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Media Release

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Melissa Reese Named Top Five Teacher of the Year Finalist

Charleston, SC – Melissa Reese is the exception to the rule when it comes to realizing her career dreams. At age of three, she approached the podium in the Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh as if she were taking up the position of the lecturer. She knew then she wanted to be an educator.

From that young age, she felt the tug to become an educator. That tug has served her well; she was named a Charleston County School District (CCSD) Top Five Teacher of the Year Finalist.

Reese has been teaching for seven years, serving the past three years with CCSD.

The Murray-LaSaine Elementary School teacher holds a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood and Elementary Education and a Master of Education Teaching and Curriculum from Penn State University.

Reese's family moved from state to state because of her father's occupation and by the time they landed in Hershey, PA, she had fallen behind in her learning.

"States teach different standards, and at times I struggled," said Reese. "I didn't want others to feel left behind, and that's when I ultimately committed myself to becoming an educator."

In college, she studied elementary education, which led to her working in the Head Start and Pre-K programs in her area.

After Reese arrived in Charleston she became aware of the large Montessori following and was drawn to the style of teaching. She completed her training and has been at Murray-LaSaine ever since.

Montessori is a hands-on method of teaching that helps children learn through concrete and abstract methods.

"It helps children find their internal drive and motivation and teaches them that if they want to learn something, they must do the work that comes along with it," said Reese. "Montessori has its freedoms and limits. It's not something where kids just come and do what they want. They are required to learn the core subjects and are held to state standards of growth."

Becoming a Top Five Finalist

The school culture at Murray-LaSaine is more than just academics. The culture is one of peace through education of the whole child. Murray-LaSaine is a hybrid of a traditional public school and Montessori learning.

This was a perfect fit for Reese.

"I want everyone to be kind and helpful," said Reese. "I teach children the importance of growing up to be successful, productive members of society. I hope that they go and change the world."

Reese was thrilled to learn of the Top Five Teacher of the Year nomination, particularly since she has only been teaching at the school for three years. The irony is not lost on her that the Montessori Method does not instill competitiveness; however she is a competitive person by nature.

"I am honored that the staff chose me to represent the school," said Reese. "I realize that the title does not define me. There are many of other teachers that are just as amazing which reminds me to be humble."

Reese loves her profession and lives for the 'lightbulb moment.'

"Building relationships with the students and planning and tailoring instruction to meet the needs of all of my students is what brings me joy," said Reese. "I also love working with a team (my principal and staff) who are leaders in education. They know how to creatively balance Montessori with public education, which helps to encourage social and emotional growth with all of our students."

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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.