

For Immediate Release

March 17, 2023

Contact:

Andy Pruitt, 843-937-6583

Media Release

Office of Communications

Donald R. Kennedy, Sr.
Superintendent of Schools

Anita Huggins
Deputy Superintendent

Vanessa L. Denney, M.Ed.
Interim Executive Director of
Communications

Pulse of CCSD – Barbara Hairfield committed to the best education for students - from the classroom to the State House

Charleston, SC - It is not the facility. It is not the instructional materials, the schedule, the programs offered, or the amount of technology access. The number one indicator of student achievement and success is the quality of the classroom teacher.

According to veteran Charleston County School District (CCSD) educator Barbara Hairfield, if we want the very best education for students we should focus our attention, time, efforts, and resources on building capacity in, and retention of, effective classroom teachers.

In most professions, entry level positions are provided support with someone to give over-the-shoulder training, guidance, and modeling as new employees learn and become acclimated to their new jobs. But, because of the way education is funded and structured, that is not often the case for new teachers. Once hired, and new teachers enter and close their classroom doors, they usually find that they must navigate their new position, basically on their own, while figuring out how to live independently for the first time on a salary that does not begin to cover their living expenses, and therefore, juggle additional jobs to help make ends meet after their teaching hours end.

Hairfield knows all too well the support educators need and has devoted much of her career in being there for them. This includes pre-service teachers which she has also mentored and supported as a supervising teacher for countless student interns from The Citadel and College of Charleston. Hairfield currently serves in the Office of Teacher Effectiveness in a specialist role she says is exactly what she is meant to be doing. She is a mentor that provides foundational supports for new teachers as they begin their career and continues to support and build capacity in veteran educators as they grow into effective teachers, assuming leadership roles in their schools with the ultimate goal of increasing teacher retention.

Hairfield said that building leadership capacity in good teachers naturally increases job satisfaction by enhancing a sense of pride and belonging in teachers by being a valuable assets in a school.

"To be of value in your school is a huge piece to teacher retention," said Hairfield. "Making a decision to stay in a position has a lot more to do with than salary. Trained Mentor Leaders are equipped to provide a higher level of support to induction teachers, which increases induction teacher success, and gives Mentor Leaders a higher level of job satisfaction."

Helping teachers flourish

When Hairfield joined CCSD in 1990 at the former Alice Birney Middle School (now Northwoods Middle School), she came not only to teach but to learn and relished her time there for 15 years.

"I taught with some incredible people, many of whom are now leaders in CCSD," said Hairfield. "My experience there showed me the difference between people who focused primarily on teaching their content and people whose objective was to teach students. I found that those who focused on meeting the needs of children first not only survived in challenging environments, but they thrived and flourished. Those restorative approaches might have been before their time then, but they came naturally to those putting them to use. The concept still holds true today. I continue to promote it in every school where I work with teachers."

Restorative practices is why working in OTE is so important to Hairfield.

"OTE is critical to teacher retention, not just for supporting induction teachers but for building leadership and job satisfaction in our strong veteran teachers," said Hairfield. "Those educators are the ones we absolutely want to retain in the classroom. In the current crisis, with scores of educators exiting the field, we must examine the reasons why good teachers are leaving and think innovatively about what we can do to keep them."

Raised in a large Catholic family, as the oldest of 10 siblings, Hairfield had a strong upbringing in the importance of service and putting the needs of others always before self. With that foundation, along with her early teaching experience, Hairfield says that she has always tried to practice those beliefs and emulate her colleagues who put their students' needs first.

"Those examples actually set the tone for the rest of my career," said Hairfield. "Supporting educators and being a voice for them is my passion. I know how much teachers give of themselves for their students, and I have worked to be a voice for them in all I do – from the classroom to the statehouse and beyond."

At the school, district, and community levels, Hairfield has taken on various leadership roles, including serving on The Citadel's Professional Education Board for 20 years. She became involved in state and national organizations before leaving

the district to accept a position at the S.C. State Department of Education with a program called the Teacher Specialist On-Site Program. This initiative was funded by the General Assembly to place highly effective teachers in underperforming schools such as Brentwood and Morningside through this state program, to work directly supporting the teachers in struggling schools to be more effective.

Hairfield returned to CCSD to serve as a Teacher Coach in a new program developed under the Chief Academic Office and later become the CCSD K-12 Social Studies Curriculum Specialist for 12 years to directly support Social Studies teachers.

In addition to her work as an educator, whether as a teacher or as a district administrator supporting teachers, Hairfield has spent 16 years as a Legislative Appointee to the [South Carolina Education Oversight Committee](#).

Hairfield serves as the Educator Representative of the Senate Pro Tem and has twice served 4-year terms as the Vice Chair of the EOC. Her work as a member of this legislative advisory committee to the General Assembly on all education issues includes Early Childhood Readiness, Cyclical Review, Revision, and Adoption of Standards in all content areas, adoption of the Profile of the SC Graduate, adoption of State Assessments for Accountability, metrics for state Report Cards, approval of EIA funding requests, Teacher Recruitment and Retention, Literacy initiatives, Read to Succeed legislation and revision, Graduation requirements, College and Career Readiness indicators, Alternative Instruction including e-Learning, Data Dashboards, Tiered Credentialing, and countless other projects and issues that arise related to education.

As a member of the full Education Oversight Committee, Hairfield works with the Commission on Higher Ed and the S.C. State Department of Education, as well as, the Governor's Office on Education. Currently, Hairfield chairs the Public Awareness Sub-Committee and serves on the Academic Standards and Assessments Sub-Committee of the EOC.

Most recently, Hairfield was appointed to serve on the search committee for a new EOC Executive Director. That work began in January when the former Executive Director left to become the Deputy Superintendent of Academics at the State Department of Education with Superintendent Ellen Weaver's new team.

"My work with the Education Oversight Committee is more than a political appointment to me," said Hairfield. "It is a huge part of my service to education. This commitment enables me to be a voice for my colleagues, CCSD, and state teachers and administrators - to be a strong voice for what is best for education."

Hairfield explained that education took a dramatic shift in 1998 when the South Carolina General Assembly passed the [Education Accountability Act](#). Prior to this legislation, schools and districts had a lot of autonomy, very little accountability, and South Carolina student achievement was dismal. Within that legislation, the Education Oversight Committee was established to ensure that all components of the EAA legislation were followed with fidelity.

"I have always been very interested in political processes," said Hairfield. "I knew that this was where important decisions were being made for education, felt this was a service I was called to be a part of, and have remained committed to it since my initial appointment in 2007."

According to the U.S. Constitution, the state government is responsible for public education. Hairfield acknowledged that this can make things frustrating for educators because all decisions related to education are regulated by state general assemblies, most of whom are non-educators. Therefore, it is very important for educators' voices to be heard while legislators are in the process of making education decisions. Hairfield added that she believes legislators make the absolute best decisions they can with the information they have.

"Sometimes, members of the General Assembly may not be aware of how the implementation of a piece of education legislation plays out after it has passed or know that they have not heard all perspectives on a topic before a legislative decision is made," said Hairfield. "Part of my role as an Educator Representative on the EOC is to better inform them. It is important to relay educator input so that our perspectives don't go unheard. Once a piece of legislation is passed, the legislature sends it to the State Department of Education whose job it is to facilitate, or operationalize the law."

Hairfield explained that CCSD is often looked at as one of the role models for the state.

"CCSD is fortunate because as a large district in a desirable city, we attract some of the brightest and most forward-thinking leaders, creative personnel, and innovators. Charleston has been able to try new things that many districts are not afforded the opportunity to do. I have always been so happy to be a part of the Charleston County School District and am proud of the work that CCSD is doing academically and of our focus on increasing diversity, alternative teaching pathways, leadership opportunities, early readiness, literacy, and restorative practices."

No matter her role in education, Hairfield is committed to being a servant leader to her colleagues in Charleston and in Columbia and to all the students of South Carolina.

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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.