



James Simons Montessori

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Media Release

Student Activism and Advocacy: The Composting Journey at JSM

CHARLESTON, SC- Starting in the 2023-2024 school year, a group of James Simons Montessori (JSM) parents joined forces with James Simons's Green Team and other committed staff members to educate students and strengthen their involvement in composting through the SMART Recycling program. Although many schools were active in composting prior to the pandemic with Covid restrictions, schools had to cease operations, and it has been a slow process to get composting up and running again post Covid.

At the beginning of the school year for the first quarter, a network of parent volunteers would come to JSM during meal times and help students sort their breakfast and lunch waste into the appropriate bins. A group of JSM teachers including Ms. Sharon Beeson, Ms. Michelle Kraft, Ms. Adrienne Jones, Ms. Cara Ernst, and Ms. Jessica Wilson

attended a meeting with the parent composting committee to assist with the program getting off the ground. This group of teachers was composed of various members representing different levels so that they could support their team of teachers from the ground up. Many teachers also took the time to teach students about the importance of composting and caring for the earth. They even assigned roles to students during the composting process to get the system in place. A group of 4th grade students, directed by Amelie Godfrey, made a video educating their peers about how to compost in our school environment. In Montessori we often talk about restoring and caring for the environment, and the Earth is an important component of that environment.

According to Dominique Godfrey, an active member of the [Friends of James Simons](#) organization, through the composting program, “We have students as young as 3 years old independently disposing of their waste after meals...as a result of the school’s efforts, 20 tons of food waste was diverted from landfills”. Composting integrates some major tenets of the Montessori program such as independence, stewardship, service, and real life application.

Unfortunately a few weeks ago the contract with SMART recycling came to an end, and James Simons families and students channeled their frustration with this decision to activism. Students wrote letters, made videos, and one brave 1st grade student Delphine Godfrey (along with her mom Dominique, previously mentioned) even spoke up at the Charleston County School District Board Meeting on April 29th. Delphine shared, “Me and my friends like to help the Earth. We worked hard at composting this year. One day there was no more composting and it made us sad and confused. I want to compost next year at James Simons every day please”.

Shortly after these acts of advocacy, the CCSD board decided to continue funding the SMART Recycling & Composting Program at James Simons through the end of the 23-24 school year and into next year. This experience was a great learning opportunity for students to understand the power of their voice. James Simons is not only raising stewards of the Earth, but they are also raising a future generation of activists.

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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.