

For Immediate Release

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Media Release

CCSD announces Top Five Finalists for 2024 Teacher of the Year

Office of Communications

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Charleston, SC - Charleston County School District (CCSD) officials surprised five teachers today by announcing their selection as the Top Five Finalists for 2024 Teacher of the Year.

The finalists are **Grace Barry**, Septima P. Clark Academy; **David Bonezzi**, Carolina Park Elementary School; **McKenna Hakanson**, North Charleston Creative Arts Elementary School; **Julia Royall**, West Ashley High School; and **Stevie Shirey**, North Charleston High School.

CCSD Superintendent of Schools, Anita Huggins, presented each finalist with flowers and a plaque. At each stop along the route, CCSD shared live announcements and updates on its social media platforms (@CCSDConnects). Photos from the day can also be found on those platforms and on the district website, ccsdschools.com.

One of the Top Five Finalists will take over the reins from the district's current Teacher of the Year, Spencer Quinlan, of Springfield Elementary School.

Meet the Top Five Finalists

Grace Barry – Barry is a high school English teacher at Septima P. Clark Academy. She joined CCSD four years ago after earning a bachelor's degree in English and History from the College of Charleston and later, two master's degrees in Secondary English and in Literacy Education from The Citadel.

Barry's professional memberships and organizations include the South Carolina Council of Teachers of English and Teaching Children of Poverty Scholars. Additionally, Barry is a CCSD Juvenile Detention Center summer school teacher and an adjunct professor at The Citadel.

In addition to being named Clark's 2023-2024 Teacher of the Year, Barry was the school's Rookie Teacher of the Year in 2020-2021.

Of her contributions to education, Barry's most prized is how she has helped grow the opportunities for students at Clark. Barry is qualified to teach four content

areas and does so because her students need help in those areas. Barry's goal is to meet the needs of her learners.

David Bonezzi – Bonezzi is a second grade teacher at Carolina Park Elementary School. He joined CCSD 11 years ago after graduating from the University of Akron with a degree in Early Childhood Education. He later earned a Master of Teaching, Learning, and Advocacy from the College of Charleston.

Bonezzi worked at Memminger Elementary School from 2013 until 2019 and was the school's Rookie Teacher of the Year. He joined the staff at Carolina Park in 2019.

Bonezzi is a member of the Palmetto State Teachers Association.

Bonezzi believes his greatest accomplishment in education is the classroom environment that he has cultivated over the past decade, one focused on community, student ownership, and authentic learning experiences that ignite a passion and curiosity for understanding the world around them.

Catherine "McKenna" Hakanson – Hakanson is a resource teacher at North Charleston Creative Arts Elementary School (NCCAES). She taught at a primary school in South Africa, an elementary school in North Carolina, and as a first grade teacher at Pinehurst Elementary School before joining NCCAES.

Hakanson earned a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education K-6 from Appalachian State University and a master's degree in Teaching, Learning, and Advocacy, with a concentration in Diverse Learners.

Hakanson has been a Teacher of the Year nominee at the school level three times since being employed with CCSD and was named College of Charleston's 2023 Outstanding Master's Student of the Year in Teaching, Learning, and Advocacy. At NCCAES, she is the NCCAE Exceptional Children department lead, a school-wide planning team member, and Ron Clark Academy House System Lead.

Hakanson believes some of her greatest accomplishments have been creating a sense of belonging for students and giving them the chance to take action using the tools they have gained from their education. She does this by spreading awareness for neurodiversity by advocating for and organizing Neurodiversity Month celebrations and community outreach events. Hakanson also worked in collaboration with one of her students to advocate for and organize Asian American Heritage Month in May. Seeing her student have the opportunity to turn their frustrations with a lack of representation into an action plan that was truly student-led is one of her favorite memories of her teaching career.

Julia Royall – Royall is a French teacher at West Ashley High School where she has served the last three years. She earned a bachelor's degree in French from the College of Charleston, and her teaching career spans 20 years.

Royall's professional memberships include President of the American Association of Teachers of French and South Carolina Chapter Regional Representative, and South Carolina Fellowship of Language Educators.

Royall believes that her greatest contributions and accomplishments in education are her ability to establish relationships with students and colleagues, her involvement in her school and community, and her passion for and knowledge of the content. The most important contribution Royall makes to education is her commitment to all students' learning and growth. Every child who is in Royall's classroom is seen, valued, and respected.

Stevie Shirey – Shirey is a high school science teacher at North Charleston High School. She has been with CCSD for three years and a teacher for a total of 17 years.

Shirey's degrees include a Bachelor of Arts in Music Theory and Composition and a Bachelor of Arts in Biology from the College of Charleston. She also earned a Master of Science in Biology from Clemson University.

Professional memberships include the National Science Teachers Association and Palmetto State Teachers Association. She is a Clemson University Inquiry Master Teacher, American Meteorological Society Maury Project Peer Trainer, North Charleston High School Lead Innovator, and a North Charleston High School Teacher Mentor.

In 2005, Shirey was a brand new teacher. She was asked to sponsor the National Beta Club and as a new teacher under evaluation, she said yes to her new boss. National Beta Club is an academic service organization that also has the opportunity to compete in academic and art competitions. Shirey quickly realized that the relationships she was forming with her Beta students could never be formed in a single semester in a classroom. This was where Shirey could make a real, long-term impact. It was with this group of students that Shirey achieved her greatest, proudest, professional moment.

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.