

For Immediate Release

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Media Release

Pulse of CCSD – John Poretto a 25 year Burke High School Educator

Charleston, SC – A young man from New Jersey enrolled as a freshman at Charleston Southern University almost 30 years ago and Burke High School is fortunate for it.

That young man is John Poretto, who is now a 25 year veteran science teacher at Burke where he has spent his entire career.

“Mr. Poretto makes teaching look easy,” said Principal Cheryl Swinton. “Over the years, I have watched him build meaningful relationships with students while cultivating a vibrant interest in science.”

Poretto teaches chemistry, physics, and marine science to a group of students that inspire aww in him every day.

“When my students show excitement, it ignites my passion and ignites a passion in them that they didn’t know existed,” said Poretto. “It is enjoyable to watch.”

Assistant Principal Alan Smith said Poretto’s dedication and commitment to the Burke High School Learning Community is second to none.

“Mr. Poretto strives to provide all of his classroom students and other students he encounters with meaningful, educational, and authentic experiences,” said Smith. “Mr. Poretto’s commitment, love, and enthusiasm for providing the best learning environment for Burke students is on display routinely. He is one of the first persons in the building each morning, one of the last to leave each evening, and one of a very few prepping in his classroom on some weekends.”

Poretto has no plans for retirement anytime soon, even though he is eligible in about two years. He does admit though, that in all of his years of teaching, last year was a challenging one.

Burke High School

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Erica S. Taylor
Chief of Staff

Joseph Williams, Ph.D.
Executive Director of Secondary Learning
Community

Cheryl Swinton
Executive Principal

"Last year was difficult," said Poretto. "I had a high rate of virtual students and some that were in-person. It was hard to strike a balance."

Poretto explained that the plexi-glass proved difficult to work around while in science lab and the virtual students did not get the full hands-on benefit of working in the lab.

"This year has kicked off perfectly, and everything has been just great," said Poretto.

Friend and colleague, Micah Brown is appreciative of Poretto's longevity at Burke.

"He truly cares about his students and sets an example for rookie and veteran teachers in the building," said Brown. "Over his many years of service he has made a tremendous impact on his student's lives."

New discoveries

Poretto's fascination with science came in part from his family. His father was a shop teacher for more than 35 years and Poretto shadowed him often as he was growing up. He is also the youngest of five and said his entire family unit (mom, dad and siblings) inspired him to be who he is today.

"That influence and his passion for his work, and my passion for science and discovering new things was the driving force for me going into education," said Poretto. "So in 1997 upon graduation, there was an opening at Burke and it was a great fit for me."

According to Roy Joe Kemp, the school's CTE Chair and PLTW Engineering Instructor, Poretto is an amazing person that uses his skills and knowledge to support the students, faculty and staff here at Burke.

"His scientific mind and problem solving scientific method also proves to be a real benefit to one of his favorite hobbies, working on cars," said Kemp. "John and his brother have built a race car in their home shop, and he (John) is often in the parking lot helping kids and faculty with their vehicles. It reminds us all that we all need to be of the Renaissance persuasion. That is, having an inquisitive mind, growing ourselves in a multitude of different directions to benefit not only ourselves, but also others."

Poretto said that teaching high school is no more challenging than teaching other grades.

"There are good days and bad days and you just keep moving forward," said Poretto. "I love it here. The students are amazing and I have never considered teaching anywhere else."

He credits the administration, too. While he has worked under many different leaders, he is appreciative of all of their support.

From day one, however, Poretto has worked with longtime band director Linard McCloud who is one of the longest serving employees at Burke. They became fast friends and consider each other brothers. The only thing they don't have in common is their choice in football teams.

"Mr. Poretto wants what is absolutely best for his students and he pushes them out of their comfort zone," said McCloud. "I felt called to mentor him in the beginning because he was fresh out of college and so new to teaching. Today he is that mentor to many young teachers and certainly an influencer among his peers, and even the students."

"I have really enjoyed the support the staff is given; this is a great school to be in," said Poretto. What makes Burke truly special, though, is the students. I enjoy building relationships with them. I enjoy watching them set goals and make personal progress in all areas of their lives."

Smith added that Poretto can always be seen providing assistance and support to countless numbers of students, co-workers, parents, and other school stakeholders.

"There's never a time when he is not trying to assist someone with a specific need or helping to do something positive," said Smith. "Mr. Poretto has consistently proven himself to be loyal, dedicated and trustworthy not only to me, but to all those that come in contact with him."

"Science teaches problem solving and students are really required to put their skills to work," said Poretto. "The discoveries they make just in learning the material also sparks interests in career paths they might not have ever considered."

Traditionally, Poretto has been able to conduct marine science field trips at nearby Brittlebank Park. COVID-19 put that on hold but as soon as they are allowed again, the students will be down on the riverbank, casting and fishing and learning about our local estuaries.

"We are fortunate to be able to do hands-on learning right down the street," said Poretto. "The Lowcountry provides a unique learning opportunity."

In the meantime, Poretto is glad to have his students back in the classroom and able to properly use the labs. With the plexi-glass removed, the students can more efficiently complete their lab challenges.

Poretto said he is appreciative of CCSD and all that was done to advance learning last year amidst the pandemic. He is also proud of the curriculum the district

provides on all levels and at each school. His son Aidan is a product of CCSD and is thriving as a sophomore at Wando High School.

"CCSD is a great place to have a career and get an education," said Poretto.

"To paraphrase the Bulldog Band's old We're so Glad to Be a Bulldog refrain - "We're so glad that Poretto is a Bulldog," added Kemp. "While 25 years is a silver anniversary - John is golden with us!"

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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.