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Chakadasovavan Or named a Top Five Teach of the Year Finalist

Julian Mitchell Elementary School

Donald R. Kennedy, Sr.
Interim Superintendent of Schools

Karolyn Belcher
Chief Academic Officer

Michelle Simmons
Associate Superintendent of
Elementary School Learning
Committee

Amber Sainz
Principal

Charleston, SC – Chakadasovavan Or is first-generation American born and his family has been his biggest cheerleader in encouraging him to accomplish other firsts. He was the first in his family to graduate college, to become an educator, and now to be able to pave the way for immigrant refugee students.

Or is a third grade teacher at Julian Mitchell Elementary School where he makes a difference in the lives of students every day. This is Or's third year teaching at Mitchell where he considers himself more than a teacher.

"I guide [students] through instruction and we work together through hands-on activities to do the actual learning," said Or.

According to Principal Amber Sainz, Or strengthens and improves the teaching profession by focusing on scholars as a whole.

"He focuses on the whole child," said Sainz. "He is a good role model for his scholars and builds strong relationships with students and families through his engagement with them."

Or became a Teacher Cadet in high school. His advisor, Patsy Meeks inspired him to follow through with a career in education because she instilled in him the mindset that he could do anything he put his mind to.

"As I was going through my practicum, I realized I could make a difference in the lives of children," said Or. "I am a successful teacher because I see the value in my students and what they mean for the future of the world."

Or received his degree in Elementary Education and a minor in Political Science from the College of Charleston. He is enrolled in the Teaching, Learning, and Advocacy master's program at the College of Charleston. His area of interest in education is addressing poverty and environmental factors which disrupt a child's full potential to receive a quality education. Through this program, Or hopes to be able to find ways to support the scholars at Mitchell and advocate for their needs.

Or is a Call Me MiSTER and a South Carolina Teaching Fellow. He is also a math professional learning community leader. He is trained in restorative circles, has

been recognized as the 2021 Avery Research Center Teacher of the Year, named a 2020 CCSD Rookie Teacher of the Year, and received the 2020 Guiding Light Excellence Award.

"I enjoy finding ways to support students' academic and social-emotional growth by providing additional opportunities for them to enjoy the learning environment," said Or. "Whether it's through tutoring after school, collaborating with local organizations, or working at the Horizons Summer Camp, I'll do my best to ensure that a child's needs are met."

Or intentionally works to create meaningful relationships with his students and their families. An example was choosing to "loop up" with his students. He was a second grade teacher for a time and wanted to continue with them to the next level.

"I love my students and I enjoy new challenges," said Or. "I also am intrigued that my students are constantly working to impress me with what they have learned or accomplished. To me, it means they are enthusiastic about learning. These moments only strengthen our bond and continues to build a strong foundation of learning."

It is important to Or that his classroom is a safe space where students feel comfortable collaborating, listening, and learning as a group.

"It is so wonderful to be part of their little learning journeys," said Or. "I hope when they leave my class they have learned to always be curious. I want them to be excited about learning new things, exchanging ideas, and asking questions. I want them to be able to hold interesting conversations."

After all, asking questions is what Or prides himself on.

"To continue to grow as an educator, I challenge myself to ask questions, dive deeper into what learning is, and trust my colleagues to provide truthful answers," said Or. "Teaching is a journey and I want to be a lifelong learner and continue in my own education."

Or is thrilled to have been selected as a Top Five Finalist for the Charleston County School District (CCSD) Teacher of the Year, and promises to represent Mitchell and his colleagues well.

"My relationship with my colleagues at Mitchell is so rewarding," said Or. "I want to make them proud. As a first-generation American, I am humbled and I will value the experience. I will lead the way for all CCSD teachers. This will be yet another opportunity for me to collaborate with my colleagues and work together to achieve greatness."

Mitchell is a special place to Or. As he was receiving his degree, he volunteered at the school and saw firsthand what the teachers were doing inside the historic walls. He fell in love with the programs offered at the school, such as the Green Heart Program which also serves the community.

"Mitchell is a safe, welcoming space," said Or. "I was welcomed with open arms. There is a lot of heart to this school and I personally take great pride in being a part of that."

Not only does Or engage with his students and families, but he also lives among them.

"Mr. Or chooses to live within the community that he works," said Sainz. "He works closely with the many community partners that support our school. Additionally, he worked with a local professor and his students to research, write, and publish a book about the local community."

The book, "[Us and the Creek](#)" was illustrated by his scholars in collaboration with Dr. Merrie Koester, the Director of Flood Resilience.

"We were able to create a book that talked about the importance of preserving saltwater marshes in the Lowcountry," said Or. "They made a pledge to take care of the environment and advocate for what they believe is right. This was an incredible teaching experience for me because I was able to connect world-class knowledge with world-class skills."

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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.