



**For Immediate Release**  
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## Media Release

### **Pulse of CCSD – Jennie Moore like a family for Sarah Novak**

#### **Jennie Moore Elementary School**

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

**Karolyn Belcher**  
Chief Academic Officer

**Michelle Simmons**  
Executive Director of Elementary  
Learning Community

**Karen Felder**  
Principal

**Charleston, SC** – When Sarah Novak moved to Mount Pleasant, she and her husband had three children and another one on the way. On a hot day that summer, she arrived at an old, pink stucco building for a tour of Jennie Moore Elementary School.

As with all school buildings in the summer, the facility was undergoing a deep clean. Custodial crews had moved all of the furniture out of each classroom and into the hallways.

Novak was able to look past all of that, though. Something about the place felt special. She enrolled her son and daughter, and immediately agreed to volunteer at the school. There was one catch. She had a four year old that would need to accompany her.

Jennie Moore principal Karen Felder agreed – after all, Jennie Moore is a family.

The Jennie Moore community welcomed Novak and her young daughter with open arms. They were even more welcoming when she had the baby and brought him in as well.

“What really made me realize that Jennie Moore was truly a family is when I learned that 100 percent of the faculty had joined the PTA,” said Novak.

With the kids in tow, she helped the faculty by making copies, shelving books in the library, helping children with their school work, and whatever else was asked of her. She loved it so much that she volunteered for eight years before becoming a teacher assistant and then the math interventionist. Now the school is housed in a beautiful, new facility. Novack’s been teaching at Jennie Moore for ten years but a part of the family for 19.

#### **Becoming an educator**

Novak grew up in Spartanburg and attended Philip Exeter Academy as a boarding student. She received her undergraduate degree from Washington and Lee University and a Masters in Chemistry from Duke University.

Novak went into the pharmaceutical industry but after a year, she asked herself if this was really the career path she wanted to take.

"My favorite part of grad school was being a teacher assistant and working in the labs with the kids," said Novak. "So I decided I wanted to teach high school chemistry."

The best laid plans can also change. Before her move to the classroom, Novak took a slight detour to the local YMCA where her intention was to work for just six months before going back to school. After eight years, she was still there running their programs.

The move to Mount Pleasant, coupled with being pregnant caused Novak to put the idea of teaching on temporary hold. Thankfully for Jennie Moore, that resulted in her innumerable hours of volunteer service.

At one point, Novak's youngest child was in the multi-age classroom and the teacher expressed the need for a volunteer. Novak jumped at the opportunity and agreed to oversee the math center every day.

"I loved it," said Novak. "The next year I agreed to do it again and then eventually I was brought on as her teacher assistant. The irony of it all is that I have a Masters in Chemistry and I am teaching math intervention to second through fifth grade students."

Novak works with children who need extra help in math. They come to her classroom three times a week for 30 minutes and she helps the students work towards a better understanding of their current lesson.

"I am drawn to the kids and their excitement of learning new things," said Novak. "They light up when they have that 'ah ha moment'. My job is to teach and when they get it I want to just cheer for them. It brings me great joy."

"Sarah has worn so many different hats at Jennie Moore over the last 19 years," said Principal Felder. "She has been a parent, PTA president, volunteer, teaching assistant, and now our math interventionist. She is just one of those amazing people you meet. There is no job too big or too small for Sarah to tackle. When she takes on a project, she does it better than you would ever expect. She truly understands students and their learning. She has a true talent in figuring out what kids need and then looks for unique ideas and strategies to help them. She always goes above and beyond."

While this year will look a little different due to COVID-19 protocols, Novak has fun learning ideas planned for the students so that the learning and 'ah ha moments' continue.

Novak said that Principal Felder is the glue that holds the Jennie Moore family together.

"She is a great principal and leader," said Novak. "She is the whole piece. Jennie Moore has such a great volunteer network. Parents and the community want to be involved and Ms. Felder makes it so easy to do so on a regular basis. She would never ask anyone to do something that she wouldn't do herself. If you're working hard, she is working twice as hard."

In addition to being the math interventionist at the school, Novak stays all day to volunteer with things such as the yearbook, creating the directory, she serves as the communications chair for the PTA, and is responsible for the weekly newsletter and PTA website, she inventories and adds books for the leveled reading room, helps organize field day and Jump Rope for Heart and so much more.

"For me personally, I truly have a passion for volunteering," said Novak. "Our motto at the school is "What will your beautiful hands do today." My answer is 'whatever I can.' I just love doing it, especially when I know I am appreciated."

Her children, Andrew (25), Harrison (23), Jordan (22) and Clayton (18) are all products of Jennie Moore. She and her husband Ralph could not be more proud of their accomplishments. Novak smiles when she recalls how fellow teachers follow their accomplishments or recall stories of their times as students at the school.

"It goes back to being one big family," said Novak. "The teachers here know us not just because of my volunteer efforts but because my kids attended the school and we were involved 100 percent of the time."

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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.