

**For Immediate Release**  
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## Media Release

### **Middle School Volleyball Established in District 20**

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**Charleston, SC** – A brand new athletic team with novice players is sure to have some struggles. However when your entire school, your coach and your parents are behind you, it motivates you to push harder.

This was the case for the first ever girls' volleyball team consisting of players from James Simons Elementary School (JSES) and Simmons-Pinckney Middle School (SPMS).

The girls did not close out the season with any major victories, but they're more motivated than ever to make next year's season one where they get noticed.

Coach Cortnie Jones began as a long-term substitute teacher at JSES in 2015. As she transitioned to a full-time physical education teacher, students and parents continually expressed interest in creating sports teams at the school.

An athlete herself, with an interest and knowledge in track and field, she started a running club that competes annually in the Charleston Youth Marathon, along with meets across the Lowcountry.

The success of that program prompted other students to seek her out to help in creating a basketball team and a volleyball team. Logistics and timing put the basketball team on hold initially, but the creation of the first-ever James Simons Pinckney Girls Volleyball Team delighted of a handful of girls hoping to play.

The school partnership came about to ensure the sister schools provide the most for their students.

"It was a win-win for both schools," said Jones. "At SPMS, they've established a boys' basketball team. The momentum to provide more athletic opportunities is there. Now we need funding and coaches."

SPMS principal Nathan Nelson was working separately from JSES principal Chris Ryan to provide athletic opportunities for the students and parents in District 20.

"We realized that the students know each other because they live in the same communities," said Nelson. "What better way to combine our efforts and resources than to give our students an additional connection through volleyball and basketball?"

"Being part of a team is a great way to boost students' confidence and develop leadership skills," said Ryan. "Team sports require students to work together, cooperatively, and problem solve. This carries over into the classroom. Students develop friendships with others whom they might not otherwise associate which also boosts school-wide climate and culture.

Nelson noticed bonds being created not just between students, but students and faculty as well.

"The addition of these two teams have made a difference in our student's academics," said Nelson. "They have a coach to keep them accountable, and they're also able to put academics in perspective – teams build relationships with teachers and students when it comes to their academics."

The City of Charleston Recreation Department facilitates the athletic program. The girls played against other beginner level teams in the area from Summerville to McClellanville. Home games are played at the nearby Arthur Christopher Community Center.

Eight female students signed up to play – all of them brand new to the sport.

"It was a learning experience for me," said Jones. "For me, coaching such a young age and actually having to teach them to play the game, was new for me."

But with the help of a parent volunteer as an assistant coach, and many adoring parents cheering the team on from the stands, Jones considers the season a success.

"We didn't win any games, but I pushed the girls to learn the game and put in 110 percent," said Jones. "I could see the progression in the girls and the fight they put up for each point."

Jones hopes to incorporate a basketball team for the males next year. In the meantime, she's already planning conditioning sessions for next year's interested players. If the interest is there, they could create an A-Team, B-Team and C-Team.

"This year is just the beginning of what we hope will be a robust sports program at James Simons," said Ryan. "By incorporating sports teams at James Simons, in partnership with Simmons Pinckney, we are expanding the opportunity for our students to become more physically fit. In addition, sporting events bring parents and families together"

Money to support the team and pay for required equipment come from fundraising and grants. The team would not be possible without parent volunteers. Anyone interested in learning more about the James Simmons Pinckney Volleyball Team can contact Cortnie Jones at [cortnie\\_jones@charleston.k12.sc.us](mailto:cortnie_jones@charleston.k12.sc.us).

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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.