

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Taylor R. Johnson
Communications and
Multi-Media Specialist
taylor.johnson@ocsdsc.org

Monday, July 14, 2025



Orangeburg County's Summer Arts Program: A Legacy of Talent, Culture, and Youthful Brilliance

ORANGEBURG, S.C. – Every summer in Orangeburg County, something extraordinary unfolds — a movement defined by rhythm, creativity, and boundless potential. For more than two decades, the Orangeburg County School District (OCSD) Summer Arts Program has served as a sanctuary and springboard for gifted student artists, providing a transformative space where imagination takes center stage.

This year, the program entered a new chapter under the leadership of Johnnie Smith Jr., OCSD's newly appointed Fine and Related Arts Coordinator. In his first year at the helm, Smith brought fresh energy and bold vision to the long-standing program, reaffirming its legacy while introducing new elements of student voice and innovation.

The five-week intensive arts experience is tailored for gifted and talented students, modeled after the prestigious South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts — but with a distinct Orangeburg flair. "Here, students don't just follow the script," said Smith. "They write it. They live it."

Each summer, students from 4th through 11th grades are nominated and selected through a competitive three-phase audition process. Once chosen, they immerse themselves in one of five artistic disciplines: visual art, dance, drama, chorus, or band. This isn't your typical summer camp — it's a creative boot camp led by exceptional instructors and powered by student vision.

"This is a student-led program," said Smith. "They take the lead; they bring the energy. I love their independence. I love their creativity. Our students in Orangeburg County are just different. The world better watch out — we're coming, he continued."

That passion came to life this summer with the debut of an original performance piece: a song titled Beyond. Written, composed, and performed entirely by the students, Beyond captured the soul of the program — a declaration of identity, aspiration, and artistic excellence.

But beyond the stage, the program represents something more profound. Students aren't just learning how to perform — they're learning how to thrive. Through exposure to new techniques, artistic mentorship, and collaborative experiences, they gain confidence, discipline, and a strong sense of identity.

"Culture is the makeup of our history," Smith shared. "It leads to who we are and what we have inside of us that sets us apart. I fell in love with the arts. It saved me. And it's saving our youth by giving them a place to be heard and seen. That's why we do what we do, said Smith."

OCSd Superintendent Dr. Shawn D. Foster praised the program's continued impact and renewed vision under Smith's leadership, "our Summer Arts Program represents the very best of what public education can offer — access, opportunity, and excellence," said Dr. Foster. "We are committed to ensuring that every student in Orangeburg County has the opportunity to explore their gifts and pursue their passions. The work of Mr. Smith and his team is not only developing talent but transforming lives."

Supported by what Smith proudly calls "the best staff in the world," the Summer Arts Program continues to have a lasting impact — emotionally, creatively, and academically. Many participants have gone on to earn prestigious scholarships, gain national recognition, and pursue careers in the arts.

As the program's visibility grows, so does its vision: to ensure that every child in Orangeburg County has access to high-quality arts education and the opportunity to shine in their own unique way.

From brush strokes to bold solos, from original choreography to soul-stirring monologues, the Orangeburg County Summer Arts Program is more than a stage. It's a movement — rooted in access, excellence, and exposure — preparing students not just for their next performance but for life.

For additional information, please contact Taylor R. Johnson, Communications and Multi-Media Specialist, at taylor.johnson@ocsdsc.org or 839-253-2070.

Orangeburg County School District

The mission of Orangeburg County School District, the catalyst of innovation and excellence, is to ensure all students discover and develop their person, purpose, and platform through high- quality educational experiences distinguished by a culture of collaboration, equity, and inclusion; a creative learning environment with inspiring opportunities; a commitment to nurture the academic, physical, social and emotional well-being of all. Visit us online at ocsdsc.org

###