopes the takeaway is that "we're all in this together."

The students in attendance are allowed to participate with parent permission. On average there are about 25 students in attendance and the hope is that the circle will continue to grow.

Working with Director of Student Engagement Theresa Griffith and Instructional Coach Leslie McLaughlin, Deming was able to use the structure of the program to introduce students to his colleagues at the department. The format of the Community Circles follows the school's belief in restorative practices that addresses the needs of the whole student. There are set expectations of the circle keeper, the students, and the officers.

"We're creating activists and future leaders," said Griffith. "We are creating people who will go back into the community, give back, and create change; it's the types of changes that the kids want."

McLaughlin added the students can take the skills they are learning through this process to the outside world and use them in their everyday lives.

For St. John's senior Bruna De Jesus, Community Circles are a safe place to ask questions and have productive dialogue.

De Jesus explained that students pick the topics they want to discuss, prior to each meeting. Those topics range from police brutality, to how officers feel about how society views them, to general policing policies. Not all of the topics are law enforcement related, however. Social media, current events, and typical teenage concerns are also discussed.

"A lot of students had a prior mindset about police officers," said De Jesus. "As they got to know the officers, their minds changed and they realized these men and women were more than just a uniform or someone in authority. The conversations can be tough but they take place in a respectful way."

Ofc. Jose Bordallo is Latino and a Johns Island native. He is also the Latin liaison for CPD. Bordallo was chosen to participate in the Community Circle so that he could create connections with the Latino students at St. John's.

"It's good for the students to see a Latino officer in uniform serving his community," said Bordallo. "I am from John's Island so I am easily able to help provide resources and connections to things the students and their families may need."

Bordallo said he has witnessed an increased comfort level with the students and teachers. "The Community Circle has been beneficial because it humanizes us as officers and it shows the students they have access to us, should they need an officer," said Bordallo.

De Jesus said the experience has been positive for her and she is learning about policy.

"Knowing my rights and the policies that officers and departments must follow makes me feel safe," said De Jesus. "I know what I should and should not do and being armed with knowledge makes me feel safe."

CPD Lt. Jeff Harrison described the conversations as restorative because questions are raised, answers are given, and a better understanding is the end result.

The first Community Circle lasted three hours, and according to Harrison, it set the tone for being open and honest.

"We're seeing barriers being broken down and the students are getting more personal and interactive," said Harrison. "They are not as guarded and feel like they can ask us anything."

De Jesus has also formed a bond with SRO Deming and feels empowered to go to him with questions or concerns outside of the Community Circle. She said the experience has allowed her to feel connected to the other officers that participate as well.

"Communication is a great way to de-stigmatize everything," said De Jesus. "It changes the opinions we may have had growing up."

Swarkena Foggy, a junior, was nervous at first. After seeing her classmates make the leap and actively participate in the Community Circle, she jumped in with questions of her own.

Foggy said she did not distrust police officers prior to her participation in the Community Circle, but had mixed feelings as she followed the news during and after some notable events in 2020.

Sr. Officer Nicholas Brown said specifically that the students were interested in the riots in Charleston.

"The students wanted to know some of the inner workings of it, our responses, our reactions, and how we felt about it as people," said Brown. "Policing is one of those things that is multi-faceted. We do a multitude of things that encompasses our community and this is just one of them. We want the kids to see that we are out there working for them and our community."

"These discussions have given me the confidence to ask the hard questions and stand up for things I believe in," said Foggy. "As far as the student body, everyone coming together to talk opened a lot of eyes and probably helped expand their connections outside of this school to share with others that all police officers are not bad."

Sgt. Chris Koegler agreed. He believes that surrounding yourself with people who think differently than you do opens eyes and minds to better understanding.

"The students' willingness to be up front and get right into it was great to see," said Koegler. "They tackled the issues head-on and that's where we wanted it to be."

MPO Joseph Dela Rosa described the meeting as an environment where no one is being judged and a place where students can be in the company of police officers in a casual setting versus one in which they might be in trouble.

"This is showing me that what I say matters," said Foggy. "My questions, my thoughts, and my feelings matter. I applaud the officers who are participating and being willing to be put on the spot and answering questions that may be hard to answer."

Officer Deming and Brown, who have served CPD in a multitude of roles, were recently awarded a commendation from the department for spearheading this initiative.

"This has been a learning experience for the students, staff, and officers," said Deming. "It has been a positive way to bridge the gap. The open dialogue we have been able to have with these students will hopefully result in them feeling comfortable in coming to me or any other officer with problems, concerns or the need for advice."

The program has been so successful that it has now expanded to West Ashley High School, Burke High School, James Island Charter High School, and Haut Gap Middle School.



Community Circles

AMHS STUDENT REFURBISHES SEWING MACHINE AND DONATES TO SOA



Jeremiah Benton, a junior at Academic Magnet, restored this 95 year old sewing machine

A junior at Academic Magnet High School (AMHS) and his father recently had the opportunity to spend some quality time together working on an unlikely project.

Jeremiah Benton and his father Eugene were gifted a 1926 sewing machine by Mount Pleasant resident Shari Sebuck. The sewing machine belonged to her grandmother, Inez Ethel Arbogast Trent (born February 4, 1909), who was from a coal-mining town in St. Albans, WV. The sewing machine has a storied history.

“My grandmother used that sewing machine to sew anything and everything,” said Sebuck. “She sewed all of the family’s clothing, the bedding, and even the draperies. They were not a wealthy family, so the sewing machine was considered a necessity, not a luxury. It was utilitarian. My mom and her sisters would all switch dresses so people would think they had more clothes, and they did the same with shoes because they got one pair a year.”

Sebuck treasures the machine because it belonged to her grandmother but wanted to pass it on to someone who might use it and extend its useful life.

The Sebucks have known the Bentons for years. Eugene assisted Sebuck in cleaning out a storage unit after her mother’s death, and that is when they discovered the forgotten sewing machine. It occurred to Sebuck that Eugene and Jeremiah might enjoy refurbishing it. The father and son are known to tinker with various projects, so she offered it to them.

Eugene is not only handy with tools but is known to sew as well. As a volunteer parent at all of his children’s schools through the years, made sewing repairs to athletic padding and practice jerseys, among other things.

“I already have a few fancy sewing machines because I like making things,” said Eugene. “I like the art of sewing. I learned from my grandparents, who worked in industrial plants around South Carolina. When I saw that sewing machine in the storage unit, I immediately knew how old it was. That’s not to say it wasn’t in good condition. It was in great shape for how old it was.”

Eugene got the sewing machine safely home and tucked it away for a future project. That future project presented itself sooner than later. The COVID-19 pandemic hit, and Charleston went into lockdown. To pass the time, Jeremiah started tinkering with his 3D printer, making N95 masks at the Medical University of South Carolina’s request. It was a way for Jeremiah to give back to his community while earning community service hours required for graduation.

In the meantime, Eugene decided to pull out the sewing machine. He began taking it apart and looking at what kind of

work would be required to restore it properly. This project piqued Jeremiah’s interest.

The pair found the owner’s manual in a drawer that dated the machine to 1926. Inside another drawer of the 95-year-old machine was a handwritten letter from Sebuck’s mother to her mother (Sebuck’s grandmother). There was an old Sears & Roebuck catalog, needle and thread, measuring tape, and buttons. The machine also had all of its original parts.

Jeremiah is a product of Laing Middle School, where he excelled in the STEM curriculum. He had the engineering know-how and all of the necessary tools needed to complete the project.

“The sewing machine was very delicate, so we had to be very careful when cleaning it,” said Jeremiah. “It had been in storage for so long that we had to lightly wash the old wood and oil the hinges, especially the pedal. It all still worked perfectly.”

“It was a slow process because paint and varnish must dry properly before reassembly,” Eugene added. “Jeremiah used his Dremel to sand and polish. We matched the proper polyurethane and stain color for the base and paint color so we could refinish the cast iron base.”

The pair used lemon juice to deoxidize some of the metal, which he learned in 7th grade.

“It was neat to put that knowledge to use,” said Jeremiah.

The sewing machine is unique, according to Jeremiah, because it is operated by pumping a foot pedal which puts in motion a belt system. The belt is a genuine leather strap.

“We took great care to remove the leather strap for fear it would split or splinter,” said Jeremiah. “We didn’t want to damage it because you can’t replace it with an original part. They’re not available anywhere.”

Eugene likened this project to those of the ones Jeremiah worked on while a student at Laing.

“It was a hands-on project, all about taking it apart and putting it back together as good as new,” said Eugene. “Laing was a dream school for Jeremiah, and it prepared him greatly for Academic Magnet.”

“It has been a great pleasure witnessing Jeremiah’s service to our community through his skillful projects inspired by his interest in STEM,” said AMHS Principal Catherine Spencer. “We at Academic Magnet are thrilled to support his passion and look forward to his future path!”

The father and son donated the sewing machine to the costume and fashion design department at Charleston County School of the Arts (SOA), which shares a campus with AMHS.

“We wanted the legacy of Shari’s grandmother to live on,” said Eugene. “We wanted that legacy to live on through the kids in

the fashion design program. We wanted to allow students to see how far technology has come, even with sewing machines. With this old machine, you had to control the needle and thread with your hands. We thought it was a great idea to have students in fashion design see something that was 95-years-old and still in proper working order.”

“We are so grateful to receive such a unique piece of history,” said Kelly Martin, SOA’s costume and fashion design instructor. “It is an amazing way to show students how fashion has evolved and has been impacted by culture, economy, and location. To have something from a local family is an honor. This machine will show my students how past machines worked, how hard one had to work to make garments and how far technology has come.”

Martin said part of her curriculum delves into fashion history and understanding the progress the industry has made.

“The first sewing machines made proved to be 40 times faster than what could be done by hand,” said Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is interested in sewing himself. He became interested in it almost a year ago as he studied material science in his mechanical engineering courses.

“I spent five hours sewing a pair of leather gloves,” said Jeremiah. “I love fine fabrics and materials.”

Jeremiah was also impressed with the sewing machine’s beauty, made of dark wood during the industrial age, not long after World War I and the Great Depression.

“It was interesting to be part of that history, even if by simply restoring the piece,” said Jeremiah. “It’s even nicer to donate this sewing machine to the school to see what SOA does with it.”

Jeremiah has a bright future ahead. Colleges such as Clemson University, Columbia University, United States Military Academy West Point, Georgia Tech, MIT, Virginia, Ohio State, and the University of Florida have expressed interest in his attendance. In fact, one of the deans in Clemson’s Mechanical Engineering Department helped Jeremiah choose his senior classes.

“If I enroll at Clemson, I will be a sophomore in the Mechanical Engineering program and can get my masters within four years,” said Jeremiah. “My dream job would be to work at The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency or with Space X until I start my own company.”

SOA Principal Shannon Cook is appreciative of the gift.

“We at SOA appreciate the gift of this special sewing machine and the care and effort that resulted in its restoration,” said Cook. “It has found a place of honor in our hallway where it can be admired and appreciated.”



Before and after
Sewing machine before (left) and after (right)

District student engagement teams successful in reaching remote students

The Department of Alternative Programs and Services continues to partner with schools across Charleston County School District (CCSD) to reach remote learning students who are having trouble engaging.

“We were really worried about them,” said Jennifer Coker, Executive Director of Alternative Programs (DAP). “We created groups with individuals across all departments to go one by one down the list, starting with the schools that had the highest percentage of kids learning remotely.”

The teams have done everything from updating parent contact information to actual home visits. Those one-on-one conversations allowed school officials to discuss the barriers students were facing with remote learning and offer the needed support and solutions.

“The question was what can we do to support you to make sure your child is attending,” said Coker.

Supports include everything from enrollment in community Learning Pods, providing MiFi devices, food, housing, and school supplies.

“We learned that many families were simply having technology issues or needed school supplies,” said Coker. “Housing and food are big problems as well and if a family is struggling with that, then school is not going to be a priority.”

The success rate, after providing the necessary supports, was overwhelming, Coker explained. The effort began in the first semester with primarily North Charleston schools, and 207 families (241 students) were reached. Twenty-eight students returned to in-person learning and that number continues to grow, according to Coker.

“We want students to return to the classroom but in some cases, it is just not possible,” said Coker. “Many of these students and families had concerns about COVID-19 or had someone living in the home that is at risk. So we understand the need to stay home. We also understand that remote learning can be a challenge so we wanted to show our families that we are here to assist in any way that we can.”

Talecia Drayton, Prevention and Intervention Coordinator for DAP said the collaborative effort identified barriers and concerns with students and their families.

“This endeavor is a great way for us to collect data, connect with families, and connect families to district and community resources in an effort to help increase student engagement,” said Drayton.

DAP Director Dr. Shavonna Coakley said that as a district employee and parent to three CCSD scholars, who are all remotely attending school this year, she was grateful to be a part of this work.

“My insight into what is happening within the homes comes from the lens of knowing what most parents are feeling and the struggles our scholars are experiencing in balancing school, home, and life,” said Coakley. Therefore, I am able to establish



the connection needed to ensure the success of the scholar(s).”

According to Celina Anthony, Senior Instructional Program Consultant in CCSD’s Department of Federal Programs the students, their parents, and in some cases their grandparents, were appreciative of the effort.

“It was a pleasure to serve in the NCHS student engagement team under Dr. Kala Goodwine’s leadership,” said Anthony. “I contacted many Hispanic families whose children were learning virtually. Several were failing in one or more subjects and did not participate in many of the zoom lessons. We spoke to parents regarding students’ failing grades and their lack of participation in the Zoom lessons. We asked them if there was anything that the school could do to help them improve their grades. Also, we asked the parents if they have other needs that we can assist them with, such as food and clothing.”

Anthony said she was not surprised when North Charleston High School (NCHS) families said Mr. Darby, the school principal, visited them the other day.

“It was evident that the school was making a great effort to help students not only succeed academically but emotionally,” said Anthony.

“This pandemic has reminded us all that it truly takes a village,”

said Deer Park Middle School Principal Shanitra Deas. “Being able to provide our families with resources to not only to be successful in school, but also meet basic needs brings our district’s motto to life. We can’t do everything students and communities deserve, but students and communities deserve all we can do.”

Coker said that meeting with the families was a great way to form relationships so that when there is a question or a family needs help, they know who to contact.

Morningside Middle School Principal Michael White took a team out just before Christmas break.

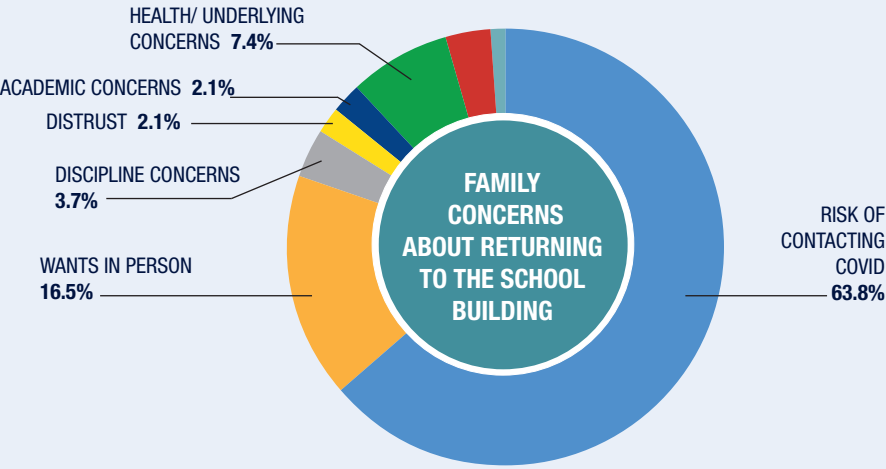
“The students were fascinated and smiling when they saw me come to their front door,” said White. “The ones we were able to talk to were excited to talk to us. Parents and guardians were better able to paint the picture for us as to what was going on at home so we could intervene with encouragement or resources.”

White said his team continues to conduct the outreach quarterly, not just to address absenteeism, but to identify and provide wrap-around services to families in need.

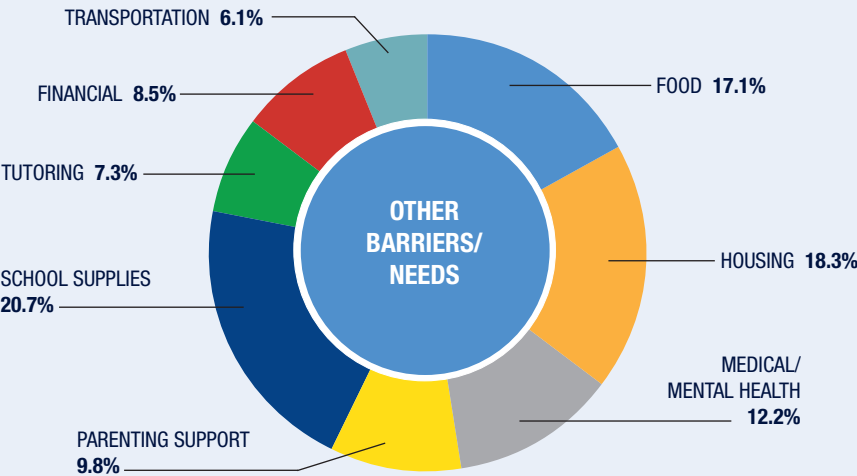
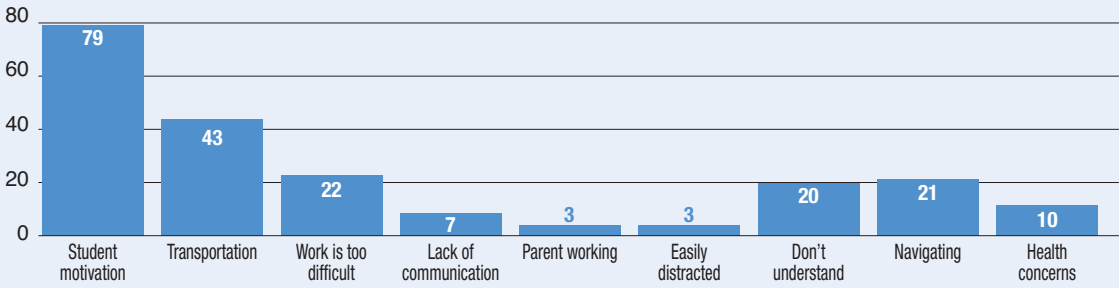
“It is important that we be intentional in all we do as educators and administrators at Morningside,” said White. “It is important for schools like ours to be intentional and more than just lip service.”



BY THE NUMBERS



BARRIERS TO REMOTE LEARNING



Focus ON CCSD

Focus on Charleston County School District is published for, by and about CCSD, the state of South Carolina’s premier school district where *Students are the Heart of our Work.*

Gerrita Postlewait, *Superintendent of Schools*
Erica Taylor, *Chief of Staff*
Sully Witte, *Communications Officer*

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