

**For Immediate Release**

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# Media Release

## **CCSD students treated to NBA game**

### Office of Communications

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**Charleston, SC** – Over 100 Charleston County School District (CCSD) students in some of the district's Acceleration Schools and their chaperones were treated to a trip to watch the Charlotte Hornets play the Utah Jazz last month. The tickets were donated to Coaches for Character, a local non-profit, by Sporty Jeralds, the marketing manager of the Charlotte Coliseum.

Gregg Blatt is the director of Coaches for character and is a familiar partner to CCSD. He sponsors the CHAMP Awards which is an annual event that honors 88 Charleston County students chosen from eighth grade and twelfth grade. The award is designed to honor true "Unsung Heroes" who often go unnoticed, even though they have accomplished wonderful things in their community, church, home, or school. Their selection is based on character, community service, academic effort, and overcoming odds. This is the third year of the partnership.

"I am very proud of our preexisting partnership and delighted to work with CCSD on anything that benefits the students," said Blatt, who was a college basketball coach for 21 years. "I happen to have contacts in the sports world, and my good and very generous friend Sporty made the ticket donation to my foundation, Coaches for Character."

Blatt said he saw fit to donate the tickets to CCSD because of the preexisting relationship with the district.

CCSD's mission highlights the importance of educating and supporting students to make sure they are college, career, and citizenship-ready. The foundation of Acceleration Schools are based on a turnaround model that is research-based and focuses on interrupting systemic barriers to equity. It's four focus levers are Turnaround Leadership; Talent Development; Instructional Infrastructure; and Climate and Culture.

"The opportunity for our students to attend the game came to fruition because we focused on the concept that it takes a whole village to raise a child," said Colleen Carr, Director of CCSD's Acceleration Schools. "By bringing stakeholders together from the community, parents, students, school leaders, and district personnel, we were able to allow students the experience of attending an NBA game and make memories that will last for a lifetime."

Carr added that because Blatt and Jeralds bought into Acceleration Schools being a change agent in the community, 110 tickets were donated and six Acceleration Schools and Transformation Schools were engaged in the experience.

"I am happy to be in a position to donate the tickets," said Blatt. "The credit goes to the Acceleration Schools team that put in all the hard work, planning, and executing the logistics," said Blatt. "They get a lot of the credit for making this happen."

According to Chicora Elementary School Principal Monica Smalls, CCSD is better able to help students develop into well-rounded individuals when they are provided opportunities outside of the classroom to foster their passions and put their learning into practical application.

"It is because of our community partners that we were able to take six students from Chicora to the game," said Smalls. "Attending an NBA game in another state gave students a chance to develop their social awareness skills, and explore a new environment that fosters their curiosity. Attending the Hornets game served as a way for members of our CCSD community to come together on a Saturday and continue building our relationships with those from our individual schools as well as other schools in our community."

Carr said this was yet another example of the community coming together to serve students. In addition to the tickets being generously donated, snacks and meals for the trip were donated by community partners. Burke High School, whose entire basketball team attended the game, and Chicora Elementary School Partners donated the cost of the bus rental for transportation provided by Coastal Limehouse Bus Company. Coastal Limehouse also discounted the cost of the bus rental.

"When a whole community comes together, look what we can make happen," said Carr.

In addition to the entire Burke Basketball team, students from CCSD's Acceleration Schools were selected to attend the game chosen based on good citizenship and an interest in the game.

Smalls said the students from Chicora have a passion for basketball and an interest that deserved to be supported.

"This opportunity can aid the students as they make decisions regarding college and their careers," explained Smalls. "Our students understand basketball and academics are synonymous. Being able to foster their love of basketball by taking them to an NBA game has ultimately supported our efforts to propel them to academic excellence."

Smalls added that community partners play a large role in many things Chicora students are able to do.

"This opportunity gave our students the chance to strengthen skills they will need as they move toward college, into careers, and become active members of society," said Smalls. "It is because of our community partners that our students were given an opportunity to broaden their horizons and experience something they will carry with them as they move forward in life."

Coach Deon Richardson, the Athletic Director at Burke, escorted 25 players and coaches. He described it as a chance of a lifetime for his players and staff.

"It was a great experience for them based on the fact that the outing was tied to sports," said Richardson. "Getting my players outside of Charleston was an added benefit. The Lowcountry is not a major market for sports teams so to be able to participate in something like that was amazing."

Some of his players have never been to a college game, much less have left the Charleston area, Richardson explained.

"To be able to attend an NBA game exposes them to the opportunities out there that await them," added Richardson. "There are so many career opportunities in the sports world. From operations, marketing, recruiting, parking, ticket sales, and more, these student-athletes got to see what their lives could look like as they advance themselves through athletics."

"Seeing the parents and students being so excited about attending the game makes me emotional because experiences and opportunities allow our students to remember that your past and present do not dictate your future," said Carr. "We are preparing students to become globally productive citizens, and not only will they be successful, but they are heading to greatness."

Blatt agreed.

"It makes me happy to be able to give to these kids and contribute whatever I can," added Blatt. "Some people may take for granted getting to watch a professional basketball game. I can only imagine what it means to these kids, though. The smiles on their faces were enough for me to know they enjoyed it."

The Hornets lost the game by just 12 points which Richardson said resulted in his players learning the valuable lessons of loss, hard work, and perseverance.

"Our own team made it to the third round of the playoffs so the correlation they got from this experience was to not quit on yourself and play hard," said Richardson.

This year's CHAMP Awards will be held May 15, 2024, at The Gaillard Center, where the University of South Carolina's Head Football Coach, Shane Beamer, will be the guest speaker.

For more information, contact the Office of Communications at (843) 937-6303.

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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 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; military; dual credit; and many more.