

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 2 | Edition 12 | December 2019



Gerrita Postlewait
Superintendent of Schools
Charleston County School District

Dear district colleagues,

Beginning Monday, December 23 we will be closed for winter break. As we begin to embark on our holiday celebrations and look toward the New Year, let's pause for a moment to reflect on how remarkable the CCSD family is. Thanks to you, our students have experienced academic success at all levels during the past year -- made possible through the commitment and dedication of teachers and staff.

Our district is made up of extraordinary people who are deeply committed to making this world a better place by investing in our students' futures. Our students strive to excel because they are motivated by educators who believe in them and encourage them to reach beyond their highest aspirations.

To all the CCSD family, I am honored to work with you every day, and I am blessed beyond measure to witness first-hand the success and accomplishments of students and staff.

May your holiday break be filled with cheer, warm memories, and happiness.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gerrita Postlewait
Superintendent of Schools
Charleston County School District

Balloons Over Broadway



Third grade students at St. Andrew's Math and Science read *Balloons Over Broadway* then researched the history of the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade. Students then worked in groups to design and make balloons. Finally they put on a parade for the school to see.

BOARD APPROVES BROAD RANGE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In recent weeks, the list of recommendations before Charleston County School District Board of Trustees has stirred impassioned conversations among staff members and parents about the kind of schools we have and the kind we will have in the future. These recommendations culminate more than a year's work including the Shared Future initiative, Mission Critical Action community teams, listening sessions in all the county's constituent district areas, school-level meetings and public meetings. Even though all of the recommendations have not been voted on by the Board, I wanted to share with you a summary of the actions that were approved on November 18. The following have been approved for implementation:

- Mary Ford Elementary will become the district's first Early Childhood and Family Engagement Center for 4K and 5K students and eligible 0-2 year olds in August 2020. Chicora Elementary will become a 1-5 school to include Mary Ford students.
- 15 schools were designated as "Acceleration Schools" based on recent academic performance by individual schools or by a feeder pattern of schools. Those schools will receive intensive care in order to accelerate academic growth. Conversations are currently being held regarding the possibility of asking the State Board of Education for waivers from some regulations to allow these schools more autonomy. Those waivers could include areas such as length of school day/week/year; teacher certification in some subjects; and teacher evaluation processes.
- Somewhat connected to the Acceleration Schools is the concept of "schools of choice" that would allow selected schools to request additional waivers from regulations and would also create the possibility that some schools would be "partnership-managed schools." A recent Solicitation for Interest resulted in three partnership proposals for next year: Engaging Creative Minds at Sanders-Clyde Elementary, a College of Charleston teacher residency at a school TBD, and a University of Virginia leadership program with several schools TBD. There were also five turnaround proposals for partnership-management. Those proposals are currently being vetted by a committee, and any resulting recommendations would be presented to the Board by January. It is important to note that Acceleration Schools don't necessarily become partnership-managed. Also, regardless of the designation, all the schools remain public schools serving a neighborhood attendance zone. There is no plan to privatize these schools, period.
- The CCSD gifted program will be revamped with local placement policies to ensure that every school serves at least the top 5% of students in grades 3-8.
- All CCSD staff members will receive cultural competency training and an advisory group will be formed on diversity and inclusion.
- The College of Charleston and West Ashley High School will partner to establish an Advanced Academic Program at West Ashley built around Advanced Placement and college-credit coursework.
- District 10's 6-8 students will be merged into one feeder pattern with grade 6 likely to be located at West Ashley Middle and grades 7-8 at C.E. Williams Middle beginning in Fall 2020.
- Haut Gap Middle will move grade 5 back to the feeder elementary schools beginning in Fall 2020.
- Several recommendations related to partial magnets, and to date the Board Committee of the Whole has voted to continue magnet status for Sullivan's Island Elementary, Laing Middle, St. Andrews Math & Science, Ashley River Creative Arts (with a small attendance zone), North Charleston Creative Arts, Jennie Moore Elementary creative arts, E.B. Ellington advanced academics, and Haut Gap Middle. There will be more discussion and a final vote at the Dec. 16 Board meeting.
- Three new elementary school projects will be among those added to the sales tax referendum vote in November 2020: a new Ladson Elementary at Ingleside and conversion of the current Ladson to a 4-5K Early Childhood and Family Engagement Center; a new elementary campus for the merger of Hunley Park, Lambs, and W.B. Goodwin Elementaries on the current Lambs campus. Either Hunley Park or Goodwin will be converted to a 4-5K Early Childhood and Family Engagement Center; and a new elementary school in Constituent District 9.
- Studies will be conducted in two areas: the feasibility of creating one Montessori middle school to house grades 7-8 from Murray LaSaine, James Simons, Hursey, and Montessori Community schools; and the feasibility of combining, merging, or rezoning schools with fewer than 500 students within the next 3-5 years.

The Board will consider on Dec. 16 the recommendations related to Academic Magnet High School, Buist Academy, Memminger Elementary, and partial magnets that were carried over from the November meeting. Updates on those decisions will be shared in next month's FOCUS.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Lowcountry Food Bank	2
Cario Middle's Daffodil Project	2
Grounds maintenance excellence award	2
Run for the Fallen.....	3
Mental Wellness	3
Project SEARCH.....	4
Mt. Zion 5K	4
We See You	4

DISTRICT'S PARTNERSHIP WITH LOWCOUNTRY FOOD BANK ADDRESSES NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS



Lowcountry Food Bank employee sorts school orders



Lowcountry Food Bank delivers items monthly to each school



A student volunteer helps organize Backpack Buddy supplies

Since 2006, the Charleston County School District (CCSD) has partnered with the Lowcountry Food Bank (LCFB) to serve at-risk students through a program called Backpack Buddies Program.

The mission is to meet the needs of children at risk of hunger or homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act by providing them with nutritious and easy-to-prepare food to take home on weekends and school vacations when they do not have access to free and reduced-price school meals.

Through partnerships with civic, business, faith-based, academic and community organizations over the past eight years, the LCFB's Backpack Buddies Program has grown tremendously.

LCFB delivers items monthly to each school and students

are sent home with food every Friday.

According to Sonya Jones, CCSD's Title I Programs Compliance Administrator in the Department of Federal Programs, the Lowcountry Food Bank began collaborating with the district's Department of Federal Programs, during the 2015-2016 school year.

"To date, over 29,000 bags have been distributed and currently, up to 177 students are receiving assistance each month," said Jones.

Just like with the traditional Backpack Buddies model, approximately 4-lb. bags of kid-friendly, shelf-stable food (including cans of pasta and vegetables, fruit cups, shelf-stable milk, cereal, fruit strips, pudding cups, and whole grain cookies) are sent home with students every Friday

during the school year. Unlike the traditional model, these bags follow the students to the schools they may be attending.

Jones said the Lowcountry Foodbank wants to make a difference because they realized that students whose families are experiencing economic instability might end up moving multiple times during a school year, which can disrupt a student's learning in many ways, and they do not want hunger to be another challenge.

"CCSD is tremendously thankful to the Lowcountry Foodbank for providing this opportunity for students in need," said Jones.

If you have any questions contact Sonya Jones in the Department of Federal Programs at 843-937-7920.

Cario Middle memorializes Holocaust victims through Daffodil Project



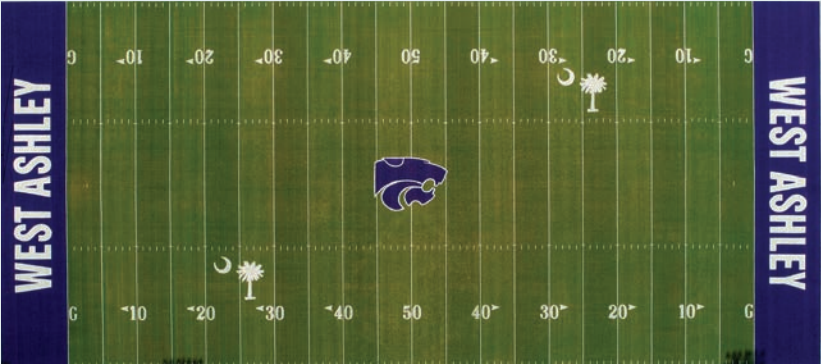
Cario Middle School students, parents, school staff, and community members participated in the Daffodil Project November 25 and 26, 2019 as a way to memorialize Holocaust victims.

The program aspires to build a worldwide Living Holocaust Memorial by planting 1.5 million Daffodils in memory of the children who perished in the Holocaust and in support for children suffering in humanitarian crises in the world today.

Eighth grade students and staff at Thomas C. Cario Middle School heard stories from Holocaust survivors Ann Fields and Joe Engle and then planted daffodils on campus and created a garden in their memory.



PGMS salutes Charleston County School District for grounds maintenance excellence



An image of West Ashley High Football Field taken with the Mechatronics teacher's drone

Charleston County School District (CCSD) Facilities Management Division was the only K-12 school district to receive an Honor Award from the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS).

CCSD competed in the Society's 2019 Green Star Awards® competition. The award was given in the Athletic Fields category for exceptional grounds maintenance. Winners were honored during the Society's 2019 Awards Dinner held October 17, 2019 in conjunction with the School of Grounds Management & GIE+EXPO in Louisville, KY, October 15-18, 2019.

The second-largest school district in the state of South Carolina, CCSD serves more than 50,000 students at 87 locations with 60 acres of athletic turf, which includes 30 acres of athletic fields. Being very close to sea level, the grounds team is careful with pesticide application and utilizes organic-based products when possible.

West Ashley High School was the focus of the Green Star Award submission, according Ron Kramps, CCSD Associate of Facilities Management.

"I am so thankful for our Plant Operations and Service Solution team and their expertise in maintaining our athletic field," said Kramps. "The fields are beautifully maintained and this award is a fitting recognition of their dedicated service to CCSD."

The Green Star Awards program brings national recognition to grounds maintained with a high degree of excellence, complimenting other national landscape award programs that recognize outstanding landscape design and construction.

Overall, PGMS presented six Grand Awards, its highest honor, as well as 14 Honor Awards and four Merit Awards in nine categories of competition. To view a complete list of winners, please visit www.PGMS.org.



Military magnet students participate in Run for the Fallen



Sgt. Luis Hernandez’s students at Military Magnet Academy participated in The SC chapter of Run For The Fallen in November. The run honors soldiers from South Carolina who have died fighting in the War on Terror. Each mile of sweat and pain and each flag saluted is to pay homage to each service member’s life and their family.

The run across South Carolina is to raise awareness for the lives of those who fought and died, to rejuvenate their memories and keep their spirits alive and to aid in the healing process for the South Carolina residents whose lives have been affected by war.

Initially, runners were scheduled to pass by the school where a water station would be set up. Hernandez took it a step further and assembled members of MMA’s Cross Country Team to also participate in the run.

The team of six runners Garnaris McCormick, Xavier White, Brandon Fancy, Anthony Cruz, William Herard, and Malik Bennett arrived at Liberty Square in downtown Charleston at 6:45 a.m. and met with Mayor John Tecklenburg and others who had gathered to send the group off on their 122 mile journey to the State Capital in Columbia.

MMA runners were prepared to run the first 5.3 miles which culminated at the Military Magnet Academy campus. As the group passed MMA the street was lined with faculty, staff, and students who had gathered to cheer on the runners. There were police escorts as well as a live feed of the runners as they progressed through the city and up Rivers Avenue.

The Cross Country team also took turns carrying flags as well.

“All the young men were excited to have been able to take part in this terrific event, honoring those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country,” said Hernandez.



MENTAL WELLNESS IMPORTANT TO BEING EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS



This relaxation room at Northwoods Middle School is aimed at addressing mental wellness



Teachers and staff at Northwoods are encouraged to use the relaxation room in an effort to help create mindfulness

“Healthy Bodies; Healthy Minds; Healthy futures” is not just a motto at Northwoods Middle School – it’s becoming a school culture. Administrators there are trying new things every day to benefit not just their students, but their teachers and staff as well.

In an effort to support staff at the middle school, a relaxation room has been established so teachers can get away for a few minutes from the hustle and bustle of the workday.

Principal Colleen Knauer said that from October to January, teachers (especially first-year educators) are under an inordinate amount of stress. Ensuring mental wellness is important to Knauer because it results in a positive learning atmosphere for both teachers and students.

In addition, data shows that investments in a teacher’s well-being results in greater teacher retention.

“When you have a place to go, even if for just a few minutes, you can center yourself and relax,” said Knauer. “Acknowledging the importance of our staff’s mental wellness has been beneficial and it is reflective in our teacher retention.”

This large space, which was turned into a relaxation room in September, was previously being used for storage. Coach Megan Reilly, school nurse Marcie Freeman, and guidance counselor Monica Vallejo came up with the idea of redoing the room to create a space for teachers.

“We realized some other schools in the district were providing similar areas,” said Freeman. “It is important to allow teachers to take a health and wellness break – away from the craziness of the day – in a quiet and relaxing atmosphere.”

A private lactation room features a comfortable lounge chair and mini-fridge for storage. Adjacent is another room for

individuals to participate in silent meditation. Both rooms open to a larger room featuring lounge chairs, couches, a hammock, and yoga mats.

“Teachers often arrive at school early to relax and start the day with a mindful approach,” said Reilly. “They are also encouraged to come during the day whenever their schedule allows.”

Like dozens of other schools in Charleston County School District (CCSD), Northwoods participates in the MUSC Boeing Center for Children’s Wellness initiative (BCCW) which was developed as a partnership between MUSC and CCSD to improve the district’s wellness culture. Schools follow a checklist and are awarded grant funding to implement wellness initiatives each year.

“We were motivated by the checklist because we realized we didn’t do well with adult wellness and sustainability,” said Reilly.

Knauer is the administrator in charge of the school’s wellness committee and has been a champion of all ideas surrounding student and staff’s health and wellness. She was more than happy to give the project her blessing.

“I’ve been at Northwoods for ten years and teacher retention has been a significant hurdle,” said Reilly. “Under Knauer’s leadership that has improved. She hired the least amount of teachers in the last four years while adding 160 more students [due to a rezoning that recently took place]. Investing in your teachers, even with small gestures like this relaxation room, can make all the difference in the world.”

Feedback has been positive, Reilly said.

“I am super excited to come here every day,” said Reilly. “But every-so-often things [that are not school-related] happen. Stuff comes up and derails your life just a tad. This room offers a place to let that go or work that through so

that we can be at our mental best.”

Much of the furnishings used to outfit the rooms were donated and \$600 from the Wellness Grant was used for cushions, lighting, and paint. Reilly, Vallejo and Reilly’s father donated their time to paint the room and Coach Liz Whiteman painted murals on the wall.

Once a month local chiropractors and massage therapists come to the school and offer 10-minute chair massages during the school day for teachers to get pampered on their planning period, which Reilly said is huge for morale.

In addition, Sara Newer is teaching yoga there every Wednesday after school.

“The students we serve demand a lot of us,” said Reilly. “They need us to be at our best. If we can take a few minutes every day to better ourselves we can better serve as encouraging adults and bring mindfulness to the school day.”

“Sometimes educators need a place to gather that doesn’t feel like school,” said Knauer. “This room is even more special because they’re not prone to treat it like a teacher’s lounge. If you’re centered, you can educate students better. If you take care of yourself, you can take care of your students better.”

Melody Chabala is a language arts teacher that utilizes the room most mornings before the start of school. She started taking yoga classes five years ago but never really bought into the notion of meditation. Chabala now uses the relaxation room two to three times a week before school to clear her mind and start the day off on the right foot.

“Myself and another teacher use a meditation application and put a timer on for five minutes,” said Chabala. “It is hard to make time for yourself, but it is so very important.”

Project SEARCH puts students on path to employment



Brandon Babcock is a West Ashley High School student enrolled in the Project SEARCH intern program



Cameron Poplin is a Wando student working in the maintenance division



John Bloomingburg has already secured a job thanks to the training he is receiving with this internship



Nikki DeWitte is a Wando student working in the housekeeping department at Embassy Suites through the Project SEARCH program

Charleston County School District (CCSD) proudly boasts a program that provides career readiness skills for children with exceptional needs. Project SEARCH, which was implemented last year in partnership with AccessAbility, Embassy Suites Hotel, Vocational Rehabilitation, and SC Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, is a program to prepare students for meaningful employment in the modern workforce. Interns started this August.

The Project SEARCH Transition-to-Work Program is a unique, business-led, one-year employment preparation program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. The program culminates in individualized job development.

This year, students from Burke, School of the Arts, Wando and West Ashley High School are enrolled in the program which is held on-site at Embassy Suites.

Grant and district money fund the program which was the result of high-level collaboration coordinated by Mary Stahl, Special Education Coordinator for the Department of Exceptional Children.

Paula Carr, the Project SEARCH instructor for CCSD explained that the students are immersed in the job environment fairly quickly. Like any employee, upon arrival, they sign in and report to their department manager.

The students are spread out into various roles from house-keeping to maintenance to food and beverage.

About mid-morning the students report to class where she instructs them on job safety, self-advocacy, communications skills and more.

“I work with the students to polish the skills they’ll need to utilize on the job,” said Carr.

The students enjoy lunch in the breakroom with the other employees and then report back to their department. At the end of the day, another instructional period is held to allow for a question and answer period and an opportunity for their accomplishments to be recognized.

“We talk about what they’ve mastered and what areas they need help in,” said Carr. “We also brainstorm on how we can help each other.”

Cameron Poplin is a senior at Wando. He enrolled in the program because he was drawn to the hands-on experience it offered.

“I enjoy it because we work on something different every day,” said Poplin. “We fix lights,

valves, clean AC units, and change batteries in room locks.”

Poplin is optimistic this training will lead to future employment in the industry.

The chance of obtaining gainful employment is the main goal of the program, Carr explained. “Ideally the students would be placed in full-time employment here at Embassy Suites, however, the skills they’re learning are certainly transferable.”

Not only does the Project SEARCH internship help these students, but the employees of Embassy Suites have embraced the idea of inclusion and embraced these students.

Kobe Oree, a Wando senior enjoys working in the program

“My favorite part is washing windows,” said Oree. “I hope this will help me get a full-time job when I am an adult so that I can be independent.”

John Bloomingburg works in what is considered public areas of the hotel, such as the lobby. He vacuums and washes windows.

“What I like most about the job is meeting new people, and working with a lot of great people,” said Bloomingburg.

Stahl hopes leaders at Embassy Suites gain an

appreciation for the possibilities they can offer students.

“They’re now seen as members of the team at the hotel and that’s thanks to the employees taking the time to teach them quality skills and giving them the room to execute those skills,” said Stahl.

“Each month I send out a newsletter to the staff featuring an ‘Intern of the Month’ and the employees in their departments brag on the student. The employees here are some of their biggest cheerleaders.”

The parents of these students are appreciative of the program.

“The parents knew their child was exiting high school and were not sure what the next step was,” said Carr. “Project SEARCH will allow the students to transition into the real world.”

More importantly, the interns are very happy with the program.

“At the end of the program they’ve gained the confidence needed to do the work independently,” said Carr. “The point is to help them reach developmental milestones. They understand that they’re making a difference, and just like everyone else in this world, they want to do something that has purpose.”

MOUNT ZION 5K



Nine Mount Zion Elementary School students and some of their parents completed their first 5K at the Bohicket Marina 5K on November 16, 2019. A few of them placed in their age group. Guidance counselor and running coach, Diemchi Nguyen, trained them for six weeks leading up to the race, and they did a fabulous job by all finishing Zion 5K the run. Student entries were sponsored by Kiawah Cares.

WE SEE YOU

School Resource Officers are often the first thing students see every day when they arrive at school. They serve as more than just a law enforcement officer, they are a friend, a mentor and sometimes a parental figure.

We see these men and women show kindness and compassion to the most vulnerable

members of our society. So, in appreciation of their service to Charleston County School District scholars, we honor them for what they do – for it so profoundly impacts every individual in the school communities where they so selflessly serve.

To nominate your school resource officer, please email sully_witte@charleston.k12.sc.us.

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*

Charleston County School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or any other applicable status protected by federal or state law. Questions about non-discrimination policies should be sent to Charleston County School District, 75 Calhoun Street, Charleston, SC 29401.



Olenthial J. Faison
Master Deputy
Charleston County Sheriff's Office
Baptist Hill Middle High School

What brought you into this work?

I have a strong passion for helping people.

What makes the position of School Resource Office unique?

With all of the negative incidents on social media/news about Law Enforcement Officers, what better ways that a Law Enforcement Officer can build a relationship and trust with the community and the future children of tomorrow.

What makes the school community you serve so special?

The people in the community are so helpful and are good hearted people.

What is your favorite part of the day?

The children of Baptist Hill Middle/High School.