



Chicora Elementary School

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Media Release

A transformation is happening under the leadership of Principal Smalls

North Charleston, S.C. – The students at Chicora Elementary School love their principal. Many say she treats them as if they were her own. [In Principal Monica Smalls' heart, they are.](#)

"Treating these children as if they are our own is intentional," said Smalls. "We call these students our babies. They are what makes this school so special."

Smalls is only in her second year as principal of Chicora. She is no stranger to the school or the community, though. She served as assistant principal for several years before being promoted, and she's made big changes at the school.

Brayden Meyers is a fourth grader who has attended Chicora since he was a very young child. He described Smalls as fun and loving.

"She has high expectations for us and we follow her rules," said Meyers. "Mrs. Smalls also cares about us and our entire family. She told my sister she was going to be a smart student just like me."

Teacher Alexandra Balcom said that students are also aware of the great things happening at Chicora.

"The students see Mrs. Smalls in the halls, in their classrooms, and at their events," said Balcom. "She is there for all occasions. She goes out of her way to be present, even in the tough moments."

Changing the culture

Smalls utilizes a variety of developmentally appropriate instructional strategies that consider the different emotional needs of her students. She said that additional support from the district has also helped to change the culture of Chicora.

"Providing a safe and loving environment here is so important," said Smalls. "Outside of these walls, things may be happening in the community that doesn't belong inside this school. At Chicora, those things stay outside so that the only job of our students is to learn so that they can become productive citizens."

Cornetta Sams is the assistant principal at Chicora. She said that Smalls is selfless when it comes to the students.

"She works to ensure our students are succeeding and growing in all areas of their life," said Sams. "She is fairly new in this role and I have witnessed to Mrs. Smalls' growth."

Sams explained that Smalls' support for her staff gives them the confidence they need to do their jobs.

"It is ok to make mistakes, but we must get up and try again," said Sams. "Every morning she gets on the intercom and speaks positive affirmations to the entire school body. This motivation promotes unity as well as ensuring that we all know that we are not perfect, but we must keep trying."

Sams is also appreciative of being able to share leadership responsibilities with Smalls.

"She calls on all of us to motivate, impact, empower, and push our students to be successful," said Sams. "Just as she believes in me, she believes in our children."

Balcom said that she is proud that Smalls is her principal.

"She exudes confidence and is such as natural at what she does," said Balcom. "She is very mindful of the challenges our students face and facilitates support and intervention in an honest way so we can operate as a family and as a team to support our students and their families."

Balcom explained that the extensive professional development that is offered ensures that teachers are well-trained, they know what is expected of them, and they know how to execute it.

The South Carolina Department of Education has embedded State Transformation Coach Marcella Glover at the school as an additional resource. In her role, she provides support to Chicora through assisting with building capacity and sustainability.

"It has been great to see Mrs. Smalls evolve and build lasting relationships with parents, students, and the community," said Glover. "There is a transformation happening at Chicora and Mrs. Smalls is committed to seeing it play out. By following the South Carolina School Improvement Model, Mrs. Smalls and her staff consistently monitors student performance data and provides identified students with evidence-based interventions. Teachers are provided with targeted Professional Development that support the district and school's goals. That makes all the difference."

Smalls said that she is developing in her role as principal thanks to the professional support and development opportunities provided to her.

"I am appreciative of it because I want to be an effective leader," said Smalls.

Smalls has several young educators under her guidance and is able to quickly connect with them because of her philosophy of "growing together."

Balcom has seen her philosophy in action.

"Mrs. Smalls is very supportive of my career and she trusts that I know what I am doing," said Balcom. "I really appreciate that and I know she will be there for me when I need her guidance."

Bridging the gap

Glover acknowledged that it is a challenge to make sure that each student is learning at a proficient level.

"With the right supports in place, it can be done," Glover said. "Mrs. Smalls follows the lead of the Acceleration Schools so that she and her staff are equipped to deliver instruction and her students are provided with the intervention they need."

Smalls considers her staff a team.

"We are all here for the same reason," said Smalls. "It is our job to cultivate a brighter future for our students and close the opportunity gaps all while building lasting relationships."

Balcom explained that staff is encouraged to get to know each student and to build relationships.

"After that, the academics will come," said Balcom. "It is our job to love them first because kids don't learn from people that don't love them. Teaching the whole child aligns with Mrs. Smalls' approach to creating a positive culture that leads to successful outcomes."

Glover said that Smalls is a principal committed to everyone's success.

"Things are less overwhelming when you know she always has your back no matter the challenge," said Glover. "She believes in each teacher and student and wants nothing but success for them."

Each day is a new day at Chicora where it is taught that hurdles can be overcome.

"We celebrate our students as a way to motivate them," said Smalls. "We acknowledge them in every way because their well-being is important."

Fifth grader Melanie Nunez said that Smalls has done a great job of helping students achieve their goals.

"She is so caring and kind and she encourages us," said Nunez. "She spends a lot of time with the students and that is part of what makes learning fun at Chicora."

It is evident by the number of hugs and high-fives given out on any one day that the students at Chicora love Mrs. Smalls.

"Knowing I can make a difference in the lives of my students is my 'why,'" said Smalls.

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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 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.