

For Immediate Release

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Media Release

Pulse of CCSD – CCSD alum supports department in charge of helping students and families

Division of Strategy and
Communications

Donald R. Kennedy, Sr.
Superintendent of Schools

Charleston, SC – A closed hand cannot give, according to Libby Smalls-Tisdale, Receptionist in Charge of Charleston County School District's (CCSD) Office of Family and Community Engagement (FACE). In this role, Smalls-Tisdale and her coworkers support parents and families to ensure student success.

Tisdale-Small is on the front lines of the FACE office, fielding calls from parents and guardians trying to navigate the ins and outs of CCSD. Callers might be frustrated and angry, but her calm, soothing manner quickly dissipates those feelings as she guides families towards what they need.

The FACE team is charged with facilitating resolutions to parent concerns and improving family and community relationships with the school and the district. This type of support comes natural to Smalls-Tisdale who is a born empath, always willing to lend a hand or a shoulder.

Part of FACE's work is to resolve parent complaints that reach the district level. A FACE officer can receive as many as twenty-five calls a day and a complaint can take days to resolve. Smalls-Tisdale takes the bulk of those calls in addition to the dozens of other calls she connects to other district departments for assistance and resources such as the Department of Alternative Programs, Exceptional Children, Head Start, and the Office of Translation and Interpretation Services.

"I think as we grow older and mature, we evolve in how we are able to help or provide for others," said Smalls-Tisdale. "You have to put yourself in their position. As a mother, myself, I have been there. I can relate to the working parents so I am able to stay focused and not get worked up with them. My goal is to calm their frustration so we can point them towards the resources they need."

Smalls-Tisdale believes her childhood and early career prepared her for this role at CCSD. This is her third stint with the district, an opportunity that she enjoys.

Lowcountry native

Smalls-Tisdale was born and raised on James Island and attended Riverland Terrace Elementary, Murray LaSaine Elementary School, James Island Middle School, and James Island High School.

At a very young age, she became employed by the district as a [student school bus driver](#), choosing to drive one rather than wait on one.

“It was challenging for a female because there was no one to help me practice,” said Smalls-Tisdale. “It was scary the first time. I kept messing up the clutch and there was an elderly man grading me and he started fussing and told me to park the bus and get out of the driver’s seat. He showed me how to do it again, so I just watched and kept practicing in my head.”

Smalls-Tisdale ran two routes; an elementary school route and a high school route. The safety of the students was her responsibility, a responsibility she didn’t take that likely. Smalls-Tisdale feels that same way today in her other various roles with CCSD.

Her life came full circle when she came to work at CCSD at Camp Road Middle School (formerly James Island Middle School) for ten years as a student data clerk. She retired but later returned to the workforce again as an employee in the District’s Division of Strategy and Communications, and now FACE.

Choosing a career

A college degree was not the highest priority for Smalls-Tisdale. As she interviewed for jobs after high school graduation, she quickly learned that employers wanted candidates with higher education. She enrolled at Trident Technical College and took classes, all while working with the Department of Social Services.

“They didn’t have online classes back then so I took weekend classes,” explained Smalls-Tisdale. “I really had to juggle because I was working full time and helping out at home.”

Smalls-Tisdale earned her Clerk/Typist certificate and promised herself that one day, she would go back to school and finish her college courses. She kept that promise to herself and today is earning her associate’s degree in Criminal Justice. Her goal is to one day become a municipal politician, so she can implement change in her community. In the meantime, she is a fierce advocate and political activist for causes near and dear to her heart, particularly, voter registration.

"I have four more classes left," said Smalls-Tisdale. "I've spent many long nights studying after a long day at work, but I am used to being a night owl."

In between that, she takes the weekend shift to care for her aging parents, so that her sister can have a break. Additionally, she is the president of her neighborhood civic association.

Both of those activities are yet another example of her giving, benevolent nature.

"The neighborhood civic association is a volunteer group and as president of the association, it keeps me busy," said Smalls-Tisdale. "We all work hard together to keep things running smoothly. We also celebrate the people that live in our community."

Smalls-Tisdale is particularly proud of the graduation celebration members were able to organize for the 2022 graduates in her community. A special "shout-out" video was made featuring local celebrities and dignitaries and sent to each of the R.B. Stall High School students that live in the neighborhood. Funeral homes, individuals, and businesses also donated so that each graduate could receive cash gifts, presents, and swag bags.

"I think it is important, no matter what your platform is, to use that platform to recognize, celebrate, help, give, provide, resolve, and rally the troops," said Smalls-Tisdale. "If you help people, they will remember and hopefully, it will motivate them to help someone else when they can."

FACE

CCSD has many resources and many programs available to families and students. The district is so large that it is often difficult for families to navigate through the various channels to find what they need. The mission of the FACE office is to facilitate effective communication and cultivate positive relationships among parents, schools, and the community through increased engagement and by the provision of targeted resources and support.

"I know all too well what some of these parents are going through when they call our office looking for assistance," said Smalls-Tisdale. "As young parents, we left the house in the dark to get the kids off to school and because I worked two jobs, I often arrived home late into the evening and early morning cleaning offices, etc. Now, as I see others cleaning, I do what I can to lighten their load before they reach my area. Sometimes the little things you do matters a lot to others."

Smalls-Tisdale said she enjoys being an advocate and helping others because that is how she was raised.

"My mother came from a family of five sisters and three brothers," said Smalls-Tisdale. "Many of those siblings relocated to New York where opportunities for

black people were much better than in the Lowcountry. They often sent money home to the remaining siblings or when they came to visit, brought money and necessities with them to help out our families here. We would see that as children and my siblings and I have imitated that kind of giving into as adults.”

Smalls-Tisdale and her husband Patrick taught that kind of generosity to their own children as well.

“Give if you can and help out whenever you can,” said Smalls-Tisdale. “It’s not what you can do for yourself but what you can do for others. It’s not always about you.”

In any capacity, you have to be well-rounded to serve your community. You must be able to handle criticism and complaints with grace. Smalls-Tisdale is all of that and more, according to FACE Director Dennis Muhammad.

“Ms. Libby, as we affectionately call her, is the ‘glue person’ in our office,” said Muhammad. “The ‘glue person’ is the one that is essential and keeps everything together. When we are out of the office in the schools or the community, we know home base is always covered by Ms. Libby. We don’t have to come back to an overwhelming number of complaints because she handles most of them.”

“I love working in the FACE office,” said Smalls-Tisdale. “It is something great to be a part of. When people call, I am their first line of contact. If I can handle the call, I do and I pass it on if have to. Either way, I feel like I am making a difference every day, multiple times a day.”

Muhammad described her as a professional member of the team.

“We respect her as such,” Muhammad added. “She is a big asset to our team and the main office, and we need her skill set dearly.”

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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.