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# Media Release

## **Pulse of CCSD – Eric Stallings strives to be an agent of change**

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*"Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it." Marian Wright Edelman*

**Charleston, SC** – Getting an education was important in Eric Stallings' household. So much so that he knew early on in life that he wanted to be a teacher. Many years later, Stallings, Charleston County School District's (CCSD) Assistant Director of Pathways to Teaching, fulfilled that dream.

"I wanted to be a change agent," said Stallings. "I wanted to be involved in children's lives and advocate. My goal was to be there for my students and their parents and give them a voice so they could eventually advocate for themselves."

Stallings has turned his passion into a career in helping others. Today he recruits and mentors teachers so that they can continue the work of advocating for children.

"My mom worked a lot," added Stallings. "She had to work hard to provide for us. That left me to advocate for myself, which in turn caused me to realize that being an advocate for a child, no matter rich or poor, is key to their future success."

Stallings was the first person in his family to graduate from college. He did not come from a family of educators, but he was involved in his community, and certain people made a significant impact on his life.

"Many people pushed me to go to college and instilled in me to be the best version of me," said Stallings. "I Knew I would not make a lot of money but the joy and pride of working with students in the classroom outweighed everything else."

### **Always the advocate**

Stallings grew up in Aiken and during his high school years, he became involved in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. The nonprofit put him in a position where he could mentor younger children, which sparked his interest in becoming an educator.

He has continued his non-profit work here in Charleston as a member of the board of directors for HALOS, a nonprofit organization to promote safe and nurturing homes for children in kinship care. He is also a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Stallings joined the Call Me MiSTER program (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models). The initiative is a teacher recruitment program to address the critical shortage of African American male teachers. He committed to teaching and chose to attend the College of Charleston.

Stallings' degrees are numerous. He attended the College of Charleston, where he earned a degree in Middle-Level Education, a master's degree in Learning and Advocacy for Diverse Learners, and an additional master's degree from Charleston Southern University in School Administration and Supervision in Elementary and Secondary – all while working full-time.

"I didn't grow up with a teacher that looked like me," said Stallings. "During my time with Call Me MiSTER, I learned how important it is for students to see black and brown male role models. The program gives participants the tools they need to be successful as minority male teachers and how to relate to the students and stress that they too can become a teacher or anything they want to be."

### **For the love of the students**

Stallings loved teaching as much as he loved his students. He started his career with CCSD as an eighth grade teacher at Baptist Hill Middle High School.

"I enjoyed working there," Said Stallings. "I felt a sense of belonging at Baptist Hill. I enjoyed seeing middle school students transition to high school and watching them grow. It was amazing to witness their journey first-hand. The community out there in Hollywood is very welcoming and a great place to start a career."

Stallings spent seven years at Baptist Hill and was named Teacher of the Year in 2018 and went on to be named a Top 5 Finalist that year. His passion for the profession did not go unnoticed, and he was quickly hired to work in the Office of Teacher Effectiveness (OTE) working with Title 1 teachers.

"We see much turnover in Title 1 schools, especially with first-year teachers," said Stallings. "I am passionate about working with teachers new to the classroom or the district because I want to help them through that first-year journey. To be able to assist them is important to the retention piece."

Stallings also remembers that what you are taught in college about how to be a teacher can be somewhat different from reality.

"A teacher must be empathetic to a child's trauma or socio-economic situation and so many other things," said Stallings. "Each child is different, and a teacher must be able to pivot when necessary, all while trying to engage students to make sure they have meaningful learning experiences."

Stallings spent almost three years in OTE helping teachers do just that and encouraging them to build strong relationships with their colleagues and scholars. During that time, Stallings was trained in teacher evaluation standards and cognitive coaching to support teachers across the district.

"Some teachers have that 'it' factor," said Stallings. "You know when you see it. Working with induction teachers and their mentors gave me an up-close glimpse of the ones who will be future superintendents. What these teachers are doing and how they are impacting their schools is exciting to witness. Those are the ones I know will go places."

Ready for a new challenge, Stallings took a position in teacher recruitment – promoting opportunities at the middle and secondary levels and in alternative programs.

"It was rewarding to build partnerships within the community and at our colleges and universities," said Stallings. "I liked the challenge, and with the teacher shortage, it was even more challenging. It is super important to me to ensure that every student has a certified teacher in front of them. Every child deserves to have a teacher in the classroom on the first day of school. Additionally, what drove my passion was diversifying the pipeline of candidates, so everyone is represented at every school throughout the district."

### **Call me MISTER**

Stallings is a walking success story from the Call Me MISTER program. His storied career in education continues to revolve around advocacy and mentoring. Now he recruits and encourages other young men to participate in Call Me MiSTER.

"My mentor in life was Floyd Breeland," said Stallings. "He was my Call Me MISTER advisor at the College of Charleston. He was a lifelong educator and served in the South Carolina House of Representatives. He tucked me under his wing and told me to stick it out. He was stern with me, but he knew I had a calling, and he made me want to work hard to get there. I want to be that someone for the next in line."

Stallings said it is rewarding to watch a young man matriculate through the program and enter the classroom. He has been able to build lasting relationships with many of the young men, several of whom teach for CCSD.

"His dedication to recruiting and retaining teachers to CCSD has been very apparent in his commitment to being a teacher recruiter and currently as the

Assistant Director of Pathways to Teaching,” said Rodrick Bellamy, a sixth grade math teacher at Northwoods Middle School and Call Me MISTER participant. “His work in creating and implementing the Men of CHS Teach Program has helped recruit, train, and retain male teachers of color in our district’s schools. He has also maintained a consistent relationship with all Call Me MISTER Program graduates employed in our district.”

Stallings said he has enjoyed watching the MiSTERS that came after him, such as Bellamy, Marvaye Payton, Chak Orr, and Corey Roberts..

“To see the impact the MiSTERS are all making in the district is amazing,” said Stallings. “They are spread out in schools across the district, all working in very different environments, but they are all making a difference in students’ lives – every day. The common denominator is that they all put students first. They all believe in doing what’s best for their students. They bring 100 percent every day which is noticed in and outside the classroom. Those are the best of the best.”

### **Pathways to becoming a teacher**

Today Stallings serves as the Assistant Director for Pathways to Teaching. This innovative concept creates another pipeline for a career in education.

For example, TeachCharleston recruits professionals in the private sector to earn their certification.

“It is life-changing for them to go from the workforce to the classroom, training and educating the next generation,” Stallings explained.

Men of CHS Teach is another mechanism to recruit minority males for early childhood and elementary classrooms.

Stallings offers the men who agree to participate support throughout the year, visits their classrooms, helps candidates through the certification process, and helps them navigate the transition from private sector jobs to the classroom.

The Men of CHS Teach program is growing. Eleven participants joined CCSD classrooms this school year.

“It is important to give students experiences with real-world connections,” said Stallings. “These professionals know what it takes to navigate that student to success, whether it be teaching, the medical field, engineering mechanics, etc. To have these professionals teaching our students and giving them that knowledge is invaluable. Often students walk away with a passion for something they did not know they had.”

Stallings added that it is essential and necessary for students to see and experience highly qualified teachers in every aspect of education. No matter the grade or level.

"Eric is a great colleague to work alongside," said April Butler, Director of Pathways to Teaching. "He openly welcomes the challenges of the work and eagerly celebrates the wins. He is an instrumental part of Pathways to Teaching and I am lucky to have the opportunity to have him on the team."

In each recruitment position Stallings has held with CCSD, he has nurtured relationships he built with universities across the country.

"I have traveled the country, held virtual events, and spoken at colleges and universities all in an effort to recruit top teachers to CCSD," said Stallings. "The most important aspect of my work is collaborating with our principals to make sure that they have the best staff and teachers in their building for their students."

One of Stallings' favorite quotes is from Martin Luther King – "Life's most persistent and urgent question is 'What are you doing for others?'"

Stallings believes that the teachers of CCSD are doing everything possible to provide the best education for our scholars.

"If you are a teacher in CCSD you have the most powerful position in the district," said Stallings. "Each student you touch and each parent that you meet will be better off for having had you in their lives."

While Stallings misses the connections with students and families that he was able to make as a classroom teacher he enjoys building relationships with new teachers and those he has recruited.

"I smile as I see our new teachers connecting with the students and teaching them new concepts," said Stallings. "The work continues."

Stallings aspires to make more significant impacts across the district whether working with students or families, teacher retention, or recruitment.

"I will work as hard as possible wherever I am needed, Stallings added.

Out of the office, Stallings enjoys spending time with his family and friends. He and his wife Tope Leyimu just welcomed a baby girl, so their love of traveling has been put on hold temporarily.

"I have a passion for travel and exploring new cultures," said Stallings. "I have a great group of friends from all over the world, including Germany, France, London, Mexico, Brazil, and Spain. I love building lifelong friendships and connecting with people."

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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 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.