

**For Immediate Release**

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# Media Release

## **Pulse of CCSD - Dennis Burgess and team keep things up and running**

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**Charleston, SC** – Overseeing nine million square feet of building space (the equivalent of 4500 homes sized at 2,000 square feet) was not what Dennis Burgess envisioned when he pondered a second career.

But today, 18 years later, Burgess is a Plant Operations Officer for Charleston County School District (CCSD).

He and his team oversee custodial cleaning, lawn care, heavy equipment operation, trash, recycling and composting, pest control, playgrounds warehouse operations, pick up and deliveries, used furniture and public auctions, operations and maintenance of Head Start facilities, storm water ponds, and athletic fields.

It's a monumental task enthusiastically taken on by a hybrid team of CCSD personnel and contracted personnel. CCSD employs 21 hourly team members and four salaried managers. There are more than 650 contracted employees. Six hundred of those are the cleaning staff. The other contractors consist of delivery drivers or they are embedded in other areas like the heavy equipment shop.

"I spent 20 years at Kmart and now 18 years with the district," said Burgess. "I love it. This is a great job. I never envisioned working for a school district in my life, but I have a lot of enjoyment for what I do."

### **Operations**

Burgess grew up in Illinois until high school. His mother wanted to be closer to her parents who were living in the Upstate of South Carolina at the time. She chose the Lowcountry and enrolled Burgess at Goose Creek High School.

When he became a senior in August of 1982, he took on a part time job at Kmart and went full time when he graduated.

"As a teenager, I liked working on cars with my friends," said Burgess. "I worked as a mechanic for Kmart couple of years and eventually wanted to switch gears and go into management."

Burgess became a part-time manager and worked his way through the store management training program, eventually becoming an assistant manager and then Director of Operations.

From 1994 to 2002, he served as assistant operations manager and then co-director of operations for Kmart. When the corporation announced their plans to file for bankruptcy in 2002, Burgess saw the writing on the wall.

Burgess began his search for facility operations positions and came upon the opening with CCSD. He was hired as a custodial and grounds manager August 1, 2002.

Through the years, there were various reorganizations within the department which allowed Burgess to be promoted. He has been a department head since 2009.

It's a perfect fit for someone like Burgess who is task oriented.

"I get a lot of satisfaction from completing the tasks before us," said Burgess. "Everything we do has a direct impact on the kids and the staff in those buildings such as replacing the carpet in a classroom. Those things have such an impact on everyone."

"I can scarcely say enough good things about Dennis Burgess," said Ron Kramps, Associate of Facilities Management. "When I think of the unsung heroes (and we have many) Dennis is at the top of that list. Few people realize the vastness and importance of his responsibilities and fewer are able to appreciate how many events and day-to-day operations go so well because of his personal attention and expert management of facility operations."

The facilities team often receives praise and thanks, but according to Burgess, being in charge of cleaning and pest control doesn't lend itself to lots of positive feedback.

"We must be self-satisfied with doing these jobs," said Burgess. "They are not high profile or fancy but what we do does provide an element of safety and health for our students so they can achieve academically."

Burgess said that there are multiple opportunities that occur every day that require decision making and problem solving. Not only does his leadership team such as Jeff Tisdale, Mike Johnson, Jeff Smith, and Jeremiah Mitchell depend on him to make the right decisions, but so do his immediate team members.

"It is never a dull monument," said Burgess. "We are always busy. There are some great people that I work with. I may lead them but they are really the ones with the boots on ground doing the work."

Their latest endeavor was coordinating in-person diploma ceremonies. Two weeks before the first one was to take place, his team was notified.

"We nailed down the specifics, organized the rentals of stages, seating, equipment etc., and the event took place seven days later," said Burgess. "It was quite challenging."

"Kramps used his experience as Navy officer and incorporated those into our processes much more organized and efficient," said Burgess. "He is a great leader. He listens to all of our ideas and gives us the autonomy to make decisions to get things done."

That autonomy would come in handy when Governor Henry McMaster mandated that schools be closed due to COVID-19 in March.

The cleaning methods and procedures already employed by CCSD were more than effective against corona virus, according to Burgess.

"As a result of COVID-19 we did provide more oversight to make sure we were doing everything we were supposed to be doing," said Burgess. The only addition we implemented was the fogging machines."

Burgess explained that the machines were already being utilized to clean school weight rooms and locker rooms. The machines are powerful enough to clean a whole hallway of classrooms if the doors are open during the process.

"We had that technology in use for six years at locker rooms in high schools," added Burgess. "Cleaning those type of rooms is very difficult because of the nature of the equipment in the weight and locker rooms. The fogging machines also eliminate human error. We'll take this concept and continue to use it in the fall when we return to school."

"Dennis brought years of experience in private sector facility operations and logistics, so he applies a rigorous, "get it done right" mind-set to everything he does," said Kramps. "I trust him to manage anything thrown at him with precision and attention to detail."

Burgess' job is very demanding and requires him to wear a lot of hats. As a result, he and Gina, wife of 31 years, enjoy their country-style living in Givhans. That's where those hats get to come off, briefly, during weekends and holidays.

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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.