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Media Release

April is School Library Month – How librarians support literacy, student achievement, and a love of reading

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Charleston, SC — Charleston County School District (CCSD) celebrates libraries every day, especially during [National School Library Month](#), which runs through the month of April.

Libraries play an important role in our lives and have long been considered a strong influence on children's learning and development. National Library Week 2023 is celebrated with the theme "There's More to the Story" and CCSD adapted this theme to "Connecting All Our Stories." Libraries are full of stories in a variety of formats from picture books to large print, audiobooks to ebooks, and more.

"Our school libraries not only provide foundational literacy skills and access to stories, but they also provide connections between classroom content and deeper learning and exploration opportunities," said Christy James, Library and Media Services Coordinator for the district. "The work that takes place in our library facilities aligns with achieving **Vision 2027** where all students reading on grade level by fifth grade."

The month-long celebration also supports all of the District's three "pillars" that uphold the district's mission of educating and supporting every child in achieving college, career, and citizenship readiness, rigorous grade-level instruction, and high-quality teachers and leaders - **Pillar 1- rigorous grade-level instruction**, **Pillar 2 - high-quality teachers and leaders**, and **Pillar 3 wrap-around services**.

Elementary school

Shelley Ward has been the teacher-librarian at Belle Hall Elementary School for the last four years and relies heavily on the American Association of School Librarians' standards when creating enriching experiences for students.

"Increasing engagement is important to me," said Ward. "At the elementary level, you want to make learning, and especially reading, fun. I work hard to meet students where they are when creating new and unique activities."

Her students love room transformations because they're unexpected and fun. In the fall, she decorates the library to look like a campground and students enjoy flashlight reading. Ward selects books about camping, the wilderness, and survival. During "Dinovember" the room is transformed yet again and features interactive displays, such as an active volcano.

"There is some shock value in the room transformations because it is a surprise to them," said Ward.

Creating a space that students want to come to is just a mere snippet of the role Ward plays in her school community.

Collaboration is a standard that benefits teachers and students.

"I meet with teachers on a regular basis to see what students are learning in their classrooms so I can align library reading and activities with classroom curriculum," said Ward.

As a teacher-librarian, Ward also serves as a reading advisor. She often helps students choose books that are a good fit. She learns what series children like and is constantly on the lookout for new series that children will enjoy.

Ward also sparks interested readers with various reading incentive programs like Library VIPs (students who completed summer reading). They receive a special sticker that they can put on their shelf marker. This indicates that they are allowed to check out extra books.

"It is a point of pride," said Ward. "There are other incentive programs and in all of them I notice that the students are very proud to be recognized."

The opportunity to spend time with a therapy dog is new this year. When students read a million words, they are rewarded by spending time reading to Bridget, Harold, and Finn, the therapy dogs that visit twice a month. Ward plans to expand this program school-wide to all students who show growth in reading.

The library at most schools is considered the hub and offers various ways for Ward and her colleagues to engage scholars. At Belle Hall, that list is endless and forever changing to meet the needs of students. What remains a constant is the "windows and mirrors" philosophy.

"I try to offer a diverse collection of reading materials so students can see themselves reflected in what they're reading and can see into someone else's experience," said Ward. "It has transformed how my students relate to each other."

Middle school

Sean Muzzy, the teacher-librarian at Northwoods Middle School, prides himself on creating a library environment where there is something for everyone.

"We have a welcoming environment where we build relationships with our students so that we can tailor our books, activities, and learning materials to their interests," said Muzzy. "We carry a diverse collection of books that feature an array of characters so my students can see themselves in what they read and learn about others."

Muzzy works with teachers so that the library serves as an extension of the classroom.

"I purposefully attend teacher planning meetings and schedule face-to-face meetings with our educators so that we can offer meaningful instruction and materials that pertain to what students are learning in the classroom," added Muzzy.

As one might expect, his library has more than just books. Students have access to 3D printers, different manipulatives, and maker space activities. Muzzy said that breakout boxes are popular and promote collaboration and critical thinking.

At the middle school library, hours are flexible, allowing for individuals or entire classes to come in on an as-needed basis.

"Students and staff are served in my library every day, and at any time," said Muzzy. "No two school days are the same and I think the students and staff appreciate being able to come in as needed or scheduled."

Muzzy is also proud of the diverse collection he maintains.

"I make a concerted effort to grow our Spanish and Portuguese sections so that our Multilingual Learners can read books in their native language, as well as find books in English to enjoy," said Muzzy. "We have a very diverse student population so I need to fully understand where our students are from and what they are interested in."

Muzzy is in his fourth year at Northwoods. After being a stay-at-home dad for many years he went back to school to earn a degree in education. During that time he volunteered at his mother-in-law's school where she served as principal for many years. He was a substitute teacher there and shadowed existing teachers.

"I just loved the energy of the school and fell in love with the library," said Muzzy. "It was a perfect fit for me. I am now working in my third school as a teacher-librarian and I feel like it fuels my creative side because the position offers a little bit of everything when it comes to being an educator."

The library at Northwoods is the heart of the school and it just makes sense that it is a revolving door of learning and activity.

"I love that part," said Muzzy. "My kids are coming in here for more than just books, and that makes me proud."

High school

Stephanie Edwards is a teacher-librarian at Baptist Hill Middle High School. She has to think outside the box when it comes to engaging students since she serves a wide range of ages. She relies heavily on decorative displays that promote her diverse collection and draw students in the door.

"The most important thing to me is to have books that feature characters that look like our students," said Edwards. "These stories need to have experiences in them that our students can relate to and subject matters they want to read about and talk about."

Edwards hosts a book club for students and that has proven to be quite popular. By using the donation platform Donors Choose, Edwards is able to purchase new books and enough for each book club member.

"The book club encourages group reading and discussion," said Edwards. "They will often take turns reading aloud to each other."

In a twist, Edwards has students that prefer a one-on-one book club. Edwards and the student will read the same book and then discuss it together as they progress through the chapters.

Edwards has been with CCSD for 23 years and knows many of the families she serves. She is now teaching the children of some of her former students.

"That closeness and those tight bonds allow me to get to know my students as individuals," said Edwards. "I am better able to suggest books that they might like to read because I know their interests. This also helps when it comes time to order new books."

At Baptist Hill, the library is considered the heart of the school where both teachers and students feel they can come and ask questions, seek help, and find resources.

"There is something going on all the time in this library and sometimes it is a quiet place for students to find some reprieve," said Edwards. "It serves many purposes. Most importantly, it has come to be known as a collaborative space."

Edwards loves her students like her own and wants nothing but success for them.

"To be successful, they must be proficient in reading," said Edwards. "In my library we work together when extra help is needed. I also find ways to encourage students to write. I host virtual and in-person author visits so students can meet these professionals and be inspired."

Edwards fell in love with the library many years ago as a volunteer. She was dreaming of becoming a psychologist but the draw of the written word was stronger.

"I love, love, love my job," said Edwards. "It is a servant's job and hopefully I am making a difference in the lives of my students."

"These three teacher-librarians highlight what is so wonderful about all our school libraries in CCSD," said James. "Our libraries are providing vital support to our students and teachers. Connecting all our stories really is what our teacher librarians do all year long."

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 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 49,000 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.