

**For Immediate Release**  
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## Media Release

### **James Island Elementary named top Wellness School in CCSD**

#### **James Island Elementary School**

**Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.**  
Superintendent of Schools

**Karolyn Belcher**  
Chief Academic Officer

**Michelle Simmons**  
Associate Superintendent  
Elementary Learning Community

**Jonetta Gregory**  
Principal

**Mount Pleasant, SC** – The MUSC Boeing Center for Children's Wellness (BCCW) in partnership with Charleston County School District celebrated over 80 schools and their wellness efforts last month.

During the 2020-2021 school year, 41 CCSD schools earned a Wellness Award. The grand prize winner was James Island Elementary School. The second and third place winners were Sullivan's Island Elementary School and Murray-LaSaine Montessori School, respectively. Deer Park Middle School earned the Charleston County Medical Society Rising Star Award which comes with an additional \$250.

The MUSC BCCW School-Based Wellness Initiative was created with the goal of improving nutrition and increasing physical activity for students and staff by motivating districts and schools to make policy, system, and environmental changes through participation in the School Wellness Checklist.

Wellness Awards range from \$250 to \$2,000. The award money must go into the wellness programs at each school to help grow and sustain their initiatives. In total, \$21,950 went to CCSD schools for the 2020-2021 school year.

In addition, CCSD schools received over \$150,000 in wellness grants this year to fund initiatives such as school gardens, increased water consumption, kinesthetic classrooms, and movement throughout the school day.

"Participating in the MUSC BCCW School-Based Wellness Initiative is key to developing the whole school, whole community, whole child model (CDC's framework for addressing health in schools)," said Holly Kut, Instructional Specialist for Health and Physical Education. "The School Wellness Checklist goes beyond the student health and wellness; it caters to employee wellness, which fosters higher morale, provides self-care opportunities, and community involvement supporting lifelong healthy learning. Happy healthy schools make happy healthy students."

According to Dr. Janice Key, Director of the MUSC BCCW, despite the many unprecedented demands placed upon schools and teachers this year during the

COVID pandemic, they did an outstanding job supporting wellness through healthy nutrition, adequate physical activity, and support of emotional needs.

"Healthy kids are better learners," said Key. "It is only when kids are healthy and well that they can recover from the impact of this pandemic and excel in school."

### **A Culture of Wellness**

"Creating a culture of wellness for the faculty, staff, and students at James Island Elementary is an initiative that is one of my top priorities," said Principal Jonetta Gregory. "Making health a part of our mission has greatly empowered our students, faculty, and staff to get healthier and be happier."

The Wellness Checklist has seven categories with various point-weighted actions. For example, the Nutrition category has 22 action items that range from posting nutritional analysis information for each menu item to offering a salad on a daily basis.

Meredith Barnette is a first year nurse at James Island. She partnered with Physical Education teacher Ginny Jones to kick the year off in high gear when it came to wellness.

"With this being such a crazy, different year we wanted the wellness initiative to be something positive to focus," said Barnette. "We wanted it to be something to take their mind off of the anxiety and whatever other emotions came with this year."

The Wellness Committee instituted various projects and activities such as a garden club, a running club, art projects, and communicated monthly on ways to improve wellness throughout the school.

"Our students, faculty, and parents worked really hard this year to achieve overall wellness for our school," said Jones. "The wellness room was a huge success. Teachers signed up throughout the year to donate fruit, vegetables, and herbs for water along with healthy snacks."

In addition, the school's one mile loop was opened to not just students but the community at-large; teachers even participated in an after school walking club.

"Students in all grades participated in the Kids Heart Challenge; students in grades 2-5 had the opportunity to be a part of the recess running club where they recorded miles for prizes," said Jones. "Students got to taste test strawberries. Our PE program received the Bowler's Ed grant and was awarded a class set of bowling equipment. Parents helped with Physical Education donors choose projects to improve our PE equipment and bring new and exciting activities to the PE program."

From self-care month in October to a water drinking camping in the fall, JIES students and staff were all-in when it came to any wellness challenge that presented itself.

"Ginny headed up the wellness initiative at her previous school so she had a lot of insight," said Barnette. "Also, there were already many things in place so we worked together to improve our efforts."

Barnette spent 20 years as an anesthesia nurse. She loved the hospital and her patients so the move to pediatric nursing in a school setting was quite a change.

"It was nerve-racking," said Barnette. "I have four kids of my own ranging in ages 19 to six and it dawned on me that I pretty much know how to take care of children. The transition was easy and fun. I love interacting and getting to know the students. It's been great to see how they responded to our wellness efforts, as well. They've really embraced them."

"It was huge honor and didn't realize how competitive it was," continued Barnette. "I love my school and principal and couldn't ask for a better staff. For us to win this together is a true bright spot in the middle of chaotic year and great way to cap off end of the year."

For more information, contact Principal Gregory at (843) 762-8240.

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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.