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Media Release

CCSD 2025 Teacher of the Year Finalist Profile - Oakland's Carr hopes to use her position as a finalist to encourage strength-based approaches in teaching across the district

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Charleston, SC – Carissa Carr, a Gifted and Talented educator at Oakland Elementary School and Stono Park Elementary School, was named a Top Five Finalist for Charleston County School District (CCSD) Teacher of the Year. She said she is humbled and honored to be recognized among her peers.

Carr's dedication to her students goes far beyond academics. She is committed to helping students recognize their potential and empowering families to celebrate their children's strengths. Her passion for educating children runs deep, and she hopes to use this opportunity as a finalist to advocate for a strength-based approach and mindset to educate all children - a model that is used in the Gifted and Talented Department.

"The value of knowing a student's strengths, weaknesses, likes, and interests is like no other," Carr said. "In my 19 years of teaching, the most rewarding part has been being able to push a student to their fullest potential by providing them with the skills, resources, and support needed so that they can accomplish anything they put their hearts and minds to."

As a general education teacher for 11 years, Carr trained extensively to incorporate high-level learning and curriculum in her classroom in an effort to reach all students, not just the ones identified as Gifted and Talented. She said the benefit to her students was extraordinary.

"The idea is to take the approach of a child's strength area - their talents, their interests, their career goals and aspirations for the future, and build upon those strengths and have a 'can vs. can't' commitment," said Carr. "Along the way, educators help students fill in the gaps."

Carr and her colleagues know that talent is distributed equally, but opportunity is not, and she hopes to advocate for talent development, exposing as many or all children to higher-level thinking and curriculum.

“When we focus on students' strengths, we empower them to see themselves as capable learners,” said Carr. “A strength-based approach nurtures confidence, motivation, and resilience - creating a foundation where growth naturally occurs. It is my hope that we, as a district, can embrace the idea of giving all students enrichment and resources.”

The Gifted and Talented Department works with a platform called Thrively that endorses the strength model. Carr described it as a whole-child approach. Assessments related to the program identify a student's top five strengths, which include global indicators, not just academic performance.

Carr said the assessments open the eyes of her students and give them a big-picture idea of where they can go in the future.

“This component sets the students up for future success,” said Carr. “My hope is that the district can make this available to all students. Talent is everywhere, so we must create opportunities. My goal and mission is to give students resources and opportunities to as many as I can.”

Carr added that if she can touch just one life, make a difference in one student's future, and change the course of a child's life for the better, then she has successfully accomplished her job.

“The heart that I have for teaching and my students is my greatest contribution,” said Carr. “This is not something that can be taught in school or learned in a textbook, but something that must be within. Every student has their own strengths and talents within, and it is our job as educators to help them grow and flourish. I believe that we as educators and as a community need to begin focusing on the areas of strength within our students.”

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

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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.