

For Immediate Release

April 5, 2022

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Media Release

CCSD promotes students' mental health to prevent violence in schools

**Division of Strategy and
Communications**

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Charleston, SC – Charleston County School District (CCSD) is investing in improving students' mental wellness in the hope that serious violent incidents can be avoided. The school district has engaged various initiatives to prevent violence ranging from promoting a physical presence – random searches, etc. - to mental wellness learning. Jennifer Coker, CCSD's Executive Director of Alternative Programs and Services (DAP), recently outlined some of the initiatives that promote mental wellness.

Coker said the district has engaged in various initiatives to prevent gun violence on its campuses. Some are relatively new, while others have been in place for years. Perhaps most importantly, the district is engaged in building relationships that make students and others feel comfortable talking about and reporting the potential for gun violence, she said.

"The district has increased the amount of support it provides around mental health," Coker noted. "Offering students information that promotes good mental health has been important, but in addition to merely offering information, the district also makes individuals available at schools that students may turn to."

CCSD monitors social platforms and other mediums to detect behaviors that may lead to violent behavior, Coker added, and trained staff members can identify behavior patterns that may lead to violence. DAP launched a campaign a couple of years ago to help students feel comfortable about sharing information about weapons, drugs and suicides. However, it's a combination of initiatives, ideas, and partnerships that promote a feeling of comfort, Coker said.

"Teaching kids is essential kids," Coker explained. "A variety of initiatives have been developed to promote Social and Emotional Learning. Social workers at schools are the frontline individuals in that process. Listening circles have been developed to go into schools to hear what students have to say. Partnerships with agencies such as the Lowcountry Children's Center, Charleston Center, the Medical University of South Carolina, the National Crime Victims Center and private clinicians offer options to students and adults."

Parents are essential in this process as well, according to Coker. The parent-home connection is as important as anything being done in schools. Parents need to pay attention and understand what's occurring – such as changes in behavior or grades - and not be afraid to ask for help, she said. An unfortunate weakness in the process is parents not being aware of what to do, she said. CCSD is in the [third of a five-year grant](#) awarded to address such concerns.

Coker confirmed it's hard to measure the success of mental health initiatives, but a risk assessment procedure has been established. Last spring, the district began voluntary districtwide climate assessments for both students and staff. Together, those and other initiatives are making kids feel comfortable sharing what they know, Coker said.

For more information, contact CCSD's Division of Strategy and Communication 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.