



**For Immediate Release**  
March 17, 2022

**Contact:**  
Cheryl Swinton, 843-579-4815

## Media Release

### **Virtual opportunity allows Burke students to speak with counterparts in Congo**

#### Burke High School

**Donald R. Kennedy, Sr.**  
Interim Superintendent of Schools

**Karolyn Belcher**  
Chief Academic Officer

**Joseph Williams, Ph.D.**  
Associate Superintendent of  
Secondary Learning Community

**Cheryl Swinton**  
Executive Principal

**Charleston, SC** – Students at Burke High School recently met with diplomats, traditional chiefs, and students from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in a transatlantic experience via Zoom. Leaders included Mfumu Difima Ntinu, King of Kongo; Princess Yelu Mulop, Suku traditional Chief and advisor to the President of DR Congo in charge of youth, gender, and violence against women; Ndongala Kiabokulua Martin, a pastor who works with a foundation that studies African and American traditions; and, former CCSD student Charlotte Young Fadare, Cultural Affairs Officer with the US Department of State at the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa.

The students heard from a panel of DRC natives on the importance of Congolese culture, language, and identity to its people. Notably, they also spoke on the need to share this vibrant land and culture with the global community, which often receives slanted and negative messages about the DRC and other countries in Africa. The DRC sits on the equator, meaning large swaths of land are covered in tropical rainforest. The country is diverse, with an estimated 450 ethnic groups that each speak a dialect of one of the multiple national languages. Most Congolese speak multiple languages including one of their national languages as well as French, which is the country's official language and is taught in schools.

"Our scholars were challenged to think deeply about how their own traditions and culture transmit to modern culture," said Executive Principal Cheryl Swinton. "They gained stronger appreciation of their own history and culture and the desire to see and know more about other cultures."

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has a tumultuous history. The Kingdom of Kongo existed in the general area of the DRC from the 14th century to the 19th century. Kongo had a complex political system and proximity to the Congo River made it a natural epicenter of trade in Africa. It is estimated that about 60% of African-Americans in South Carolina can trace their lineage back to this region of Africa. Since taking back its independence in 1960, the DRC has encountered internal and external conflict and shifting leadership. Today, the DRC is run largely by a president and a parliament elected by the people.

After hearing about Congolese culture, students from Burke and DRC ACCESS students shared reflections on their own experiences and feelings on what it

means to be American and Black and what it means to be a Congolese youth, respectively. Students on both sides of the Atlantic enthusiastically asked questions and offered responses, learning about each other's experiences as citizens of another country, sports, and their perceptions of the world at large.

"In light of this experience, many Burke students have seen a renewed interest in their African heritage, and a burgeoning interest in Congolese music and other cultural markers," explained Burke's AP Human Geographer teacher, Alexis Marianiello. "Burke students hope to make continued contact with their Congolese cousins and learn more about their larger world."

For more information, contact Principal Cheryl Swinton at (843) 579-4815.

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#### **About the Charleston County School District**

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally-accredited school district that is 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 more than 50,000 students in 87 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.