



St. John's High School

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Media Release

St. John's High celebrates new firefighting program

John's Island, SC —St. John's High School was recently gifted with a [fire engine](#) from the City of Charleston Fire Department (CFD) for use in their new firefighting course. The CFD has generously made this donation to the school so the students in the class can gain valuable hands-on, working knowledge.

The Emergency and Fire Management Services program is a Career and Technical Education (CTE) course and is the first of its kind in Charleston County School District (CCSD). The course prepares students for entry-level employment in the field of firefighting, the South Carolina Fire Academy certification, and higher educational opportunities.

Taught by Nate Murtaugh, this program enables students to become certified firefighters, eligible to go straight into the firefighting workforce. The course is a national certification allowing a student the opportunity to go anywhere in the country.

"This donation is huge for our program," said Murtaugh. "Chief [Dan] Curia has been with me every step of the way in developing this program and he recognizes the need for this program. This donation is a tremendous opportunity for the program and the community as a whole."

"The City of Charleston Fire Department upgrades our apparatus on a regular schedule and it just made sense to donate this engine to St. John's as a teaching tool," said Curia. "If we train locally, recruits are more apt to stay here in Charleston. We want to hire local talent because that's who will best serve the community because they have a commitment to their community."

Murtaugh agreed. He said from his experience that employee turnover in agencies is less likely if individuals who serve are from the communities they serve.

"Public servants show increased ownership in their commitment when it involves their hometown," said Murtaugh. "Individuals drawn to this kind of work naturally want to help people, especially when it's their neighbors."

Murtaugh will be working with local agencies such as St. Paul's Fire District, The City of Charleston Fire Department, and the St. John's Fire District to provide additional training opportunities to his students.

An instructor and a mentor

Murtaugh had a 23-year career in the fire service, serving in multiple roles from firefighter to chief of training. He spent the last 20 years as a certified South Carolina Fire Academy Fire Instructor, teaching classes from Firefighter, Fire Instructor, Water Rescue, Fire Officer, and other specialized courses.

Murtaugh started coaching football and softball at St. John's nine years ago. Through the years, he became part of the St. John's family. When the idea for the class was first presented, then Principal Steve Larson and CCSD administrators knew right away they had a groundbreaking concept that could be led by an established leader in the fire services industry.

According to current Principal Jermaine Joyner the process was not easy.

"It has been two years in the making," explained Joyner. "When I became Principal a year and a half ago, I believed in the concept, but there were a lot of hurdles that we had to jump through like securing an official sponsor (St. Paul's Fire Dept.), getting Memos of Understanding signed, and helping Mr. Murtaugh meet all the requirements he needed to be the instructor."

One of his football players, Jerrod Duncan knew he needed a plan if his dreams of professional football did not work out. With encouragement from Murtaugh, he joined the program.

"Firefighting is a tough job but the reward is saving lives and property," said Duncan. "Being the first in the district to get to complete this program will also be something I remember for the rest of my life. I'll be one of the originals."

Being an instructor came naturally to Murtaugh. He is no stranger to the growing need to recruit young professionals to the industry.

"My early interactions with emergency service personnel had a tremendous impact on my future," said Murtaugh. "I've enjoyed a rewarding career in the fire service and now have the opportunity to open doors for Lowcountry students through this program."

"Being first with anything is special"

Murtaugh said CCSD has been supportive in allowing him to develop the course programs, curriculum, and certification opportunities. Students will have the opportunity to earn the following certifications:

- NFPA Firefighter I & II
- NFPA Hazardous Material Awareness
- NFPA Hazardous Materials Operations
- SCFA Auto Extrication
- ASHI Emergency Medical Responder
- ASHI BLS CPR for the Professional Rescuer
- National Incident Management System (NIMS) 100, 200, 700, and 800

Junior Marissa Ramirez said the program is a great opportunity to learn about potential career paths.

"I am interested in a career that will allow me to help people," said Ramirez. "In this course, we are learning about the medical aspects of first response. It is more than just the fire service. Additionally, I think everything I learn in this program will prepare me for any life situation."

"There is a need in South Carolina to recruit individuals to the fire service and medical first responder positions," said Murtaugh. "This course is about more than just fire response. Students will learn about the roles that emergency medical responders play and much more."

Murtaugh has already established relationships with Lowcountry fire departments, and throughout the 90-day semester, students will tour those facilities, train with those agencies, and interact with the men and women who make up those departments.

"CCSD has given me unconditional support and I am grateful to show the community what our students can do," said Murtaugh. "This falls in line with the district's mission of ensuring college or career readiness. Some students want to go straight to work and this is a pipeline to do just that. Additionally, many agencies offer tuition reimbursement programs where employees can earn advanced degrees all while working full time."

Duncan said he was excited when he looked outside the front doors of St. John's and saw the fire engine.

"It is a pure indication the local fire agencies care about us, and we won't let them down," said Duncan. "This is a groundbreaking course for our school and I am committed to staying focused and locked in."

Murtaugh hopes to see the program modeled across the district.

"The fire service is one big family and always there to assist," said Murtaugh. "Local agencies have committed their support to my students because they want to recruit them into their highly skilled, high-demand agencies. It's a win-win for everyone."

Chief Curia has confidence that Murtaugh's students will complete the program knowing all they need to know to be successful firefighters.

"Under Murtaugh's leadership, these students will also leave with a deeper understanding of being a community servant, keeping the community's best interest in mind, which will create a better, safer Charleston," added Curia.

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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.