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## Media Release



Early College High School

### **Pulse of CCSD – Tanesha Simmons is the heart and soul of Early College**

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**Charleston, SC** – The morals and values instilled in us as children likely follow us into adulthood, shaping our character and guiding our moral compass. That is certainly the case for Early College High School Student Concern Specialist Tanesha Simmons. She is described by her colleagues as the heart and soul of Early College.

As a young girl growing up on Johns Island, Simmons adored the giving hearts of her parents. They farmed their 100 acres of land for over 60 years and their bountiful harvest fed many in the community. Her father did not believe in food going to waste. If he had it to give, it was there for the taking.

“My parents instilled in me a giving mindset,” said Simmons. “If someone is in need, you help them. You do not ask why they are in need or judge them. You do not give to others for recognition. You give to those in need in hopes that they’ll one day be able to pay it forward.”

In her role as a Student Concern Specialist she gives to students in the form of love, encouragement, mentoring and so much more.

“My purpose in life is to help children and mold them into positive young adults,” said Simmons. “I have to be the example for them.”

Principal Vanessa Denney said Simmons is a true servant leader.

“She shows students that light and hope can be found in any situation,” said Denney. “She encourages all the members of our school community and in turn empowers everyone around her to meet their greatest potential.”

Simmons’ attended Mount Zion Elementary School, Haut Gap Middle School, and St. John’s High School. She began her studies in culinary arts and dabbled in

classes to become a nail technician. She even started her early childhood education.

Motherhood put some of those plans on hold and what she noticed in the following years as she was in and out of the classroom with her own children, was how much assistance a teacher needed to run a successful classroom. She was drawn toward a career that could assist students and teachers but wasn't sure what that might be beyond being a room mother and serving on the PTA.

However, a substitute teaching position became available at Mt. Zion which fortunately turned into a long-term position in 2015. While there she established an etiquette club for young girls that covered everything from proper hygiene to fine dining. It was so popular that a young boys club was established as well and run by a local pastor. The two groups often joined forces to complete community service projects.

Simmons' career tended to follow her children to the schools they attended. Her daughter was in the inaugural class at Early College and struggled that first year. Simmons thought that she could better motivate her daughter if she was there with her. A position became available at the front desk and in 2018, Simmons joined the team.

That year turned out to be a success for Simmons and her daughter – and many of the other students there. They witnessed the magic in the way Simmons mentored her own daughter and were drawn to her. They came for advice, direction and just someone to talk to.

"They realized that I was someone they could talk to," said Simmons. "I was easily able to help them break down whatever it was they were trying to work through."

Then destiny shined on Early College and Simmons. The perfect position opened up and Simmons was hired as the Student Concern Specialist. Now she can purposefully celebrate their achievements, help them set goals, and connect them to resources that will ensure their academic success.

"The bonds I have created with these students continue to grow," said Simmons. "They confide in me and we work through their issues in a non-judgmental way."

When Simmons watched every single student from the first graduating class walk across the stage she beamed with pride. The students beamed back, many thanking her for pushing them to succeed and pursue their futures.

Simmons makes it her mission to protect and provide for each student. She conducts home visits, makes personal calls to parents, and gives her cell phone number to anyone that asks for it. She considers herself to be a 24-hour hotline for her Early College family.

"People love it when you help their children and it motivates parents to get on board and go the extra mile," said Simmons. "Communication is key when it comes to the parents. They are aware of every assignment and opportunity provided to their child."

Homelife plays a role in the uniqueness of the student body at Early College. Many of the students are below the poverty line and their families struggle. Some live with single parents who work multiple jobs to make ends meet. This requires the students to be a babysitter to their siblings. Some students have to work to help the family pay bills. Some become homeless.

Simmons helps students balance their home life and rigorous academic requirements. She provides families with resources and even money for groceries. She's secured temporary hotel lodging for families, given students rides to and from schools, and even secured a school bus stop for a student facing transportation issues which in turn helped five other students.

Just as crucial as these community resources are the academic resources provide to students. AVID and the academic Lab help students stay on track, map out deadlines and provide extra help for those who are struggling.

"It is so easy to complain about the small things in our lives but you never know who has it worse than you do," said Simmons. "Children who see their parent struggle internalize it and truly feel the pain of that struggle. My role is to help them find a solution, remind them of the amazing opportunity they have as a student at Early College and keep them focused with their head in the game."

Simmons is grateful to be a part of the Early College family. She enjoys watching the students of all ages mentor each other and push their peers to succeed. She describes it as a 'no man left behind' approach.

"That goes for the staff too," said Simmons. "This is the first place that I've worked where we all get along and genuinely love each other. If we need help, we ask and it is received. We celebrate each other and support each other. Most importantly, every teacher supports every student."

"Ms. Simmons is a remarkable person, and we are so lucky that she is a part of the Early College family," added Denney.

The 2020-2021 school year brought a new joy to Simmons. She was able to work with the seniors (the first graduating class) on applying for scholarships. Many students, including her daughter, received more scholarship money than they needed.

"That speaks volumes to the hard work and dedication these students put in," Simmons explained. "I'll continue to do the same for each class after that."

What Simmons hopes each graduate takes away with them is that once they walk across that stage, they can go and do and be anything they want to be.

"We can't forget where we came from, or how we got to where we are today," said Simmons. "But we can dream big."

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

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 49,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), music and other creative and performing arts, career and technical preparation programs, and military.