



**Charleston County School of  
the Arts**

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Principal

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## Media Release

### **Dr. Shannon Cook celebrates every student and staff success**

**North Charleston, SC** – “Students who have parents involved in their lives who advocate for them will achieve both academically and artistically,” said [Dr. Shannon Cook](#), Charleston County School of the Arts’ (SOA) principal. “That’s one of the reasons we have students here at SOA who perform at the level they do.”

There is not an academic requirement to attend SOA, but the students there are naturally driven to succeed. That’s beneficial because at SOA, the expectations are extraordinary.

Dr. Christopher Selby is SOA’s Director of High School Orchestra and the school’s 2022 Teacher of the Year. He has worked with Cook since she began at the school over a decade ago.

Selby said Cook’s approach to being an administrator allows teachers and students to grow and perform at a very high level.

“She understands the specific needs of our craft and the discipline it takes to accomplish success because she is a musician herself,” said Selby. “Dr. Cook is also intentional in ensuring the staff feels like a team, and in return, we work with our students as a team.”

#### **Arts integration**

Cook’s mother was a piano teacher and she would listen as students took lessons. At three years old, Cook began to imitate what she was hearing. By four years old, she was taking formal lessons.

“I absolutely loved it,” said Cook. “In middle school, I learned to play the flute. In high school, I learned percussion and played tuba in the band. I was able to read music and also participated in show choir and performed in the Illinois All-State Choir.”

Cook studied Music Therapy and went on to pursue education degrees including teaching, curriculum and instruction and educational leadership before earning a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership with a focus on Arts Integration. When

it was suggested that she would be a good fit to serve as principal of SOA, she had only been a principal for eight months.

"As it turned out, my background positioned me to serve successfully here," said Cook.

Not only does Cook serve, but she also participates. Both staff and students boast that she regularly performs with them and has conducted in a concert.

"She's not like any principal I have ever had," said senior Peter O'Malley. "It's special to have her on stage with us."

O'Malley, who is a cellist, became a student at SOA when he was in seventh grade. He appreciates Cook's presence throughout the day as she joins in rehearsals and checks on students in their art major classes.

"Dr. Cook supports the arts in such an amazing way," added O'Malley. "Perhaps that's because she is an artist herself."

Cook can often be found giving tours around the school, and she said that people are in awe when they see or hear the talent at SOA.

"That kind of admiration keeps us focused, so we don't take it for granted," said Cook.

Students and staff are recognized and rewarded quite often and celebrations of those accomplishments occur regularly.

"Our teachers are whom we thank, and I think we all appreciate what is happening here," said Cook. "I share in that joy by celebrating our students and teachers from the sideline. It is exciting to be a part of because it allows me an opportunity to tell them to take the time to step back and soak that in."

Selby appreciates Cook's support so that he has the freedom to put his best foot forward.

"Dr. Cook is a fantastic listener," said Selby. "She listens very closely to our concerns and takes them seriously. She actively advocates for both students and staff. By having my back she gives me the opportunity to be the best teacher I can be. Our work is celebrated and promoted and we feel respected."

O'Malley said that Cook fosters a true art community.

"Her presence in our classrooms and rehearsals is an honor and I couldn't imagine attending another school," said O'Malley. "It is at SOA that I was inspired to pursue the idea of being a professional musician."

## **Intervention**

The young artists at SOA have varying degrees of skill and passion. They also have varying degrees of academic performance.

Charlene Felder has been the bookkeeper at SOA for the last five years. Felder said Cook places a great emphasis not just on fine arts, but on academics as well.

"Dr. Cook pays close attention to our students' academic success," said Felder. "She creates a culture and environment here where each student is focused/driven on learning. She encourages their creativity in their craft and helps them find the balance to excel in their classwork."

Cook is proud of what the team has accomplished at SOA with the support of the district.

"I am extremely proud of this school," said Cook. "It is an incredible place for young artists to come and collaborate with other artists and instructors. It teaches them that they are not alone in their ability or their struggles."

Cooks explained that SOA has seen great improvement over the years.

"The growth we've purposefully worked on here at SOA is the ability to support our student artists when they struggle," said Cook. "We have numerous ways to support our students through social and emotional learning activities, academic intervention, scheduling, and time management."

Cook explained that her team collectively looks at ways to support students effectively so that students can grow at SOA.

"There are challenges in any school," said Cook. "We have challenges here. SOA is not just singing and dancing, which is a common misconception. Our kids are just kids. They need leadership that finds ways to remove barriers and obstacles so that they have everything they need to be successful. It's rewarding to be able to maximize someone's potential."

According to Felder, Cook takes time to really get to know her students and staff.

"She is a hands-on leader and makes the effort to detail resolutions or initiatives to a teacher's style or personality," said Felder. "Teachers appreciate that."

Selby describes Cook's method of ensuring academic success as a safety net.

"I have worked under numerous principals, and I have never seen anyone work so hard to ensure that no one fails," said Selby. "She has a team helping her, and Dr. Cook and her team remind us where a student needs to be and what we need to do to get that student there."

Selby called it a balancing act of compassion and expectation.

“It is clear to me that she cares about every single one of our students,” said Selby. “She puts students first in all that she does. I don’t know of too many people who work as hard as she does, and she does it all for the kids and her staff.”

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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 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 49,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), music and other creative and performing arts, career and technical preparation programs, and military.