

For Immediate Release

October 18, 2019

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Media Release

Developing dancers at Mount Zion

**Mount Zion Elementary
School**

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Charleston, SC – Students who live in rural parts of Charleston County often don't have the same opportunities as students who live in the suburbs. For example, dance studios are not plentiful on John's Island. Programs that do exist in adjacent communities are often financially out of reach for families and inconvenient to access.

At Mount Zion Elementary School though, school counselor Diemchi Nguyen (the school's 2017-18 teacher of the year), is bringing dance instruction to students – and it's all free of charge.

She was awarded a \$1,600 grant from the [Kiawah-Seabrook Exchange Club](#) which supports Charleston County School District's Sea Island schools and \$1,300 from Communities in Schools.

Grant funding is used for dance lessons led by instructors [Dance.Laugh.Learn](#).

Thanks to this funding, Mount Zion has been able to offer dance to students for the past three years.

Classes are available to all fourth and fifth graders. They are held during the school day, eliminating the hassle of having to arrange for transportation.

"Some kids have the opportunity participate in extracurricular activities, which left others feeling left out," said Nguyen. "I had one little girl on my mind that I really wanted to provide an opportunity to."

That's when Nguyen turned to Rylee Coppel, co-founder of Dance.Laugh.Learn.

"It is important to our company to be accessible to anyone and part of our mission is to reach them," said Coppel. "We will do whatever we can to work with the school on pricing and scheduling so that these children have an opportunity to learn the art of dance and express themselves."

Over 30 boys and girls participate in the program.

Jasmyne Robinson, a fifth-grader at Mount Zion wanted to join because she felt like it would be just right for her.

"I thought it would be hard to learn the routines but it came easily to me so I knew I would participate again this year," said Robinson. "What I like best about it is learning new things, having fun and being energetic."

"The first class the kids are so pumped," said Coppel. "Some are shy but they want to be here. Some don't want to show that they want to be here. But all of that changes once the music starts."

Coppel was shocked at the number of boys who signed up but thrilled to see their interest. She understands the importance of arts and creativity in the lives of young children. Dance.Laugh.Learn was recently named the Early Childhood Artist in Residence at the Charleston Gaillard Center.

"They come in here full of energy," said Coppel. "It's good for them to get out that energy and we're not going to shut that down. We're going to encourage it as their own individual forms of expression."

Fifth-grader Gracie Broach has always wanted to be a dancer. She heard about the class and jumped at the opportunity so she could begin learning dance.

"When I first walked in I was excited and nervous, and I didn't know what to expect," said Broach. "Now my favorite part about it is working together to get the routine right and correcting the things we don't have right."

The final performance has traditionally been held at an evening PTA meeting. But this year it will be held during a daytime school assembly so that the students can showcase their work in front of a large audience of their peers. It also addresses the transportation issue for parents who may struggle to bring their children back to campus in the evening.

Nguyen noted that dance serves as an opportunity for the students to stay actively moving.

"Dance class is held on the same day each week and has improved student attendance and increased family participation at our school," said Nguyen.

The routines and music are choreographed around modern dance routines. In the final recital, students will be decked out in costume accessories donated by Dance.Laugh.Learn.

For more information contact Diemchi Nguyen of Mount Zion at (843) 559-3841.

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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 span 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.