

Julian Mitchell Elementary School

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Media Release

Amber Sainz celebrated during National Principals Month

Charleston, SC – Dr. Amber Sainz’s third grade teacher instilled in her a love of learning. It was from that year forward that Sainz knew she wanted to be an educator. Her teacher let her grade papers and be the classroom helper. Sainz taught school to her stuffed animals, dolls, and any willing participants.

In high school, Sainz eagerly enrolled in Future Teachers of America where as a senior, she earned the opportunity to student teach in a first grade class. As fate would have it, she student taught her former classroom alongside her former first grade teacher.

Today Sainz is the principal at Julian Mitchell Elementary School where she has implemented the "Leader in Me" program, an evidence-based model focused on leadership, culture, and academics that equips students, educators, and families with the leadership and life skills needed to thrive in a dynamic world.

"I chose this career because I want to be of service to others," said Sainz. "I want to see others find their greatness. Education is the best place to do that."

Sainz described Mitchell as a special neighborhood school where several generations of community members have attended.

"The community takes ownership in this school and partners with us to provide resources for our families," said Sainz. "It is a place where former students come back to and remember their time here as if it was just yesterday."

First grade teacher Sara Thompson said that Sainz encourages community partners and school alumni to get involved with the school.

"Mitchell is a historic school nestled in a downtown neighborhood and when parents and grandparents walk back through these doors, it's like they're coming home," said Thompson. "Dr. Sainz has intentionally created a welcoming environment so the community can stay engaged with our school."

Allison Rouse, a math instructional coach and fourth grade math teacher, agreed.

"Mitchell Elementary School is the gem of the city," said Rouse. "Neighbors walk and bike to school, and the community partners to support us. That along with Dr. Sainz's leadership has really transformed the school culture here. Teachers are excited to come to work."

Education is where the heart is

Teaching and administering to elementary-aged children is where Sainz's heart is.

"There is so much potential and growth at this age," said Sainz. "Elementary school is a perfect opportunity to grow relationships with the students."

Sainz uses Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* to round out the "Leader in Me" program and the students love it.

Fifth grade student Amrie Rivers said that learning to be proactive (the first step in the seven habits) is motivating to her when it comes to leadership.

"We're learning to push the pause button when we need to slow down," said Rivers. "That is something Mrs. Sainz has taught us about being proactive."

Traditionally, being pulled out of class meant a student was acting out. At Mitchell, it means an adult recognized that a student needed a minute to regroup. According to fourth grader Xavier Legare, Sainz helps students who might be frustrated.

"She is nice and kind and welcoming," said Legare. "She helps us with the seven habits so that we can stay on task and calm our feelings."

The students at Mitchell look at Sainz as their mentor. In fact, for Quanterus Thompson, she is his favorite part of coming to school.

Sainz's mentor has always been her father who had her learn the "seven habits" at a very young age.

"He was a fire chief and he instilled in me grit," said Sainz. "He taught me that you have to be tough, but you have to do it with love. I saw him do it every day."

Because of that, Sainz's philosophy is to learn, lead, and live with love while serving others along the way.

"I am a heart-driven person," Sainz added.

As the students progress through the "seven habits" and the "Leader in Me" program, they will be separated into leadership teams. They will be tasked with taking on roles traditionally led by adults, and they will be making the decisions.

Thompson said that Sainz sets high expectations for students and staff.

"As a dependable leader she supports us with compassion," said Thompson. "She also participates in activities with the students, like our run club."

Rouse said that Sainz empowers her staff to be better teachers so they can do what is best for their scholars.

"Her leadership style is to involve everyone in the decision-making process, and as a Leader in Me school, we will be empowering the students to make decisions," said Rouse. "She is a loving principal, dedicated to her work and committed to the turnaround of this school."

Whatever it takes

"We are truly a family here," said Sainz. "When you work at Mitchell, you choose to work at Mitchell. We do whatever it takes and everyone pitches in for student success."

This is Sainz's 24th year in education and she has held many roles in and out of the classroom throughout the years. In 2019, there was a tug at her heart to serve

children in a different way. She was pulled to leave her home state of Missouri for warmer weather and new opportunities for her sons. Having always loved South Carolina, she applied for an administrative position here and was chosen to serve at Mitchell.

"I am blessed to be in this position with the entire Acceleration team, under the leadership of Jackie Haynes," said Sainz. "The Acceleration Schools program offers endless professional development opportunities, coaching, extra funding for instructional tools, and more. We're seeing gains because of it."

Thompson said those gains are partly due to Sainz's leadership style which is encompassed by empathy, compassion, and dependability.

"She engages teachers and staff to work together," said Thompson. "She herself is engaged and is always visible in the school. She at times is the crossing guard, a tutor, and a mentor. She celebrates the students and their success and she celebrates staff every chance she gets."

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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 of 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; and military; dual credit; and many more.