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Media Release

**Hunley Park Elementary
School**

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Pulse of CCSD: Girmania Matrille teaching students to celebrate their culture

North Charleston, SC - Having a trusting person, who speaks your language can quell fears of the unknown. Girmania Matrille tries to be that person for the Hunley Park Elementary School community. She knows first-hand how difficult it is to learn a second language since she primarily taught herself to speak English.

Hunley Park is a multi-cultural school and the administration there makes an intentional effort to celebrate that; but someone has to organize the celebration. That falls to Girmania Matrille, the school's Bilingual Parent Liaison. She handles all of the translation for the school. She also organizes events for parents to engage with the staff and administration.

Originally from the Dominican Republic and raised in Puerto Rico, Matrille knows that language isn't the only barrier immigrants' face. Often cultural differences can prohibit inclusion and understanding. She and her husband Julio moved to America six years ago and often encountered some of these barriers.

"I am a person of service," said Matrille. "I along with the entire staff work hard every day to include everyone and open the students' eyes to each others' differences. We then learn and celebrate those differences through the various festivals we host, food tastings, historical lessons and more."

Matrille was just finishing up earning her masters degree in (Spanish) communications and that experience would ultimately lead her to Charleston County School District (CCSD). She immersed herself in her new community and found a church home to call her own.

"I was getting acclimated to Charleston and doing it through a deep relationship with God, in English, with people I didn't know," said Matrille. "It was very hard at first. The cultures were so different."

When a CCSD recruiter recognized Matrille's talent, experience and credentials an aggressive campaign was launched to hire her as a bilingual secretary at R.B. Stall.

"This area has a large Hispanic population and I open my heart to them because I know they have all experienced so many scenarios and situations, and often horrific situations have brought them here," said Matrille.

Matrille listens to parent concerns with an open, empathetic heart. She understands that many have extenuating circumstances that makes for a struggle sometimes.

"I identify with the parents here who are struggling because I struggle too, sometimes," said Matrille. "The most beautiful thing you can have is a connection with someone. I try to share with them that every single struggle is an open door for new things."

Matrille has held several linguistic jobs around the district to include serving as a translator in the Office of Strategy and Communications as a bilingual communications specialist. Her love for the students and wanting to have more time to spend with her husband and own two children, led her back to working in an actual school.

"Girmania sets a beautiful climate for people and radiates a gladness and concern for everyone who comes to Hunley Park," said Principal Michael Griggs. "Our family atmosphere is partly because of her love for students, parents, and all stakeholders."

Matrille enjoys working at Hunley Park because of the opportunity to be face to face with people, being with the little ones and getting to know their parents. She is also grateful to the environment Principal Griggs has created which is why she happily makes the long commute from her home in North Mount Pleasant to Hunley Park.

"Dr. Griggs is an amazing leader with a huge heart," said Matrille. "He listens with intention to our ideas and usually says 'let's do it...let's give it a try'. Dr. Griggs is what makes this school special. We have a large mix of people here and he makes everyone feel comfortable."

Matrille organizes events throughout the school year and they continue to evolve into cultural experiences. She has earned buy-in from the parents who now feel they have an open line of communication with their child's school.

"We are grateful that she is with us, and we try to take our cues from her customer service," Griggs added.

Word spread and trust was built and entire families began coming to the school events that Matrille organized.

"The students are learning about their own culture through programs we initiate and they're learning about other cultures through students and parent presentations," said Matrille. "We're teaching them that different is not bad."

Matrille's passion is to serve others.

"I am an instrument of God and he guides me," said Matrille. "He has a purpose for me and that is connecting with people and serving them in the way that they need me. I am so grateful and humble for this gift I have been bestowed."

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools that spans 1,000 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 87 schools and specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.