

For Immediate Release

September 13, 2024

Contact:

Andy Pruitt, 843-937-6583

Media Release

Bring out the band! CCSD celebrates National Arts in Education Week with focus on band offerings

Office of Communications

Anita W. Huggins, M.Ed.
Superintendent of Schools

Vanessa L. Denney, M.Ed.
Interim Executive Director of
Communications

Charleston, SC - Charleston County School District (CCSD) provides in-depth creative arts opportunities for its more than 50,000 students, including various band programs. CCSD boasts a diverse student population, so the arts programs offered throughout the county are plentiful.

In celebration of National Arts in Education Week, September 8-14, CCSD recognizes the various band programs offered to students. During this week, the field of arts education joins together to advocate, educate, and celebrate the impact and transformative power of the arts in education.

"In CCSD, our mission is to educate every child in achieving college, career, and citizenship readiness, and [our band programs](#) do this," said Shelly Goughnour, Assistant Director of Visual and Performing Arts. "Studying music and the arts equips students to become productive members of society, and I am pleased that our district values and supports the arts in education."

CCSD offers a variety of musical opportunities for all students in the district. The youngest scholars are learning the foundations of music in general music classes that prepare them for band and other ensemble music instruction in middle and high school. Middle and high schools offer various band programs ranging from marching, concert, and symphonic bands to steel drum and percussion ensembles. With the addition of Montessori band programs in recent years, every fifth through twelfth-grade student has the opportunity to develop their musical skills in a band setting within the district in some capacity.

"Our band programs are thriving, and it is thrilling to see programs succeed in schools where they did not exist ten years ago," added Goughnour.

[Research](#) proves that arts education helps students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, increases imagination and creativity, fosters discipline, and much more. Take a glimpse at what CCSD's band programs have to offer.

Elementary and middle

Michal Williams is a seventh grader at Montessori Community School and is now in her second year of playing the clarinet.

Williams has made friends in the Montessori Community program and is refining her soft skills through teamwork, communication, and mentoring.

"Arts in education is so important because students need a creative outlet," said Williams. "Tapping into our creativity in the band room has taught me to think outside the box in all areas of my life."

Classmate Emery Weed joined the band because she wanted an opportunity to learn a variety of instruments. She has participated for the last three years learning the violin, flute, and a range of percussion instruments.

"I am thankful to my band instructor, Ms. Maureen (Isbister) because she is patient and encourages us to learn different instruments," said Weed. "Whether this becomes a passion or a hobby, I am grateful for the opportunity. Arts in education helps young students explore their creative capabilities, which increases success in core classes like science and math. The arts can also create multiple opportunities in the future."

Their instructor, Maureen Isbister, joined CCSD last year but is in her twenty-first year as a teacher. Just like the students in her classes, she also started playing instruments at a young age and learned a variety of instruments over the years. Coming from a musical family, Isbister knows the importance of arts in education and how it directly relates to student success.

"The arts allow students to express themselves differently," explained Isbister. "It gives students a voice or a place at school. In general, it builds community because we rely on teamwork. The band allows these students to create something bigger than themselves, ultimately enriching their lives."

Isbister considers her program a feeder for students interested in playing in high school and builds the skills required to play at the next level so that they advance with the necessary skills.

"CCSD feels strongly that music should be taught at all levels and all schools, and I am grateful to be a part of that," added Isbister. "I hope students walk away from this class with a love of music."

St. James-Santee Elementary-Middle School music teacher, Heather Simon, agrees that starting children in music and band at a young age benefits their entire academic experience. She took piano lessons at a young age and her teacher made all the difference in her decision to aspire to be a music instructor. Simon is building the program at St. James-Santee to include fifth-grade students in the band.

"I have an excellent group of scholars in my music program," said Simon. "I am working closely with my younger students so that they are prepared when they get to the middle school level, and hopefully, they will go on to play in high school, where CCSD has some excellent programs."

Like Isbister, Simon said that core academics are intertwined in her lessons.

"Math is essential in band, as is reading fluency," explained Simon. "Band also allows our students to be on a team and work together."

Eighth grader, Nataly Chiche, used to play the clarinet but switched to the flute to learn a new instrument. She appreciates the challenge of learning something new and how her fellow bandmates welcomed her as a new student at St. James-Santee.

"We've all gotten to know each other, and we help guide each other so that we play on key and in tune," said Chiche.

Keymyra Simmons and Sanadrian Goodwin are both eighth graders in Simons' band class and agree that the musical talents they are learning and cultivating could lead to a successful future.

"Even if I do not pursue music, what I am learning as far as communication and mentoring will help me in all aspects of my life," added Simmons.

Goodwin added that seasoned students are tasked with helping new students, which allows the class to form bonds with each other and create a family.

High school

Jared Sutphin took over the Baptist Hill Middle High School program in 2022 and is gradually garnering interest from curious and very talented students. He's hoping to push his students to the next level, so if they are interested, they can play and perform at the college level.

"I hope my program shows my students what is possible beyond these walls, such as scholarship opportunities, military bands, and more," said Sutphin.

Sutphin knows that high school band is demanding. There are expectations of high-level performances at games, performances, appearances, and competitions. He is aware that many of his students hold part-time jobs. He mentors them through the balance of work, school, and band. Sutphin is also aware that some face transportation challenges. He also addresses that so that everyone rides together on the team bus, even if it means he has to drive it.

A high school band is like a family away from home and that's how the students say they feel about being in his classroom.

Mallorie Pelow is a tenth grader, and the music bug bit her in elementary school. She loves being a member of the Baptist Hill Band because of what she is learning and the experience of being on the field every Friday night.

"I also love that music allows me to express myself," said Pelow. "Art is crucial to education and life in general. Whether this turns into a hobby for me or I pursue it further, it is something I look forward to each day and an experience I will never forget. I love being in the band."

"Music class expands on reading comprehension, teaches historical advancements in music, requires physical conditioning, and so much more," said Sutphin. "The hard and soft skills learned will set them up for success in life."

Carolle Sotelo, an eleventh grader, is willing to work hard because the payoff is the opportunity to show off what she's learned.

"Our band director puts a lot of time and effort into us and we owe it to him to show our audiences what we've accomplished," Sotelo said.

Sutphin said his students love being in the band.

"They have fun, and if being in the band improves their day or their high school experience is something to remember, I have done my job," Sutphin added.

For more information, contact the Office of Communications at (843) 937-6303.

###

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.