



James Simons Montessori School

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Media Release

James Simons Montessori building community through Town Hall Meetings

Charleston, SC – Learning to gather as a community and participating in assemblies is more important than ever in a post-Covid world, and students and teachers at James Simons Montessori School are taking on this charge with their new quarterly Town Hall Meetings.

Town Hall Meetings provide a space for students to gather and focus on a school-wide goal or target behavior. They also provide an opportunity to build relationships and for a school family to create school-wide norms around common language and common practices. Finally, Town Hall Meetings are a space where students can take on leadership roles as emcees and performers.

"Town Hall Meetings at James Simons are bringing our school together to make our community bond stronger," said Lauren Martin, the school's music teacher and one of the founders of the Town Hall Meetings. "We are establishing traditions by singing our new school song together and showcasing talented students who lead us in the national anthem. We hope all students will feel like they belong and know they are a part of our school family."

Cultivating these relationships and encouraging a sense of belonging is one of the main benefits of Town Hall Meetings.

Milissa Stooks, a primary teacher at James Simons, has created the Caring Community, which is a drama club that focuses on social emotional (SEL) skills and character building. Students meet weekly in an afterschool club and choose a focus skill and a book that exemplifies that skill to perform for their primary and lower elementary peers. So far this year, students have performed with the SEL skill of calming down, the character trait of being a good friend, and the skill of goal setting. The Caring Community performs for an audience of their peers and is a part of the teaching and leading process of the Town Hall Meetings as well.

Town Hall Meetings also provide a place for guest speakers and to showcase community projects. The school's upper elementary and adolescent (middle school) students have participated in theater and improvisation workshops from College of Charleston professor Genese Gee-Schmidtke. College of Charleston historian and International Studies professor Blake Scott, one of the founders of

the [MARSH Project](#), has also joined to bring in more local environment community service projects such as an upcoming neighborhood cleanup.

“For other schools that are looking to build real-life speaking and listening skills in a post-COVID learning environment and who are looking for ways to encourage common language and common practices and to target focus behaviors, the meetings are a great way to engage in this work,” said Principal Beth Dillenkoffer.

For more information, contact the school’s publicity representative, Jennifer Savage, at jennifer_savage@charleston.k12.sc.us.

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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, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military.