

For Immediate Release

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Media Release

Conroy retires after 36 years in education

Charleston, SC – Mary Ford Elementary School Principal La Dene' Conroy will retire after 31 years with Charleston County School District (CCSD); 17 years of which were as a principal in six CCSD schools.

Conroy knew most of her life she wanted to be an educator. Conroy has served in the educational field for the last 36 years; a profession she still loves to this day.

"I played school when I was a little girl in the basement with TV trays," Conroy said. "The neighborhood children would come over and play too. But what motivated me most is that I saw things in school that weren't okay, and I wanted to create a utopia where all children are accepted, and all children are treated with respect. I became stronger as went through school and decided I was going to be different than any teacher I ever knew. I was passionate about that."

She is known best for her work with teachers, teacher training, professional development, children's literature and love of learning.

Conroy was asked three times by three superintendents to assist in area schools.

Mt. Zion Elementary was her first school to assist in community relationships. At Malcolm C. Hursey, she implemented the first Montessori Program as a partial magnet for CCSD. She stepped in for a year as interim principal at Murray-LaSaine Elementary while the school was moving from a swing space to their new Montessori school while still serving as the district's Montessori Specialist.

Conroy was chosen as Employee of the Year by CCSD Access and Opportunity Division and was selected as one of the fifty Most Progressive People making a positive impact on Charleston in 2015 by the College of Charleston.

Conroy received the Reading Recovery Advocacy Award in 2011. Her educational expertise includes research, best practices, instructional delivery, grant writing, adjunct faculty for The Citadel. She currently is a Montessori instructor for Montessori Philosophy and four leadership courses for administrators /adolescent teachers through Houston Montessori Center; instructor for Palmetto Primary Montessori Teacher Education Program with Seacoast Montessori Training Center; and teaches for Gulf Coast Montessori Training Center.

Conroy's undergraduate degree is from Kent State University; she has two Masters from The Citadel; an AMS Administration Credential in Montessori from Houston

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Montessori Center and she participated fully in the Primary Montessori Teacher Education Program at Lander University and the Sea Coast Montessori Teacher Education Program for Lower Elementary.

Conroy served on the SC Montessori Alliance board for four years; and served on East Cooper Montessori Charter School's Governing Board. LaDene served on Montessori Education Program Internationale (MEPI) Board of Directors as a Public School Educator.

"Ms. Conroy has selflessly served Charleston County School District in many leadership capacities from teacher to Learning Specialist to Principal for many years," said Ruth Taylor, CCSD Executive Director for Early Learning.

"For more than a decade she has led the district in our development, support, and expansion of our Montessori programs. She has garnered certifications in specialized areas, including Montessori, that makes her a leader and well-respected resource internally and externally in our community and beyond."

"LaDene has overseen the building of three amazing Montessori schools for Charleston - each unique and thoughtful to the neighborhood they serve with attention to detail of the right furniture and materials," said Betsy Coe, Ph.D. Executive Director, Houston Montessori Center. "I have never seen such beautiful schools in my world travels of Montessori schools. I marvel at her ability to make all of this happen in a school district."

Conroy and her husband, Thomas, have been married for 47 years. All three of their daughters are products of CCSD schools and are educators in CCSD: Eve Conroy, Lead Teacher at Lambs Elementary; Amy Conroy, Assistant Principal at Meeting Street Elementary at Brentwood and Ann Conroy Johnson, Reading Teacher at James Simons Elementary and Mount Pleasant Academy.

Conroy has two granddaughters: Elizabeth Catherine (7) and Annabel Grace (5) and grandson, Thomas Hampton Johnson (3).

"You have to be a maverick if you want to change how we educate children," said Conroy. "You have to set up systems within schools where children and teachers can thrive in an autonomous and accountable system: The vision must drive the work; and you must know what is right and persevere so that the schoolhouse is a safe, beautiful, clean, and joyous place for all children to learn."

Conroy said she isn't done with education; she still has a passion for teaching.

"I'm still hoping to make a difference in my career through my training work with adult learners," she said. "I love reading and assimilating the knowledge to match it to the goals and beliefs of the school district's vision. That vision is to inspire others to act and then making the work come to fruition so community members and families can feel and be proud of the culture, climate and school community. Watching the transformation is amazing."

Outside of training and consulting she hopes to write various pieces of children's literature to be used in meaningful ways by teachers in the classroom and spend time with her family.

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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.