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## **The Pulse of CCSD – Kelly Burbage is making a difference at Mitchell Elementary**

### **Julian Mitchell Elementary School**

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**Charleston, SC** – Every week Julian Mitchell Elementary School librarian Kelly Burbage chooses a different theme such as chickens, space, or unicorns.

“The joy for me is reading to the students and watching them learn about that topic,” said Burbage. “The library is where you set the stage for the love of reading. The library gives students the opportunity to explore what interests them.”

What drives Burbage is the opportunity to connect with the students through literature.

“I love finding a new book that a student enjoys and reading aloud and interacting with the kids,” said Burbage. “I often slip in information about careers, especially science because we’re a partial science magnet.”

Burbage’s service to children is so much more than that though, according to CCSD’s Library and Media Services Specialist and Textbook Coordinator, Christy James.

"She always goes above and beyond to make sure her students have meaningful learning experiences in the library," said James. "She connects with authors in person and on Twitter, helps with the literacy events, brings in community members to speak with the students, and more.

Burbage has been at Mitchell for just three years, but she's made a lasting impression with her colleagues and her students.

Burbage is no stranger to Charleston County School District (CCSD). She grew up in Charleston and attended Orange Grove Elementary School and Middleton High School. She graduated from Clemson University, but marriage to her husband John and the birth of two sons Paul and Benjamin sidelined her career temporarily so she could be a stay-at-home mom.

During that time Burbage was able to earn her Masters of Teaching from The Citadel and went on to teach high school science at Garrett Academy, Middleton, and West Ashley High School.

Burbage looked back on her stay-at-home mom days, remembering with fondness her time as a volunteer in the Orange Grove library. She was drawn to the profession but knew it required earning another master's degree. She accomplished that goal and went on to become a librarian in Berkeley County School District for 10 years.

Looking to work closer to home, Burbage researched available positions in CCSD. While discussing the opening at Mitchell with a friend, she was asked, 'do you want to make a difference? Because Mitchell is the school where you could do that.' That is when she knew her mind was made up.

"I knew when we hired Mrs. Burbage our library program would grow," said Principal Deborah Smith. "She has been working with our upper grades on the Makers program and leads a fourth grade group in extra reading. She recently coached them in the Battle of the Books. Her work as a NASA ambassador has benefited our students by exposing them to stories about space and biographies of scientists and astronauts. She holds weekly classes with our younger grades and has an amazing way of weaving a theme throughout her curriculum. We are indeed fortunate to have someone of her caliber touching the hearts of our students."

"No two days are alike," said Burbage. "There are challenges beyond the students like parking and the attention our historic building needs. But there is great collaboration among the special area teachers I work with and the faculty here is seasoned. They've almost all been here for [a long time]. That says a lot about Mitchell."

She was pleasantly surprised at how much she enjoyed teaching little children after years as a high school teacher.

"Teaching in a Title I school is special," said Burbage. "You can literally look into these student's eyes and see how excited they are when they come into the library. You can see them lean forward when they learn something new and connect it with things they are learning in their classroom. I enjoy them because they're so curious and really very funny."

As the librarian, Burbage has options with the lessons she teaches. Principal Smith encourages reading aloud and there is much of that going on in Burbage's library. Plus, she's a Solar System Ambassador for NASA. Burbage became a Solar System Ambassador last year after seeing a post on Twitter.

"I'm not into constellations but I am interested in NASA missions, telescopes, what NASA is doing now, and how we actually got to the moon," added Burbage. "So as an ambassador I plan events at the library, retirement homes, and churches."

Burbage presented at the Librarian Conference in Columbia in March in an effort to connect educators with NASA so they can better understand and appreciate the importance of sharing it with their students.

In addition, Burbage is working on her National Geographic Educator Certification. This is a free professional development program that recognizes Pre-K through 12 formal and informal educators committed to inspiring the next generation of explorers, conservationists, and change-makers.

"She regularly shares what she's [doing](#) at Mitchell on Twitter and is always willing to present to other educators and even at the public library and other community organizations," James added. "She has a themed Read Across America Week each year (this year was space, last year was states) and the teachers and students get so into it. She's truly amazing."

A librarian is uniquely suited to offer service to every person in the school and Burbage does just that.

"My life philosophy as a librarian is to offer cheerful service," said Burbage. "I'm the one person in the school that interacts with every single student and every single teacher."

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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 span 1,000 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 86 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.