



**Charleston Progressive
Academy**

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Media Release

Pulse of CCSD – Laura Shaw is growing students one word at a time

Charleston, SC – Charleston Progressive Academy (CPA) Principal Wanda Sheats was not the least bit surprised when celebrated third grade teacher Laura Shaw was chosen as the school's 2023 Teacher of the Year. Shaw is passionate about growing things. Whether it is her hobby of plants or young minds, Shaw's commitment is undeniable.

Shaw is a ten-year Navy Veteran and was instrumental in CPA becoming a [Leader in Me](#) school. According to Sheats, she has used the leadership principles learned in the Navy to empower her students and colleagues.

"Mrs. Shaw is a servant leader as she serves our students, parents, and community," said Sheats. "Mrs. Shaw's students develop a heart for learning as she instills that can do mindset in every student, every day, and every year!"

CPA holds a special place in Shaw's heart. She came to the school by way of Memminger Elementary School, where she began her career ten years ago. Something about the historic Courtenay School building pulled at her and her blossoming friendship with Sheats sealed the deal.

"I'll stay at CPA as long as Mrs. Sheats is here," joked Shaw.

"Ms. Shaw is an exemplary educator, colleague, and professional. Her work is always student centered," Sheats said. "She nurtures students academically and emotionally. Ms. Shaw would be an asset to any school team and CPA is just fortunate to have her on our team!"

Calling the Lowcountry home

Shaw was born and raised in Georgia and enlisted in the military after high school. After serving an additional five years in civil service, Shaw enrolled at the College of Charleston to earn her teaching degree. Her husband, Ronnie, is a Charleston native and she's called the Lowcountry home for 26 years.

"I always wanted to be a teacher," said Shaw. "I was that student, at the end of the year, which would ask the teacher for leftover worksheets to take home so I could play school. I truly loved learning."

That fact is evidenced by many things, particularly the recent completion of her Master's degree in Literacy from The Citadel. Shaw was also motivated to become a teacher by family and friends. They admired how well she raised her two sons, who were honor roll students and both received partial full scholarships to college.

"People would tell me, 'if you can do that for your boys, imagine if you could do that for other people's children.' That motivated me to pursue my dream of teaching but with a broader hope of positively impacting others."

Shaw has been teaching third grade for years and she loves it.

"COVID-19 hit these students hard but they're getting better and bouncing back," said Shaw. "Some more so than the adults. I am going to do everything in my power to bring them up to speed because I feel like these children are my children. To be their teacher is one thing but to be more than that, if I can, is another. Some of these kids really do need me, just as much as I need them."

Shaw tears up as she recalls how some of her students slip up and call her "mom."

"It brings me so much joy that I can be whatever they need at that moment," said Shaw. "Students learn certain ways on certain days. I compare it to kernels of popcorn. They will all eventually 'pop', but not at the same time and educators have to be aware of that."

Leader in Me School

Shaw raves about the support she and her colleagues receive from Principal Sheats and the administration team.

"Without them, we could not have implemented our Leader in Me journey that led to CPA becoming a Leader in Me Lighthouse School, which is a model school for Leader in Me," said Shaw.

CPA is one of the very few Leader in Me Schools in CCSD.

The Leader in Me puts responsibility and accountability on the students and turns students into leaders. Now, after four years of implementation, the entire school community is living the principles of the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, not just saying them aloud," Shaw explained.

"The students take pride in their tasks and their responsibilities," said Shaw. "Behavior, school-wide has improved and I have only written up one student in the last four years. Leader in Me is an excellent program that models what large corporations are doing but on a student level. It is also heavily aligned with the

Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. There is a saying about 'it takes a village,' and it literally does. That's why I appreciate this program because we're all a part of that village."

Shaw explained that Leader In Me is based on Stephen Covey's best-seller, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Students learn what each "habit" means and how they can use the habits at school and at home. This journey begins in the Child Development classes at CPA and is built upon at each grade level. Leader In Me is a social-emotional learning program that is endorsed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Since Leader In Me is in over four thousand schools internationally, it now has an academic or instructional component called Empowering Instruction, which CPA has participated in over the last four years.

"If I ever transfer to another school, it would have to be a Leader in Me school," said Shaw. "I have seen its success first-hand."

The program also leads to improved academic performance, Shaw explained.

"Third grade sets the foundation for a student's academic future," said Shaw. "It is my job to help my third graders build a solid learning platform so that everyone else after me can build on it."

Shaw does this in many ways but tends to have a laser focus on literacy. She finds creative ways to demonstrate its importance and to make learning to read fun. One example of that is an annual author visit by Preston Thorne and Langston Moore who, along with Kev Roche, wrote and illustrated several children's books. The authors are former football players at the University of South Carolina. Not only do they visit the students to read their books and hand out free copies, but to tell their story about their love with literacy and sports.

"Reading is a passion of mine and I want to instill that in others every chance I get," said Shaw.

The village

Shaw is enthusiastic about Interim Superintendent Don Kennedy's goal of using federal relief funding toward remedying reading loss in schools. Kennedy's team announced a plan where all students by the fifth grade will be reading at grade level by 2027.

"It will take every single educator, plus 'the village' to meet that goal," said Shaw. "If we focus on the young students, especially our kindergartners, we will have a fighting chance. Kindergarten literacy instruction sets the foundation for being able to read."

Shaw said it is going to take everyone in the community, their resources, and parent participation to reach that goal. She's seen this organic model work at Charleston Progressive and is confident it can work district-wide if everyone invests in the process.

"I'll pray about it, just like I always do; for my family, my students, and my school," said Shaw. "I'll continue to pray for God to guide me to do the work I was called to do as an educator."

With gratitude, Shaw recognizes the village that inspired and encouraged her to become an educator.

"I am thankful for my mom (deceased), my five sisters, and my Alpha Kappa Alpha Sisterhood who played a huge part in molding me to be an educator and woman of distinction and honor," said Shaw. "I am thankful for the opportunity to pay it forward each and every day."

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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.