



**Carolina Park Elementary
School**

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Media Release



Top 5 Teacher of the Year Finalist – Carolina Park Elementary School's David Bonezzi

Mount Pleasant, SC – David Bonezzi did not expect to go to college. He had a difficult childhood and while he viewed school as a safe place did not imagine that it would become his career. Mr. B, as his students call him, has spent 11 years teaching in Charleston County Schools, the last five at Carolina Park Elementary as a second grade teacher. Now, he gets to pay it forward by creating a safe space for his students to learn every day. This connection he builds with his students is why he has been named a Top Five Finalist for Charleston County School District Teacher of the Year.

Becoming a teacher

Bonezzi said that as a young student, he had no plans for his post-school life. He recounted when his Chemistry teacher, who was also his football and basketball coach, asked him what he planned to do after graduation and was aghast that such a smart student did not plan to go to college.

"He talked me into taking the SATs and made me tell him my scores once I had done so," said Bonezzi. "He showed me care and kindness and that redirected my life."

Once in college, Bonezzi majored in Early Childhood Education at The University of Akron. Choosing this major after being inspired by his Uncle Frank whom he

described as a second father and who was a third grade teacher. Bonezzi remembers the impact Uncle Frank had on all the kids he interacted with and how these two mentors in his life helped him decide on this path.

After a brief trip to Charleston to visit his brother, Bonezzi fell in love with the area and looked for opportunities to be a teacher here.

"After the first week [of teaching] I remember thinking, how am I going to make it through the whole year," Bonezzi said. "I did make it through and pressed on. For the first three years, I would be at school until 6:00 p.m. I found it hard to put the work down."

When speaking about his pedagogy Bonezzi said he had a clear vision of what he wanted his classroom to look like. Bonezzi explained that it had taken him a long time to get to where he wanted his classroom to be.

Principal Michael Antonelli said student choice is what he observes when in Bonezzi's classroom. Antonelli said his students are often found working on self-directed projects using higher-level skills to problem-solve and create.

"Making the school experience joyful is evident in everything about Mr. B.," said Antonelli. "Students love being in his class! He leads a classroom where technology is secondary to face-to-face interaction, hands-on opportunities and real thinking are abundant, and his guitar playing and sing-alongs are a consistent part of the culture."

Bonezzi views teaching as an art form.

"As an artist, you're never done, you just continually evolve," said Bonezzi. "That's what I have done with my classroom, turning it into an innovative and valuable learning space."

Bonezzi also believes one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching is that you can, shut the door and close out the noise.

"In my classroom, I encourage students to learn anything they want to know about the world, think outside of themselves, and how to make the world a better place," said Bonezzi. "I bring this idea to all dimensions of my classroom. The theme of the song "Mercy" one that the students learned in class, reiterates this as it tells you to, 'not wait for someone else to solve a problem.'"

Music is a major aspect of Bonezzi's classroom. Wielding his guitar, his students learn a new song every few weeks. At the end of the day, whichever student was the helper for the day gets to choose the song the class sings together. It is an inspiring way to build community and connection in his classroom.

Community minded

In addition to Bonezzi's tremendous work inside the classroom, his efforts go beyond that. As a mentor for the Teacher Cadets program, he welcomes students from the high school taking the course to come and learn from him as well. He gives back to the community just the way he teaches his students to do.

Bonezzi cares so much about his school community and describes Carolina Park as, "a place that teachers choose to teach, parents want to send their kids and students want to come to." He sees himself as a part of a larger cooperative to educate the youth following the lead of his principal.

"Mr. Antonelli has created a family, and a great place to come to work every day," said Bonezzi."

This is what drove him to serve on his school's faculty senate, as well as on the school improvement council, and also formerly coach fourth and fifth grade basketball. Those students, who are now seniors in high school, keep in touch with Bonezzi as they apply to college. He's having the same impact on those youths that Bonezzi's coach had on him so many years ago.

"Mr. Bonezzi models kindness, empathy, respect, and making good choices, and his students follow his lead," added Antonelli. "He is the teacher that children will remember for life. He is the teacher that will be invited to their weddings. He is the teacher they tell their own children about years from now."

That consistency is a core part of Bonezzi's character. His hard work and dedication were there even at the beginning of his career when he earned the Rookie Teacher of the Year award at Memminger Elementary.

That work does not just stop within his immediate community. Bonezzi continues to push for the betterment of all teachers and students in Charleston County.

A platform to advocate

"It would be humbling to receive this honor," said Bonezzi. "I would not squander the opportunity to advocate for my colleagues and kids."

He is already a part of Charleston County's Teacher Compensation Task Force, where his efforts, combined with those of other advocates, have resulted in a \$5,000 raise and a \$5,000 bonus for CCSD teachers. This unending belief in education and teachers shows his dedication to fixing the problems he has witnessed in the profession.

"Dave has incredibly high standards for himself as a professional and also for his students as learners," Antonelli added. "His work to mentor other teachers, author a book on instructional best practices, and advocate as a key member of the CCSD Teacher Compensation Committee are evidence of this fact."

Despite being a self-described private person, he wants to use this opportunity to spotlight the issues that affect teachers leaving the field.

"Teaching has changed," said Bonezzi. "The idea that you're changing the world gets sold to people. With recruiting of new teachers becoming more difficult I want to make education what it can be. I want to improve schools and compensation."

Bonezzi is particularly passionate when he speaks about bringing professionalism back to the job.

"Top-performing districts understand that the highly complex and specialized nature of teaching and learning can only be performed by a professional," said Bonezzi. "Through my work, I hope to change the impression that people have of teaching."

Bonezzi takes his advocacy seriously. As a member of the Palmetto State Teachers Association, he works to improve the conditions of his fellow teachers. Through all this tremendous work educating children is at his heart. All these inspiring efforts are only the beginning.

Bonezzi has begun writing a book on his teaching practices to help spread his knowledge further. In addition to his work mentoring fellow teachers at his school, Bonezzi truly believes in the power of education. It is something that he fights for every day.

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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.