

For Immediate Release

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Media Release

CCSD celebrates creation of Hispanic/Latino Affinity Group

Office of Communications

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Charleston, SC – Charleston County School District’s (CCSD) Hispanic/Latino Affinity Group kicked off in the 2022-2023 school year and has been instrumental in connecting CCSD’s Hispanic and Latino educators and staff in a space where they can be celebrated and provided the support they need. As CCSD commemorates Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 through October 15, 2023), the district celebrates the growth of the group and the individuals who are a part of it.

An affinity group is a collection of individuals with a common identity characteristic. The unifying characteristic is a group that is traditionally underrepresented, which makes convening that much more important. At its core, an affinity group exists to build a community between people with shared identities and interests.

Dr. Jennifer Baez CCSD’s Interim Director of the [Office of Multilingual Services & Outreach](#), was tapped to lead the group. Baez was mentored and supported by colleague Tasha Joyner who was instrumental in forming the Black Educators Affinity Group (BEAG) in 2021. Along with the help of Brandi Blake, CCSD’s Executive Director for Intercultural Development, the Hispanic Latino Affinity Group is growing.

Born in Puerto Rico, Baez came to the United States when she was ten years old. She was an English Language Learner herself and understands what children with similar backgrounds are facing when they arrive in Charleston County.

In her role with the district, Baez provides needed expertise, supporting improved outcomes for CCSD’s multilingual learners and families. A significantly growing population, nearly 15 percent of the district’s students are multilingual students.

“As an educator I want kids to have opportunities,” said Baez. “I was lucky and blessed to have attended school in one of the best districts in the state of Texas at the time and received a very good education. I had parents and a community that really supported me and had high expectations of me. That made the difference.”

Baez said that despite that, there were opportunities she missed because she was an English Language Learner.

"I want our parents to have access to every opportunity possible for their children," said Baez. "I want our students to have equal opportunity in life and that is what drives me. I want to be one of the people that helps provide as many resources available."

Throughout her career, Baez was a bilingual teacher and instructional specialist, an English as a Second Language (ESOL) and Spanish lecturer. She wrote district curriculum for the bilingual and ESOL department, served as a teacher preparation and certification bilingual/ESL consultant, and has been a K-12 assistant principal at a Newcomer Center and in two elementary schools. Additionally Baez has been a principal on special assignment for Capital Programs, and an elementary and middle school principal in CCSD. From every angle, she has seen the challenges that multilingual learners face.

Baez did not always know that she had the heart of an educator. She was a pre-law major at the University of Dallas before a coworker at a local restaurant, who was a bilingual special education teacher, introduced her to her classroom. Baez volunteered in the class and fell in love with the students and later pedagogy.

Baez received a Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages from the University of Dallas, a Master of Education in Educational Administration from Texas Women's University, and a Doctorate of Philosophy in K-16 Educational Policy and Leadership from the University of Texas.

This is Baez's 21st year in education. She has been with CCSD since 2013. Baez has seen the Latino and Hispanic student populations grow, but the diversity of staff and administrators does not reflect the student makeup of the district.

"It is important to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month because CCSD has so many kids here from Latino and Hispanic backgrounds," said Baez. "In CCSD, we want to show those students that their culture and experiences are valued."

Baez hopes the Hispanic Latino Affinity Group will be a source of recruitment as well as a resource for current staff who want to improve their trajectory in the CCSD workforce.

"The members of the Hispanic Latino Affinity Group are happy to have this resource," said Baez. "The affinity group showed me that we need more targeted communication within the system and I hope to improve that as well as increase opportunities for our members to grow in different areas of their careers."

For example, there are approximately 7,500 Hispanic or Latino students within CCSD and only eight Latino administrators throughout the district.

Since taking over the Multilingual Program, Dr. Baez has proactively focused on instruction by ensuring all multilingual teachers are trained in sheltered instruction. She spearheaded the creation of a multilingual scope and sequence to support Tier

1 instruction. She has also made a professional development plan to target and train district leaders and content teachers across the district to support the academic growth of multilingual students.

National Hispanic Heritage Month

There are numerous ways schools can celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month and Baez encourages administrators to get creative and go beyond the surface of food and music.

Examples include a student work showcase of the EL units, school-wide support of Hispanic and Latino-owned businesses, guest speakers, performance nights, and cultural immersion.

"I am honored to be able to lead the affinity group and bring my colleagues to the table to be included in the conversation," said Baez. "No matter your race or background, we need to celebrate each other, and Hispanic Heritage Month is a great opportunity to start letting students feel like they are in a space where they are valued."

To better assist in doing that, Dr. Baez is partnering with the Office of Intercultural Development to develop a guide for principals and schools to use to support them in integrating the celebration of all cultures throughout the year.

"It is about what we can do as a district to embed those practices so they can become part of our fabric," said Baez. "That way we can celebrate every student, every day."

For more information, contact the Office of Communications at (843) 937-6303.

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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 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 50,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse portfolio of educational options and specialized programs delivered to the students of CCSD through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools and programs. Rich educational opportunities for students include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; military; dual credit; and many more.