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Kim Wilson

Executive Director for Secondary Learning Kim Wilson Retiring

For Kim Wilson, being an educator is more than a job. It is a way of life.

Wilson, the Charleston County School District's Executive Director for the Secondary Learning Community and former principal at R.B. Stall High School, is retiring June 30. He has worked in the education field for the past 42 years – more than 33 of them with CCSD.

Wilson knew since he was in ninth grade that he wanted to be an educator and a coach. He can't remember ever wanting to do anything else. His parents encouraged him even though his father only attended one year of college before going to war. "We didn't get a whole lot of direction from them academically," he said, "but they knew the value of an education."

The West Virginia native excelled in his career. He holds a bachelor's degree in Education from Glenville State College; master's degrees in Counseling and Rehabilitation and Physical Education from Marshall University; and a specialist's degree in Education from The Citadel.

In Charleston County, he worked as the Director of Guidance at Wando High School for 15 years, Associate Principal at Wando for 10 years, and Principal at Stall for seven years, before moving to the district office.

He received many honors in his career, including being named South Carolina's 2013 Principal of the Year; 2006 Administrator of the Year; Assistant Principal of the Year for the 2002-2003 school year; and Counselor of the Year for the 1988-1989 school year.

Wilson said he attributes those successes to the amazing people he worked with over the years. "I'm only as good as the people around me." While it's wonderful to be recognized professionally, he said, he also values the life he had as an educator, and the meaningful impact he was able to have on children.

Career highlights

Wilson first worked as a teacher in West Virginia, but he and his wife Betsy knew from their vacations in Myrtle Beach that they loved the South Carolina Lowcountry. As they were preparing for one of those vacations, Betsy suggested Kim pack a business suit and try to get a job. So, he packed his heavy wool suit, the only one he had at the time, and went from school to school in the summer heat searching for and landing a teaching job in Horry County.

He eventually moved to Mount Pleasant to work in a private school as the Director of Guidance and a football coach. Then in 1985, he was hired at Wando as the Director of Guidance. He remained at Wando for the next 25 years, making the school and the Mount Pleasant community his home.

Some of the best years of his life were spent at Wando, Wilson said, especially the years when both he and his wife worked there, and his two children were enrolled as students. Betsy Wilson was a teacher at Wando and retired from the district after teaching for 27 years.

"The whole family woke up together, went to school together and went home together," Wilson said. At one point, his daughter was a cheerleader, his wife the cheerleading coach, and he drove the bus to take the cheerleaders to games, bringing his son along to watch the game. Most people drop off their children in the morning and then don't see them all day, but he was able to see his children all the time during their high school years. "I wish every parent had that opportunity."

The couple's children are now adults. Their daughter, Whitney Spain, was a teacher for about 10 years and now works in the district's human resources department. Their son, Wesley Wilson, is an engineer and works at Boeing Co.

After being so intimately connected to the Wando community, Wilson had some doubts about accepting the principal job at Stall when it was offered to him. "My wife made me do it," he said. And he is glad she did. It was some of the toughest work he ever did. "But it rejuvenated me and got me excited again."

At the time, "it was like going to the other side of the world," Wilson said. "The demographics are opposite." While most students at Wando are white and come from middle and upper-middle class families, most students at Stall are black and come from lower income families. Stall faced a lot of challenges in academics, and students' parents weren't able to be as involved in their children's education.

During his first year there, he noticed students weren't very engaged with the school and they seemed to have a hard time relating and talking to people outside their immediate families and communities, Wilson said. So, he required all of his staff members, not just teachers, to take the Flippen Group's course, *Capturing Kids' Hearts*, over the summer. The program was about forming relationships with students to help them engage in school and the activities required to succeed. "It changed the culture of the school overnight," Wilson said. "It transformed the school into a place people wanted to be."

In his years at Stall, enrollment climbed from 830 to 1,400 students. And the school's graduation rate increased 25 percentage points.

Follow your heart

Wilson also led an effort to create Mickey's House, a home for Stall students who are homeless, which opened in 2017. After he retires, he plans to stay involved in some activities related to education. Mickey's House is one of them.

Wilson's first teaching job in 1974 paid only \$8,000 per year. Many teachers and administrators back then held second jobs, just to pay the bills. He remembers one summer day when he was out running and saw a school administrator and a retired superintendent painting a house. He asked the former superintendent what advice he would give young teachers. The man said, "Find another job."

But that's not the advice Wilson would give people considering a career in teaching. If they feel inspired to teach, he said, he would tell them, "Follow your heart."

Children desperately need support and encouragement, which are things educators can provide. He remembers that his mother, who had completed only eighth grade, took a typing course and then typed a birthday message for him when he was in ninth grade. She told him he was nice, handsome, had done great things in his life so far, and that she envisioned him going to college. He kept that note and read it often. That kind of encouragement had a huge impact on him, and he wants all children to feel encouraged in that way.

"I didn't make a lot of money" in his education career, he said, "but people who made a lot of money didn't have the opportunity I had to impact kids, to change their lives."

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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.