



Oakland Elementary School

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Media Release

Oakland Elementary School student competes in NASP Nationals in archery

Charleston. S.C. – The first student in Charleston County School District (CCSD) history has returned from the National Archery in Schools (NASP) Nationals tournament with not only bragging rights but a personal best. The event was held May 9-11, 2024 in Louisville, KY. Mackenzie Fleming, a student at Oakland Elementary School shot a personal best of 267 and finished 72nd out of 1789 elementary girl archers from 31 states. She will finish out the season competing in Daytona FL at the NASP World Championship June 8.

Fleming's coach and physical education teacher, April Blanton, was familiar with the NASP program (run by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources) because her own children participate in it at the schools they attend in a nearby school district. She brought the program to Oakland and teaches archery to all fourth and fifth graders. A call to action identified students who were interested in competing and Fleming was one of those students.

"I was familiar with the sport because of my time at Camp Woodie (a week-long residential summer camp)," said Fleming. "It is a difficult sport to learn. Coach Blanton has taught me how to stay calm and aim and I have learned to be successful through lots of practice."

Flemings' parents, James and Jane, have been supportive of their daughter's latest interest.

"We never tried to hold our kids back," said Jane. "If we can make it work in our schedule, we encourage them to go try what interests them. We grew up playing sports and we both like the team aspect of sports."

James agreed, and said participating in sports shows you how to build relationships as well.

"We value the idea of our kids being involved in as many sports as possible," said James. "Sports teaches a lot of life lessons."

When Fleming told her parents that Coach Blanton told her she would be good at archery, they were intrigued. After seeing her compete, they were hooked, too.

"We saw how much she liked it and how it enabled Mackenzie to get out of her own head," said Jane. "She was able to overcome her nervousness and she listened to Coach Blanton."

Fleming said the first tournament she ever competed in made her very nervous.

"The more tournaments I competed in, the more comfortable I became," said Fleming. "When we got to nationals, and I saw how big it was, was when I realized what a big deal this was."

Blanton put it in perspective, explaining that 480 archers shot at one time.

"A fourth grader could be standing by a twelfth grader during a tournament," said Blanton. "Archers are competing as individuals but also as a team, so there is a lot of pressure. Thankfully, archery is a very structured sport where all rules must be strictly followed for not just safety but efficiency of the tournament."

James is grateful to Coach Blanton for bringing the sport to Oakland.

"It is a benefit to these athletes that are competing and to the school," said James. "We appreciate Coach Blanton taking a [chance to provide this opportunity for the kids]. The days are long for the coaches and the athletes when it comes to practice and tournaments."

Jane added that it is fun to watch the relationship between her daughter and Coach Blanton blossom.

"April reassures Mackenzie and gives her extra confidence too," said Jane. "April has a vibrant personality, and it is fun to watch her interact with her team."

Fleming is glad all of her hard work paid off.

"It was fun and so worth it," said Fleming.

That is exactly what Blanton hoped Fleming would say.

"As a coach and a physical education teacher, my philosophy is to get kids involved in things outside of the classroom," said Blanton. "I chose archery because it is kind of off the beaten path in comparison to football, soccer, or baseball, for example. My job is to create students that want to go and be active. Archery is cool, and new to most kids. It was interesting to see who tried out for the team, too. Some were natural athletes and some were not the athletic type. That is okay

because archery is a quiet sport that requires great mental capacity. Competitors have to get into the right mindset.”

Oakland is the only school in Charleston County School District with an archery team but Blanton and Fleming hope to advocate for the sport and encourage other schools to offer the program. For now, Blanton wants Fleming to enjoy the spotlight.

“MacKenzie earned this,” said Blanton.

For more information, contact Principal Elizabeth Kackley at (843) 763-1510.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all 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 approximately 50,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse portfolio of educational options and specialized programs delivered to the students of CCSD through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools and programs. Rich educational opportunities for students include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; military; dual credit; and many more.