



**Charleston Progressive
Academy**

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For Immediate Release
April 8, 2022

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Media Release

Student photographers capture the excitement of learning at CPA

Charleston, SC – Charleston Progressive Academy (CPA) is a [Leader In Me School](#) in which students are taught and encouraged to take ownership and leadership in all things. The ideology fosters responsibility and that starts at the top.

Valerie Muhammad is the technology teacher and tech liaison at CPA. She also handles the school's social media and publicity. As an elementary teacher, it is often hard to juggle classes and additional assignments. Muhammad realized that student photographers could be an essential component to fully capturing the essence of the school community and sharing that with the public.

So this year, Muhammad created and implemented the [student photographer program](#) at CPA. Four students were selected from dozens who applied through a real interview process. Students had to obtain recommendations, complete a sit-down interview, and describe why they would be a great fit for the job.

The students range in age from first to fifth grade and boast various degrees of experience in videography and photography. This four-person team captures moments around the school, such as special events, performances, and more. Those images and videos are then shared internally and externally as a way to showcase all the good things going on at CPA.

In return for their commitment to the photography program, students are treated to training sessions throughout the year that go beyond the basics of "point and shoot."

"Good news spreads when you're easily able to share it," said Muhammad. "These captured moments are shared in conversations throughout the school community. Students see themselves in the images and become excited. When the team is on assignment, students are eager to have their picture taken and others are interested in a chance to join the photography team."

This year's team consists of a young man who owns his own camera and is often called upon by his church and community to photograph various events. Jerimiah

Williams is in fourth grade and his dream is to go into law enforcement and become a crime scene photographer.

"I see this opportunity as a way to begin my training," said Williams. "I am learning to use various angles. I am also learning technical and professional skills I didn't know before. I have my own camera set at home and I love holding my camera and taking pictures. It's fun to get to do it at school, too."

Fourth grader London Burnette is on the team as well.

"I love taking pictures of my family," said Burnette. "I look for interesting angles and I like learning about lighting and textures."

Muhammad said the program provides a real-world experience for the team members. They all have a press badge that indicates they are CPA photographers on official business. They are allowed to go from assignment to assignment and must formally introduce themselves to teachers and staff and ask permission to shoot, before going about their work.

"In addition to photography, this has taught them formal manners and public speaking skills that are essential in most situations," added Muhammad. "They know to be respectful at all times. When choosing the team members I had to consider students who could move independently throughout the school. It's a lesson in leadership – leaders are leaders wherever they are, even if no one is watching."

Picture-perfect moments pop up when you least expect them, so Muhammad allows the photography team to have their iPads with them at all times. When the students have captured special moments, she downloads them and posts them to social media, and the school website, and shares them on their school's internal television system.

"It is important to me to capture the good things going on at school so we can show that the students are well and good here," said Williams.

For the photography team program to be successful, it must be a collaborative effort, Muhammad explained. She communicates with the homeroom teachers of each team member so that they know when a student may be out on an assignment.

"Students may miss lessons so they must be willing to work ahead or take home extra homework," said Muhammad. "Everyone on our team is willing to make that sacrifice."

"It is sometimes a sacrifice," said Burnette. "I love schoolwork, so I don't mind."

Both Burnette and Williams agree that the opportunity has also allowed them to get to know so many more people in the school building.

"The younger students look up to us and we set a good example for them to follow," said Williams.

"Also, I take great pride in seeing the kids smile when I show them their picture," said Burnette. "The parents smile too because they are proud of their kids."

Muhammad hopes to expand the program so that she can purchase new and advanced equipment and bring on more team members.

Just this week, Muhammad received a digital camera for students to use, thanks to a generous donation from a local resident on DonorsChoose.org

The DonorsChoose.org request was posted for Muhammad by a College of Charleston senior who's doing a grant internship with CCSD.

"We have the opportunity to grow this program into something bigger," said Muhammad. "It could serve as a feeder program for students wanting to join the yearbook or newspaper staff in middle school and high school. There is plenty of potential here for our scholars."

"As a Leader in Me Lighthouse School, we are giving our students lifelong skills by teaching them how to fish now," said Principal Wanda Sheats. "An African Proverb said, 'What you help a child to love can be more important than what you help him to learn.' We are exposing our students to real-world jobs that they enjoy and as a result, motivating them to learn."

For more information, contact Principal Wanda Sheats at (843) 720-2967.

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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.