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Media Release

Pulse of CCSD – Michelle Brewer balancing more than just budgets

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Charleston, SC – Much goes on behind the scenes of Charleston County School District (CCSD), the state’s second-largest school district. CCSD’s sheer size requires that it be run not just as an institute of academic learning but as a large corporation.

Fortunately the district’s, many moving parts run like a well-oiled machine. For a district the size of CCSD to be successful, they have to. An example of that is the advanced budget preparation that is underway for 2024.

Bookkeepers and department heads are gathering and preparing the necessary documentation and leaning on Michelle Brewer, Budget Supervisor in the Office of Budgeting and Grants Accounting, for help.

“I help correct mistakes that come from mostly coding and transferring,” said Brewer. “I use my business management experience to offer assistance and find the easiest fix.”

Lauren Gandy, project specialist in the Office of Communications, said she could not have made it through the budgeting season or staff changes without her assistance.

“She has an outstanding attitude and is always ready and able to help,” said Gandy. “Her knowledge is endless. Her spirit is so kind and refreshing.”

Brewer’s upbringing and various career stops, prepared her for the intricacies of working in the district’s budgeting office.

Brewer grew up in Europe while her father served in the Air Force. She lived all over the world and was introduced to various cultures and experiences, particularly by her French mother.

“I learned how to adapt because we were moving and starting over every four years,” said Brewer.

By the age of 13, Brewer's family was back in the United States where they settled in Tennessee. In high school, she excelled in and completed vocational classes that included basic accounting and finance.

Brewer had big plans to go to college after graduating high school but decided to put that off for a while and instead traveled the world.

Life puts you where you're supposed to be

After some years, she returned to Tennessee and started working for a local mental health center. She spent 12 years as the director of a drop-in center for the mentally ill. There she honed her skills in administration and budget oversight.

In the meantime, her sister Solange Brewer (now CCSD's Director of Federal Programs) had moved to Charleston and obtained a job with the district at the former Brentwood Middle School. The bond between sisters is impenetrable. In a short time, Michelle was on her way to Charleston to join Solange at Brentwood and later at Ladson Elementary School as a secretary/bookkeeper.

"She has such a giving nature and continually goes out of her way to help others," said Solange. "I am so proud of who she has become and all that she has accomplished."

Brewer said she enjoyed being in the schools.

"At one point, I thought I wanted to be a teacher, but the business manager in me was a stronger calling," added Brewer.

Brewer received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Western Governors University. When a business manager position became available in CCSD's Finance Division, she applied and made a move to the district side of education.

"It was there that I saw first-hand how crucial each role is at CCSD," said Brewer.

Brewer has worked in the budgeting department for the last two years and loves it.

"Michelle is an excellent example of someone who has risen through the ranks of CCSD as a result of her hard work and dedication in every position she has held," said Ann McIntosh-Hill, Director of Budget and Special Revenue. "Using her wealth of knowledge, she has the gift of showing others how to navigate complicated processes in a very simple, easy-to-understand way with patience and a smile on her face."

"There are so many aspects to it because principals and bookkeepers have questions about completing budget requests and paperwork," said Brewer. "My job is to help them to get back to doing what they do best. Budgeting can be confusing. There are questions about which account to use when creating a

Purchase Order, or where to allocate a P-Card purchase. Their time is valuable. I try to support them as much as possible so they are not chasing down answers.”

As time has gone by, procedures and support systems have improved. Staff is forward-thinking and digital capabilities have opened doors to endless opportunities.

Brewer and her team created a secretary/bookkeeper website that is a one-stop shop for anything they might need.

“We tried to make it as simple as possible to understand,” said Brewer. “At the school level, they don’t have time to search for some answers because they have so much going on. Making their job easier is the most important aspect of my job.”

Monthly training is also offered that explains where funding lives, which accounts to use, and correct coding. Brewer and her three other colleagues provide continuous training.

“It is crucial because there is no room for error,” said Brewer.

Brewer and her three colleagues each manage about 20 schools and 20 departments.

“CCSD has come so far since I started,” said Brewer. “From training to communication, to support, it has improved so much.”

Brewer and her team impact students indirectly by supporting schools and departments. Her role in CCSD is no less critical.

“The schools focus on children and learning, and they must have the funding to support teachers and programs,” said Brewer. “We’re not in the building teaching but we are guiding administrators and teachers on how to spend wisely so they can make sure they have what they need to be successful.”

Brewer explained that funding affects not only new programming but teacher counts as well. The number of teachers employed in a building depends on the number of students in attendance, and Brewer described it as a balancing act.

“I’ve been at the school level, so I feel I have a better understanding of their needs, and I can help calculate and assist them in every way,” said Brewer.

Candice White, Senior Budgeting Officer, agrees.

“Michelle is very engaging and personable. “These qualities have helped her establish positive relationships with CCSD schools and offices.”

A lot of people are supporting the mission in a lot of different ways, Brewer explained.

“Behind the scenes, jobs like this are just as important to the students as others are,” said Brewer. “The money has to balance out, and we are here to ensure that.”

Just as Brewer supports her schools and departments, she is supported by her team and supervisors.

“From the top down, I feel supported,” said Brewer. “I have never been in a situation where I didn’t feel like I had 100 percent support. I try to pass that on in my work.”

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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.