

**For Immediate Release**

January 12, 2021

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# Media Release

## **Junior counselor program at JIES Kaleidoscope one of many proving successful**

**Division of Strategy and  
Communications**

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**Charleston, SC** – Learning doesn't stop when the final bell of the school day rings. Every day in Charleston County School District (CCSD), several thousand students make their way to the district's after-school program called Kaleidoscope.

The program is designed to be an extension of the school day, where soft skills and leadership methods are taught through various activities.

Dr. Pamela Pepper is the site coordinator for Kaleidoscope at James Island Elementary School (JIES). Dr. Pepper is a psychologist by training and joined JIE Kaleidoscope last spring. Her goal is to utilize her clinical skills and training that will help children/youth learn skills that will take them through life.

Based on similar models used in Kaleidoscope programs across the district, Pepper created a junior counselor program for fourth and fifth grade students.

"One of the pillars of James Island Elementary School's vision is that our students will be Beacons to the future," said Pepper. "Upon visiting another Kaleidoscope program, I learned about having junior counselors provides an additional opportunity to teach soft skills such as leadership and responsibility that they can use in their future."

Pepper explained that interested students submitted an application that included basic demographic information, hobbies, interest, and previous experience with children. Students had to answer questions explaining their interest in working as a junior counselor and what skills and qualities they possessed that would make them a good fit for the position.

Students had a deadline for the application, and Pepper and her assistant coordinator Kailah Binnom interviewed each applicant.

"We talked about examples of leadership at Kaleidoscope," said Pepper. "Some squirmed in their seats and some had real answers to hypothetical

situations. They really had to problem solve throughout the process. It was tough to narrow down. They were all really good.”

There were nine applicants and the top four were selected (two boys, and two girls). Their duties include leading groups and clubs, helping peers with homework, and reading. This year’s ambassadors are fourth graders Henry Wyman, Isla Lawson, Nola Schuelepp, and Ollie Jackson.

Additionally, junior counselors are required to abide by and demonstrate the rules of Kaleidoscope which are Safety, Order, Achievement, and Respect (SOAR). These rules are aligned with the JIES school-wide behavior expectations.

Wyman said he applied because he knew the position would teach him responsibility. Jackson agreed and added that he is learning public speaking skills.

“I have the junior counselors attend weekly meetings about upcoming events, they make daily announcements, help take attendance, and help with other tasks or duties,” said Pepper. “In doing so, they learn to be a role model to all students in the program.”

Shelia Grier, West Region Expanded Learning Program Officer, added that the junior counselor program teaches not just leadership, but problem-solving, independence, public speaking, building positive relationships, self-confidence, and overall self-esteem to be a leader among their peers.

“Pam and others using similar junior counselor programs are teaching the kids 21st-century skills, where they are learning critical thinking and problem solving,” said Grier. “Pam is intentional about teaching these skills to all students. The hope is that the younger students will look up to the junior counselors and be motivated to apply when they are in fourth grade.”

Lawson, who has a younger brother, said she applied because she felt experienced in dealing with younger children.

“I like to help out the little kids with their homework and activities,” said Lawson. “I think I do well with kids of all ages.”

Schuelepp is also an older sibling.

“I applied because I like having a job to do and getting to work with kids is really fun,” said Schuelepp.

Pepper modeled her program after the long-running junior counselor program at Sullivan’s Island Elementary School (SIES).

Jackie Meade is the site coordinator at SIES and she accepts 10 students as junior counselors. They must apply for the position and those who get accepted are identifiable by a name badge hung around their neck with a lanyard.

The junior counselors at SIES work closely with the Kaleidoscope Kid Council which is an elected group of board members who serve as a guiding group for planning projects and activities.

Projects are STEM-centered and include cooking activities, arts and crafts, and more.

"The students help run the projects and help with homework," said Meade. "We have a positive behavior system with good behavior tickets that they pass out. Every other Friday students can use those tickets in the Scope Shop and make purchases."

While the junior counselor program is designed differently at JIES, the one common denominator is student input and implementation.

"They have to put forth the effort every day," said Meade. "They can't just come in and play and join their groups of friends. There is time for that, but they are responsible for helping out and being a leader. Our counselors are set apart from the rest of the group, and can step into the leadership roles set for the day."

The positive behavior system at SIES is also tied into the school's expectations, called R.A.Y.S. which stands for Respectful, Always Responsible, Your Best, and Safe. Similar to other Kaleidoscope programs, it is an extension of the school's environment.

Greer said that similar programs across the district are designed to fit the culture of that school, which is why each model is different.

"It's a win, win for everyone," said Meade who has been at SIES for 33 years. "It gives the older students leadership roles, and the younger students look up to them and aspire to be in their shoes one day."

For more information, contact the 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.