

For Immediate Release

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Media Release

District celebrates National Arts in Education Week by highlighting dance programs for all ages

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Charleston, SC – Charleston County School District (CCSD) prides itself on offering an in-depth menu of creative arts choices for students. CCSD boasts a diverse student population, and as such, the arts programs offered in all 87 schools and programs are plentiful. According to CCSD Grants Officer Alicia Kokkinos, each year, over 20 CCSD schools apply for grants to support visual and performing arts opportunities. The grant funds provide over \$200,000 in additional arts resources for students.

In celebration of National Arts in Education Week September 11-17, CCSD recognizes the [various dance programs](#) in which students participate in.

According to Dr. Denisse Santos, Assistant Director of Visual and Performing Arts, CCSD dance programs offer students comprehensive experiences in creativity and movement.

CCSD schools offer a variety of dance styles ranging from ballet to hip hop and modern dance.

The ballet program at Ashley River Creative Arts Elementary School began in 1984 when the school opened. It originated as a program offered by Robert Ivey through a state grant. In 2010 it became a certified district position/program. In the early 1980s Rose Maree Myers presented CCSD with the idea to create an arts magnet program that would include classical violin and ballet disciplines. Once Ashley River was established, Myers went on to open School of The Arts as their principal.

Santos said that some CCSD schools offer dance programs at a very young age and students have the opportunity for group instruction to explore a variety of styles.

All students at Ashley River that are in CD, Kindergarten, and special needs attend Movement Class with instructor Brooke McMurray. This class utilizes the South Carolina Dance Curriculum and National Elementary Dance Standards through creative movement. Students in grades first through third may register for classical ballet. Fourth grade students are taught contemporary, and fifth grade students learn classical jazz.

"Students leave with exposure to several styles," explained McMurray. "Fourth and fifth graders also focus on student composition."

Kimberly Majewski has taught in numerous CCSD elementary schools since 2009 and is currently the full-time dance instructor at North Charleston Creative Arts Elementary School.

The program at NCCAES, which serves the north area of Charleston County, began in Fall 2011 as a program serving grade K-1. It was expanded to the entire elementary school serving Grade CD – 5 with the goal of developing a child-centered, developmentally appropriate atmosphere centered around arts integration and enriching experiences in the arts.

Majewski began dancing at the age of three, and the introduction to the art at such a young age inspired her to pursue a dance education.

"It is important to introduce students to dance arts at a young age so they have the basic building blocks to build upon as they matriculate up to middle and high school," said Majewski. "At this age, they get to experience something they may later become passionate about, but more importantly it gives them the tools to be self-confident, self-aware, and team players."

Her classes are structured around fun so that both girls and boys feel comfortable and willing to show off their talents and participate fully in the class.

McMurray has taught dance at ARCAES for the last 13 years and teaches everything from classical ballet to contemporary and classical jazz. She also explained that dance helps students learn spatial awareness, discipline, artistic expression, and aesthetics in terms of an audience.

"It is important for students to be exposed to all art forms at a young age so they can develop an appreciation for all that it encompasses," said McMurray. "We want children to see different forms of art and be able to really think about what they are seeing."

Majewski added that dance arts help young children learn about themselves so that they become well-rounded people. She teaches dance to all grade levels. The instruction goes beyond stylized dance and is integrated with art and classroom standards, adding an additional way for students to be exposed to core content.

"I always wanted to teach dance to elementary age students," said Majewski. "It is amazing to watch their eyes light up and their self-confidence increase," said Majewski. "I love witnessing those moments when they truly enjoy working together to create and express themselves."

At Burke High School, dance students are not only learning generational dances and music, but choreography as well. Instructor Kenyetta Bailey has created a well-rounded dance curriculum that includes social dance, cultural dance, and classical dance.

"Most kids like to dance and this class gives them some formal structure and an opportunity to choreograph and create their own routines," said Bailey. "It is also an opportunity for students to learn about the multiple career opportunities available to them should they decide to pursue that route."

Santos said that students enrolled in CCSD dance programs have the opportunity to explore a variety of options and express themselves through movement and music.

"As students get older, they have the opportunity to participate in more focused instruction on particular dance styles," explained Santos. "Some of our students go on to explore dance instruction in higher education, participate and teach in dance studios, become performers, and explore other options in professional careers."

Bailey is an example of that and relays to her students the path she took.

"I started dance in high school and went on to earn a bachelor in arts management," said Bailey. "My background is in choreography in the private studio sector. I eventually went on to earn my Masters in Dance Education from New York University so that I could be an instructor."

Tenth grade student Ja'Chia James loves to dance and enjoys Bailey's class.

"At home I dance and have fun with my friends and we make up our own dances for Tik Tok," said James. "What I am learning in this class is totally different than that. It's new music and new moves. I enjoy learning about things I didn't know before."

Traditionally a performance or recital is held at the end of the year or semester for students to showcase what they have learned. Students in McMurray's class perform for parents and their peers at West Ashley High School in a recital that features full choreography, costume, lighting, and sound.

"It is a culmination of their hard work throughout the year," said McMurray. "It is when my students can walk away and say, 'I am a dancer,' or 'I am an artist.'"

Bailey agreed and said the added component is that a student had fun in the class and enjoyed creating.

"If my students had fun, then I have more than met my goal," said Bailey.

McMurray said the hope is that students learn how to process and identify what they are seeing, hearing, and feeling, and put into words their thoughts.

"In the dance program, we use this tool when deciding ways to present our ideas and create work for audiences," said McMurray. "This is how we design and create movement in a way that communicates our intention to people who may be watching."

Santos said CCSD is very fortunate to have world class dance instructors that can provide this type of instruction for students.

"We believe that creativity and movement are an essential part of a student's arts education, and we are committed to continuing to offer this opportunity for our students," added Santos.

This is the first time in several years that Burke students were offered dance class as an elective. Bailey is working on building the program at Burke and anticipates an increase as the word spreads.

"At the beginning of the year I was told that there is talent among our students when it comes to dancing," said Bailey. "That was accurate. That talent showed up and I could not be more proud to watch them grow and improve."

For more information, contact the Communications Office 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.