



For Immediate Release

April 3, 2020

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Media Release

Pulse of CCSD – Jessica Bryant is proud to be a teacher

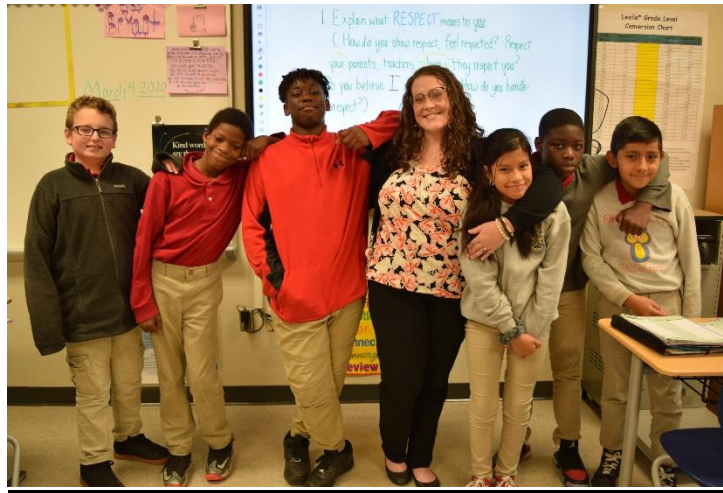
Haut Gap Middle School

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Karolyn Belcher
Chief Academic Officer

Joseph Williams, Ed.D.
Executive Director of Middle School
Learning Community

Travis Benintendo
Principal



Charleston, SC – Jessica Bryant, an associate reading teacher at Haut Gap Middle School, takes great pride in being a teacher. She put in the hard work to become an educator and wasn't going to let a horrific, freak accident prevent her from living out her passion.

Bryant was offered her first job with Charleston County School District in 2012. She wished in her heart that she could find a teaching job on the coast but never hung her hopes on it. Jane Edwards Elementary School's former principal, Susan Miles offered her a position teaching kindergarten.

Bryant and her son Luca moved to a home on Edisto Island and her teaching career was in full swing. Bryant was determined to advance her career and perfect her craft and committed to observing other kindergarten teachers so she could replicate best practices in her own classroom.

On February 24, 2016, she was making her way to another school to do just that. A storm had come in off the coast, but nothing that put her on alert. However, as she traveled to Minnie Hughes Elementary School, a tornado came

out of nowhere and picked up her car and slammed it back down into an oak tree.

Bryant woke up 11 days later at the Medical University of South Carolina. She had four blood clots in her lungs, went into cardiac arrest, and flatlined. Countless bones were broken and shattered. The healing process would take four years.

Bryant tried to return to the classroom twice but she reinjured herself and district officials determined it would be better for her to heal completely before deciding if she should return to teaching. In Bryant's mind, returning to teaching was not even a question.

"The accident and the injuries are not who I am, it's a thing that happened to me," said Bryant. "It showed me and others what I am made of. CCSD has been so good to me. They allowed me to take my time and were so patient with me so that I could heal my body. For that, I'll be forever grateful."

Setting the example

"I have to be an example for my son," said Bryant. "I did not want him to think I took the easy way out. My mom was a single mom and she went and handled her business so she could provide and I was determined to do the same thing."

Bryant takes great pride in being a teacher.

"It's such a worthy profession and I didn't want to give that up," said Bryant. "I knew I could do it. I just needed to work on healing first."

Principal Travis Benintendo said that Bryant's determination is contagious.

"Students are meeting reading goals and improving their reading lexiles due to her high expectations," said Benintendo. "Her students thrive in the positive learning environment that she has created. Students who are not enrolled in her class have actually requested to have Ms. Bryant as their teacher."

The road to becoming an educator wasn't a straight one. Bryant graduated from high school and was at that age where, in her words, she thought she knew more than everyone else.

About six years later, she learned she was expecting her first child.

"I was told I couldn't have children, so this totally changed my world," said Bryant. "I imagined how I would raise him and the path I would want him to take. Then it occurred to me that I would be a hypocrite if I was not involved in the system. So I began college at Anderson University 11 days after he was born and became certified."

Since the accident, there are restrictions on what Bryant can do. Bending down and handling a roomful of kindergarteners was not on the list.

"So when the reading coach position became available at Haut Gap and I met my rock star principals and this amazing staff, I knew I had found my new teaching home," said Bryant.

Benintendo thinks she's the rock star.

"She has quickly become a student and staff favorite due to her ability to connect with people with her warm personality," said Benintendo. "Ms. Bryant is a genuine asset to the Haut Gap family."

Bryant teaches six classes a day and they are small enough to really get to know each student and form individual bonds with them.

"The lightbulb moments these kids have is what drives my passion," said Bryant. "Teaching someone to read is literally a miracle. When I taught kindergarten, many students had no concept of reading; when they moved to the next grade they could read. I am still experiencing that with these students, but on a different level."

Bryant explained that as the confidence of her students improves, so does her own self-esteem.

"I get to come into this classroom every day and make a difference in their lives," said Bryant. "I'm helping them prepare for the rest of their lives and in all other areas of their academics. It just really drives my passion."

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools that spans 1,000 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.