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Contact:

Erica Taylor 843-937-6303

Media Release

Pulse of CCSD – Good customer services can make all the difference, no matter what the industry

**Office of Strategy and
Communications**

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Erica S. Taylor
Chief of Staff

Charleston, SC – When a Charleston County School District (CCSD) teacher calls the Office of Information and Technology (IT), they do not want to be dazzled with a lot of technological jargon. They just want the IT department to fix their device or solve their issue.

“They want their stuff to work,” said Michael Bryson, Help Desk Administrator. “It’s a technical job, for sure, so our team has to have knowledge of those things, but it is a customer service job, too. Our customers – meaning the teachers, staff and, students – need to know from us that they matter and that we will solve their problem.”

To Bryson it’s more than just a technical job.

“We have to have the knowledge but we have to have the customer service part too,” said Bryson “I ask my team to think about which one is more important. With good customer service, the teacher on the end of that line will know that they matter and that we will find the answer. It’s that simple.”

Bryson has been with CCSD for four years. He came to the district by way of BI-LO Grocery Store Corporation where he worked for 21 years in various positions.

While studying accounting at the University of South Carolina, Bryson took an internship as a bookkeeper at BI-LO. He was eventually hired full-time and said he liked the money, the accounting, and the detail.

Bryson’s outgoing personality earned him a supervisor position which allowed him to interact more with customers. He held many positions through the years and credits managers who instilled in him what it truly means to provide good customer service.

Bryson eventually took a position in the BI-LO IT department.

"The model had always been a third party arrangement in which IT services were outsourced," said Bryson. "That wasn't as efficient as having an in-house team, so one was created and I joined that department. We went from store to store fixing equipment and when we walked in you could hear everyone collectively saying 'he's here,' as if I was some kind of hero."

Bryson eventually moved into the System Administration and Software Development Department. Once again, he was putting his customer service skills to work as a Help Desk Technician.

"It was another example of striving to support the people we work for so that in turn they could support the customers we serve," said Bryson. "It is the same here at the school district. The Help Desk supports our teachers so they can serve our students."

An easy fit

Bryson was living in Greenville working in the corporate BI-LO office when a friend mentioned there was a job opening on the Help Desk at CCSD working under Judy Wyndham, Director of Customer Support for Information Technology. If offered the position, it would give Bryson the opportunity to come home.

Bryson is glad he did. He said he takes great joy from the service he and his team provide.

"Students are the heart of our work," said Bryson. "My customers are the teachers and the reason I am here is so that they can support their students. Judy is a fantastic boss. We have the same customer service brain. We're constantly growing and looking at the many different perspectives on how we can help teachers."

"Michael leads the Help Desk team with intentionality, passion and a laser focus on customer service," said Wyndham. "It is clear that he cares about the people on his team and the customers they support. Michael is very knowledgeable and works consistently to prevent problems and anticipate customer needs."

In just four short years, Bryson has been able to use his previous experience to bring technological change to the Help Desk. Technicians can now "remote in" to customer devices. Also, with the use of digital wallboards technicians can monitor the status of all IT Heat Tickets to ensure they've been resolved. Each technician now has two monitors to better work on solutions for customers. What is probably the most important upgrade for Bryson is that all phone calls are recorded so that as a team technicians can learn how to do things differently. They can replay each call to see if they missed a fact or detail.

Responding to COVID-19

Can anyone truly say they were prepared for COVID-19 and the effects of the shutdown? Probably not. However, Bryson was mentally prepared thanks to his previous career experiences. He likens it to a snowy shutdown in Greenville but the help desk still had to support BI-LO stores in seven other states that were not experiencing a snow shutdown.

"Need breeds ingenuity," said Bryson. "We were 'shut down' like everyone else but still had a very important job to do. We worked remote by implementing soft phones in which help desk calls were dispatched to our technicians' actual computers and they could help customers while working remotely."

Bryson said his department of 17 technicians was about two days ahead of the actual state shutdown (as far as preparing), which allowed the team to install VPN Apps on each machine.

"Even though we were working from home, our system stayed intact," said Bryson. "We used chat rooms so we could communicate with each other."

Bryson explained that he and the Help Desk Technicians were so used to being in the same room with each other and being able to collaborate and brainstorm that he had to find a way to continue that. At the end of each day, the team dropped into a WebEx meeting to connect when necessary.

That's not the only thing that changed in their department. Traditionally Bryson's team did not directly help a student or a parent.

"It was a whole new ballgame to try and walk a student, or parent or grandparent through their questions," said Bryson. "We were now dealing with students learning remotely from their home and having to navigate their individual home environments and systems."

"Michael directs the work of our Help Desk rock stars who work diligently to meet the support needs of teachers, staff, parents and students," Wyndham added. "They have stepped up during the COVID-19 crisis in ways we couldn't have imagined a year ago. I have tremendous pride, appreciation and respect for this group. As I work with people throughout the District, I am always asked to share gratitude for the tremendous work they do."

The department has a team of field technicians that were very flexible in helping resolve issues. A hotline was created and members of that team manned the phones to better serve families and staff. A support form was also created so that parents could log issues online.

The entire IT department was put to the test in March and again at the start of the current school year. It brought them together as an even stronger team, more eager to meet their goals.

"We want to fix as many problems as we can," said Bryson. "The goal is to solve at least 60 percent of the issues that come to us before we have to pass it up the line for further assistance. We want to get everyone we work with back online within minutes. The department fielded an unprecedented amount of calls since March and we were still able to meet, if not exceed, our goal."

The teachers are the real heroes of CCSD and the behind-the-scenes staff members are committed to making their job easier whenever possible.

"What we learned through all of this is that we can be more flexible," said Bryson. "We can teach, learn, and work remotely. It's not going to be ideal in every scenario but we can do it successfully if the need arises again."

According to Wyndham, Bryson has a quick wit and enjoys a good laugh, participating in the occasional office prank, sometimes as the victim; sometimes as the perpetrator.

With district staff back at work in their offices, things are, little by little, getting back to normal. It's football season and although Carolina isn't playing Clemson this year, the rivalry between Bryson and Wyndham continues. So do the occasional pranks among team members.

"We have a really awesome, organic family in this department," said Bryson. "Whenever there's a challenge, we brainstorm together and come up with solutions. We do that with a big picture frame of mind so as to benefit the district as a whole."

His real family is quite special to Bryson, too. He met his wife Karen at the University of South Carolina and they have been married for 23 years.

"Karen works in human resources and she is the 'memory' of our household," said Bryson. "My daughter, Melissa, is way too much like me. My poor wife had no idea she was getting 'buy one, get one free' when we got married. So far Melissa is following dear old dad's footsteps and is working in Information Technology."

When not at work, the Brysons enjoy trips to Walt Disney world and they collectively agree that everyone's favorite child is their dog, River.

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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.