

# 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.*

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## South Carolina State Superintendent of Education visits R.B. Stall High School

On Monday, January 18, 2023, South Carolina State Superintendent of Education Ellen Weaver made her first visit to a public school since she was sworn in. She toured R.B. Stall High School, met with staff and students, and spoke with local media.



## Educators and students celebrated at the SOUTH CAROLINA ALLIANCE OF BLACK SCHOOL EDUCATORS CONFERENCE

Over 500 attendees were celebrated at the South Carolina Alliance of Black School Educators conference held in Charleston January 13-15, 2023. The theme "Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers" was designed around educators and the 140 students from across the state that were in attendance.

Charleston County School District was represented with a welcome from Superintendent Don Kennedy, presentations from the Family and Community Engagement Office and Call Me Mister graduates who are now educators in CCSD.

Break-out sessions included everything from College and Career Readiness to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and Special Education Guidance.



## SCHOOL BOARD RECOGNITION MONTH AT CCSD



Charleston County School Board (CCSD) joined school districts throughout the state and nation to celebrate School Board Recognition Month. Monday, January 23, 2023 CCSD board members were recognized.

Nearly 600 locally-elected and appointed school board members throughout South Carolina will be recognized by schools and communities for their service and dedication to public education.

This year's theme "Forward, Together" reminds us all to celebrate the unique role school boards play in championing and advocating for quality education and the ownership they take in governing their local public schools. As the representatives of the people in their local communities, school board members represent their local communities' voice and vision for public schools.

## Board member Darlene Roberson named director of SCSBA's Board of Directors

Darlene Roberson, a Charleston County School District (CCSD) board member, was appointed Region 2 Director of the South Carolina School Board Association's (SCSBA) Board of Directors January 6, 2023. Region 2 consists of Charleston County.

Roberson is a native of Hollywood and attended and graduated from CCSD's Constituent District 23. She earned her bachelor's degree in experimental psychology from the University of South Carolina and a master's degree in urban education, with a specialization in school counseling from Norfolk State University.

Roberson is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Next Level Educational Services, LLC, which provides educational consulting services to various agencies throughout the state. Additionally, in CCSD she has provided leadership training to North Charleston High School and St. John's High School administrators and staff members.

Her 36 years of professional experience in education and counseling include her work for the S.C. Department of Social Services, her role as an education specialist for the Navy College Program and work as an instructional specialist for the U.S. Department of Defense. Roberson has worked as a licensed professional counselor and director of school counseling programs within the public education sector.

Roberson is the recipient of numerous educational awards and citations, including the Minerva Award for Service to Youth in Education and a Certificate of Achievement from Prince William County Public Schools, signifying her reputation for providing quality educational services.

Her professional memberships include Palmetto State School Counselor Association; the University of South Carolina Alumni Association (life member); Baptist Hill High School Alumni Association (silver member); and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., (life member).

Roberson has also served as team captain for the American Cancer Society, Relay for Life (Manassas, Va. and Charleston, S.C.) and Walk to End Alzheimer's, (Manassas, Va. and Charleston, S.C.).



Darlene Roberson

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# CHARLESTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT CELEBRATIONS

## LAW ENFORCEMENT DAY

### Academic Magnet High School

Academic Magnet High School (AMHS) celebrated School Resource Officers (SRO) Watson and Hanson for their service to Charleston County School of the Arts and AMHS on SRO Law Enforcement Appreciation Day!



### St. John's High School

St. John's High School students celebrated Officer Deming on Law Enforcement Day!



### Cooper River Center for Advanced Studies

Cooper River Center for Advanced Studies set out a table in their atrium and invited North Charleston Police Department officers over to have doughnuts, coffee, and Cooper River CAS Swag Bags! Cooper River thanks all law enforcement for their difficult work and appreciates their sacrifice and risk.

### Moultrie Middle School

Officer Wilson, at Moultrie Middle School was celebrated on National Law Enforcement Day.



## MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY



### Angel Oak Elementary School

Angel Oak Elementary School celebrated "Peace and Love" in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that" and "Be the peace you wish to see in the world" are two powerful quotes students learned and studied.

### Burke High School

On Monday, January 16, 2023, the Burke High School Marching Band participated in the YWCA Martin Luther King, Jr. parade.



### Early Learning Department

On Monday, January 16, 2023, the Early Learning Department participated in the YWCA MLK parade. It was a great opportunity to get into the community and kick off the Early Learning application season.

Michelle Simmons, Chief Academic Officer, joined the Early Learning Team in distributing books, candy, and information about our programs.



# Hunter Graham named CCSD’s 2023 Spelling Bee Champion

The 2023 Charleston County School District (CCSD) Spelling Bee returned to an in-person event this year. It was held on Thursday, January 19, 2023, at Burke High School where Hunter Graham was declared the winner. CCSD has hosted its annual spelling bee contest online over the past few years, due to COVID restrictions.

Graham is a seventh grader at Moultrie Middle School. Graham progressed to the championship round by correctly spelling “harbinger.” Hunter then correctly spelled the word, “rejuvenate” to secure his victory.

Spellers from elementary and middle schools across the district competed to become the 2023 CCSD Spelling Bee Champion. The Top 10 spellers advanced to the regional bee, sponsored by the Post & Courier in March.

Fifth graders from each elementary school and sixth, seventh, and eighth graders competed to earn the opportunity to participate in the CCSD competition.



Hunter Graham



Top 10 CCSD Spelling Bee contestants

### The CCSD Top 10 are:

- Hunter Graham of Moultrie Middle School
- Grant Baker of Camp Road Middle School
- Machaela Black of Morningside Middle School
- Tallulah Branton of Drayton Hall Elementary School
- Audrey Cen of Charleston County School of Arts
- Sam Noonan of Orange Grove Charter School
- Posey Staley of Sullivan’s Island Elementary School
- Mark Sutton of Jerry Zucker Middle School
- Zachery Teachman of Thomas Cario Middle School
- Aubrey Thompson of St. James-Santee Elementary Middle School

The competition was composed of 43 spellers and lasted 12 total rounds.

The Post & Courier’s SpellBound! Regional Spelling Bee will be held at the Lightsey Chapel on the campus of Charleston Southern University on Thursday, March 9, 2023. The winner, along with over 200 regional bee champions from around the country, will advance to the 2023 Scripps National Bee. The national competition will take place the week of Memorial Day at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland.



FASHION SHOW  
AT JAMES ISLAND  
ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL

James Island Elementary School students participated in a fashion Show after they wrapped up their Clothing Unit. Family and friends cheered from the sidelines.





# CCSD SPORTS



## Wando High School Varsity Basketball teams visit Carolina Park Elementary School

Wando High School varsity basketball teams started the day at Carolina Park Elementary School last month with high fives, cheers, and even a tunnel! The Carolina Park boys and girls teams were also excited to meet the players and see what the future could hold for them as student-athletes.



## SUPERINTENDENT DON KENNEDY JOINS HURSEY'S YOGA CLASS

Charleston County School District (CCSD) Superintendent Don Kennedy joined the primary students at Hursey Elementary School for a yoga class. The students are participants in the after-school program, Kaleidoscope, offered by CCSD's Expanded Learning Program.



## Darius Rucker makes a donation to First Tee, Greater Charleston

Local country solo artist, Darius Rucker generously outfitted the new golf team at Baptist Hill Middle High School, coached by P.E. teacher Coach Slawson. Rucker made a donation to First Tee, Greater Charleston, who then provided golf clubs to the team. First Tee is a youth development organization introducing the game of golf and its inherent values to young people, and it's making a difference. Go Bobcats!



# UNSUNG HEROES AT CCSD

## Ashley C. Johnson, Autism Teacher

*C.E. Williams Middle School (North)*

Ashley Johnson is an awesome teacher that goes above and beyond to make sure her students' life skills and academic needs are met.

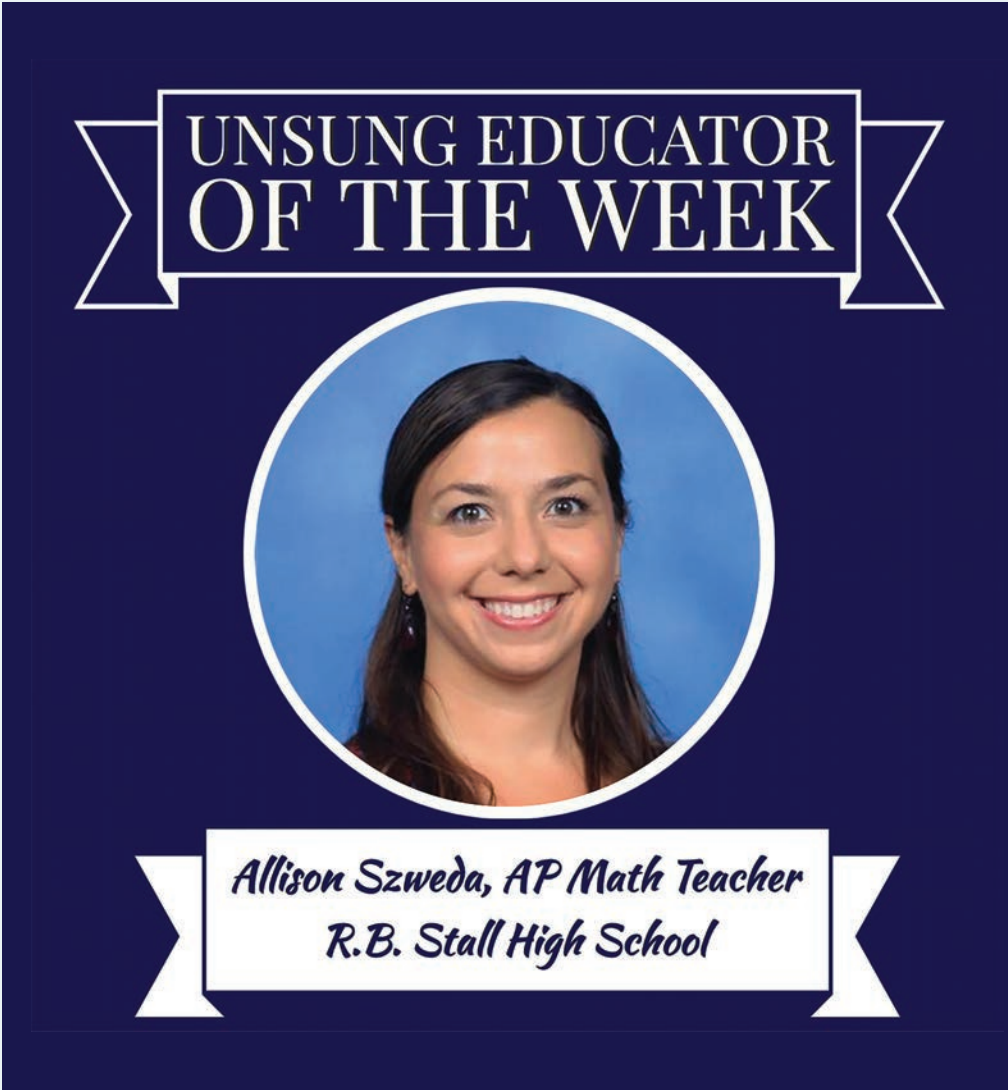
At her previous school, she allowed her students to gain work experience by opening up a Bitty and Beau Coffee Shop in the school. The students really loved It. Also, she created a parent networking group.

Ashley and the parents along with their kids would meet occasionally outside of school and go to different events. She is awesome.



## Allison Szweda, AP Math Teacher

*R.B. Stall High School*



Mrs. Szweda is the AP Calculus Teacher and Math Department Head Teacher here at R.B. Stall High School. Every day Mrs. Szweda comes to school with the goal to make sure her students not only succeed but feel as prepared as they can be for their classwork and AP exams. Mrs. Szweda is willing to go above and beyond to help make sure her students understand the subject they are learning and even points out constantly how it can help them in their future careers and goals as they prepare for graduation. Mrs. Szweda is also dedicated to leading our National Honors Society and Beta Club students to help create a caring, fostering inclusive community among the student body here at Stall High School. Everything she does when she is teaching, tutoring, or mentoring these groups is all done with a heart that truly cares about the students and sees them succeed now and in their future. She is our school's example of how students are the heart of our work here at Stall High School every single day. Not only that but she is dedicated to the teachers in and outside her department to make sure they have what they need in order to be successful educators. She always provides a listening ear and mentoring advice when asked by other teachers. She is willing to help in any way she possibly can here at Stall High School and truly has a Heart of a Warrior.



# AROUND CCSD

## Community Nights at Acceleration Schools

CCSD Acceleration Schools invited parents, guardians, and community members to meet school leaders and learn about the world-class programs and opportunities available to students. Gathering in Burke High School, North Charleston Elementary School, and Hunley Park Elementary, attendees heard from Acceleration Schools' staff, principals, and teachers about the curriculum that will equip students for the next grade level and the real world. Current Acceleration School students and parents also shared their experiences and growth within these programs.

For those wanting to learn more about Acceleration Schools and its programming, a virtual recording will be available. Additionally, select principals across the district will offer virtual, phone, or in-person one-on-one meetings with parents and guardians to answer any questions and provide further insight into the programs available at their schools.



## CCSD expands service to community with Focus on Families Expo



Charleston County School District (CCSD) staff are constantly trying to engage the community and provide support for students and their families, inside and outside the school walls. On January 28, 2023, CCSD's Department of School Support (DoSS), in collaboration with the district's McKinney-Vento Title One Office, Office of Family and Community Engagement, and Department of Student Services, partnered with Boykin Real Estate to host the first Focus on Families Expo at Cooper River Center for Advanced Studies.

"DoSS exists to assist schools and families in overcoming obstacles that inhibit their scholars from entering school prepared and excited

about learning," explained Dr. Shavonna Coakley, CCSD's Director of School Support. "To do this, we must build stronger communities and family relationships that will outlast difficult times. Saturday was a true success and DoSS believes what was done on this day can become a reality across our district as we continue to build generational success within our CCSD communities."

More than 100 people attended the free event, which was focused on housing and education. In addition, nearly 40 volunteers from 22 local organizations and non-profit groups provided information on financial planning, home stabilization, money management, and landlord-tenant laws. District staff members and the volunteers also

helped a few families secure financial assistance on-site.

"Cross-system collaboration has become far more common with the increased needs of homeless families and decreased availability of resources," added CCSD's Title 1 Programs Compliance Administrator Sonya Jones. Developing good working relationships with programs like the Department of School Support increases the likelihood that homeless children, youth, and families will be identified and assisted in obtaining essential services."

The district's departments involved in this Focus on Families Expo are now planning for a future community event.

## READING AROUND THE BASES AT CCSD



Charleston County School District (CCSD) and the Charleston RiverDogs, the Lowcountry's professional baseball team (and Single-A affiliate of the Tampa Bay Rays), will start the seventh season of their second-grade reading initiative, "Reading Around the Bases." The program started in the 2016-2017 school year to encourage growth in literacy while having fun.

Starting on Tuesday, January 24, 2023, second graders from 19 schools in CCSD began a 10-week baseball-themed incentive program. Every student will receive a Reading Challenge packet that includes a scorecard, tracking sheet, and their very own personal baseball card.

To move around the bases on the scorecard, a student must read a certain number of pages: 100 pages for a single, 200 pages for a double, 300 pages for a triple, and 500 pages for a home run.

Special guests from the RiverDogs will visit schools in CCSD over the course of the next few months to encourage and engage the students as volunteer readers.

"We appreciate the RiverDogs' consistent support for this program," said CCSD's Interim Chief Academic Officer, Michelle Simmons. "With Vision 2027 now in place, our goal of all fifth-grade students

in the district reading on grade level by June 2027, having this level of encouragement in literacy from an established community partner is vital."

This year's kickoff event for "Reading Around the Bases" was at Sullivan's Island Elementary School on Tuesday, January 24, 2023. Special guest J.P. Sears, a former Citadel star and current Major League Baseball pitcher with the Oakland A's, read to students.

The top 25 second graders from each participating school will be honored at select RiverDogs' games during the upcoming season.

"The RiverDogs are thrilled to once again partner with the Charleston County School District for one of our key community initiatives leading into a brand new season, as we have since 2016-17," stated RiverDogs President and General Manager Dave Echols. "We know how important it is for young members of our community to find excitement when it comes to reading and take great pride in playing a small role in developing that excitement."



## Kennedy at the library

Charleston County School District's Superintendent Don Kennedy attended the Charleston County Public Library (CCPL) 2023 kickoff of its popular children's Storytime programs in January.

The new CCPL Storytime was launched at a kick-off event at the Bees Ferry West Ashley Library that featured a Storytime with Children's Librarian Katie Jo Daniska, fun activities, and crafts, a meet-and-greet with CCPL's mascot Owlbert.





# CCSD Kaleidoscope Expanded Day Programs for Families

*Now accepting four-year-olds at select sites\**

## What is Kaleidoscope?

An expanded-day program for three-year-old to fifth-grade students including before-school, after-school, and summer enrichment programs. It also provides after-school enrichment classes such as chess, dance, art, coding, engineering, foreign language, music, and lacrosse.

## Does it have a cost?

It is a [fee-based program](#) that operates using an income-based sliding scale for tuition. Interested families should check with their [school site coordinator](#) to learn more.

## How do I enroll?

Enrollment for 2023-2024 afterschool programs will begin in May. A list of 2023 summer camps will be announced the week of February 20, 2023. Visit [ccsdschools.com/kaleidoscope](https://ccsdschools.com/kaleidoscope) for important dates, forms, fees, and applications.

*\*20 locations now have seats for four-year-old students for the 2022-2023 school year; contact your school's site coordinator for more information; check back in May 2023 for a list of 2023-2024 sites accepting four-year-old students.*



**Start exploring afterschool  
options today as you plan for  
the 2023-2024 school year!**

Charleston > excellence is our standard  
County SCHOOL DISTRICT



# DLI cohort partners with CCSD TO FOCUS ON CAREER READINESS



Charleston County School District's (CCSD) Director of General Counsel Investigations, Oscar Douglas recently completed the South Carolina Diversity Leaders Initiative (DLI), hosted by The Riley Institute at Furman.

The DLI equips leaders with the tools and perspectives needed to leverage diversity as a way to improve organizational outcomes and drive social and economic progress in South Carolina. As a part of the experience, participants form small groups and complete targeted community action projects in their local area, combining their individual talents to develop real solutions for real issues in the state.

Douglas' group focused on career readiness for high school seniors. In collaboration with CCSD's Career and Technology Education Department (CTE), the group branded their initiative "CATalyst for Career Readiness," and 15 soon-to-be graduates from North Charleston High School (NCHS) were identified in collaboration with school counselors and other educators.

With the ultimate goal of confirmed employment or college acceptance prior to graduation, the seniors completed self-discovery activities and employability lessons. In addition, students and their DLI mentors attended a variety of field trips, visiting local colleges, worksites, and offices aligned with their career interests. These visits included MUSC, South Carolina Ports Authority, Trident Technical College's culinary training program, and more.

"There are employment and workforce training opportunities for these students immediately upon graduation," explained Oscar. "Our community partners are willing to provide training for the students and open up pathways towards professional growth and salary increases. Additionally, Trident Technical College currently has no cost tuition for many of their educational programs."

The DLI mentors' lead contact with the CTE department was Chad Vail, Work-based Learning Partnerships Coordinator. Vail said the CATalyst team's mentoring efforts provided valuable support and built lasting relationships of trust and accountability over the term of the program.

"This program is designed to provide students with the opportunity to build relationships and earn the designation of Career Readiness," said Vail. "Participating seniors complete the 40 documented hours of career experiences so they can be best prepared to maximize the wide variety of professional opportunities available right here in the Charleston region."

Deputy Superintendent Anita Huggins was also a graduate of the most recent Diversity Leaders Initiative. She participated in a separate cohort. Huggins put her full support behind continuing the CATalyst initiative so it can serve as a sustainable program year after year.

"The work that the CATalyst team did shows its commitment to supporting CCSD students," said Huggins. "It is the continued goal of CCSD to build supportive ecosystems around our educational goals so that no student slips through the cracks. We resolve to give every student

a chance for a bright future, and this Career Readiness mentorship program is an example of that."

Huggins said that as CCSD expands and solidifies its "ecosystem" community partners will be called upon to continue the effort.

"We hope public and private entities will join us in providing our students with access to training and to securing employment," added Huggins.

While the CATalyst team has graduated from the Diversity Leaders Initiative, their work continues. Douglas said team members will continue to mentor the students in their cohort, including teaching life skills, interview techniques, and how to prepare for opportunities that await them.

"The team was able to add some engine power to an existing CTE program and add some new community partners so we consider that a win," said Douglas. "Of the 15 students who participated, almost all of them had a verbal commitment to employment with one of the participating community partners. Not all CCSD students are ready to transition to a four-year college. This program shows them a way to make a viable living, especially in industries that support Charleston's economy."

"These mentorships will hopefully remain as lifelong relationships," said Douglas. "Seeing first-hand the transformation taking place with these kids truly was beautiful to see. In a blink, these young men and women will transform from soon-to-be graduates to contributing members of Charleston society."



## Author/Illustrator visits Camp Road Middle School

Camp Road Middle School had a surprise visit last month from YA Author Kwame Alexander and his illustrator, Dare Coulter. Kwame Alexander was generous in supplying books and shirts to students and teachers and delivered two presentations during his visit.

# Jennie Moore SIC named to State Honor Roll

Jennie Moore Elementary School's (JME) School Improvement Council (SIC) was named one of six South Carolina public schools to the SC School Improvement Council's (SC-SIC) 2023 Honor Roll for their significant efforts to foster civic engagement in public education.

These Honor Roll SICs will continue in the running for SC-SIC's annual Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence.

"When everything shut down for COVID-19, the JME SIC rose to the occasion," said Principal Karen Felder. "We had a lot of new members and they took full advantage of Zoom meetings and worked together remotely to plan and create activities and options for parents, students, and teachers at JME."

Now in its 22nd year, the award is named for the former U.S. Secretary of Education and South Carolina Governor and his late wife, and recognizes the vital contributions made by more than 1,100 local SICs and their 11,000-plus SIC members across the state.

"I knew from the moment I met this council that they were going to make

a huge difference," said Chrissy Hilfiger, JME SIC Co-Chair. "Each and every member on the council has greatly contributed to our success. It's been so inspiring. We were able to assist the teachers at JME as well as keep the JME students and families engaged in learning especially during the Pandemic."

Megan Rzycki, who serves as a co-chair said it has been wonderful to be a part of the JME SIC.

"I am so proud of the work that we have done to support the JME community during the pandemic," said Rzycki. "With creativity and flexibility we were able to provide school-wide events that brought the school community together for fun and educational virtual activities."

JME joins Belvedere Elementary School SIC (Aiken County Public Schools), Greer High School SIC (Greenville County Schools), Hilton Head Island High School SIC (Beaufort County School District), Piney Woods Elementary School SIC (District 5 of Lexington and Richland Counties), and Wilder Elementary School SIC (Sumter School District)

in being recognized.

"The School Improvement Councils named to this year's Honor Roll have demonstrated their support of their schools' success," said SC-SIC Board of Trustees Chair Stewart Cooner. "We congratulate them on this distinction and thank them – and all SICs across South Carolina – for the impact they make every day for their schools, families, and students."

Five finalists from this year's list of Honor Roll SICs will be selected in March, with one to be announced as the winner of the annual Riley Award for SIC Excellence later in the spring.

SICs were established in state law 45 years ago. A founding partner of the Center for Educational Partnerships within the University Of South Carolina College Of Education, the SC School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) provides the member training, technical assistance, statutory accountability, and other operational resources necessary for the continued success of the community-based SICs in each of South Carolina's K-12 public schools.

## Focus ON CCSD

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