



**North Charleston Creative Arts  
Elementary School**  
**LaToya Smith, Principal**  
 5200 Lackawanna Boulevard  
 North Charleston, SC 29405  
 (843) 529-2831

## Media Release

### **National Principal Appreciation Month - LaToya Smith Successfully Implements High-Level Strategies to Achieve Continued Student Growth**

**Charleston, SC (October 22, 2025)** - LaToya Smith is in her third year as principal of North Charleston Creative Arts Elementary School, but she is a seasoned educator with 25 years under her belt. The Beaufort native came to Charleston in 2008 and was placed just down the road at North Charleston Elementary School. Smith considers it an honor and a privilege to serve in an administrative role in the same area where she began her educational journey with Charleston County School District (CCSD).

"Since 2008, I have held various positions within CCSD, and each one of those experiences has shaped me and prepared me for the principalship at North Charleston Creative," said Smith. "Becoming an administrator has always been my goal."

Since coming to North Charleston Creative Arts in 2023, Smith and her staff have seen significant gains in student performance and proficiency. The school was also thrust into the spotlight when McKenna Clemens, a K-2 resource teacher at the school, was named the district's Teacher of the Year for 2023-2024.

"It's exciting moments like those that enabled us to really share our school on a broader spectrum," said Smith. "It gave our school significant momentum to continue to expose the great things happening here."

Smith is proud of the continued increase in students' scores, but even more proud of the climate and culture at North Charleston Creative Arts.

Kaine Vanderhorst is a fifth grader - he loves the school and Principal Smith.

"Principal Smith is nice, but she doesn't play," said Vanderhorst. "She has high expectations because she cares. She pushed us to our potential, and she's setting us up for our future."

"We work very hard to make sure students have a sense of belonging, and that they are seen and heard," said Smith. "The Ron Clark House System that we implemented has also created a dynamic vibe, and there is a great sense of community here."

Fifth grader Marina Smith agrees and appreciates the energy and Joy Principal Smith brings to learning.

"It is nice to know she believes we can achieve," said Marina. "She really cares - everyone does. There are more students doing better since she got here. There are more students in SAIL (the school's gifted and talented program), and she should get a lot of credit for that."

Lacey Bates is the school's dance teacher and appreciates how Smith balances high expectations with trust.

"Mrs. Smith gives us the creative freedom to do what is best," said Bates. "She's created a family-friendly atmosphere here where we are all supportive of each other. She contributes to that by advocating for us and addressing concerns. That trickles down to the students who get to learn in a warm, inviting atmosphere."

The teachers at North Charleston Creative Arts are "all in." They understand that Smith implements high-level strategies to stay the course, and the gains that students are making are just the validation that teachers need to know their hard work and grind do matter, Smith explained.

"These gains are what drive teachers to continue offering high-quality instruction," said Smith. "It's sometimes a productive struggle, but we keep pressing forward because in reality, if you keep expectations high, students will rise."

Megan Norvell has known Smith for years because she served as the assistant principal at her children's school.

"I was excited to work alongside her," said Norvell. "You feel her presence every day. She says 'hello' to everyone and checks in on staff every day at some point. But, most importantly, she knows the importance of a life/work balance. You can go to her with anything. The community that she has built knows she is here for them."

Smith's philosophy or approach is that she wants her teachers and staff to see her as a leader who is supportive, open, and encouraging. My goal each day is simple: To show up as the kind of leader and person I would want my own children to have as a principal.

"It is important to me that they know I will give them whatever tools they need to deliver and provide high-quality instruction," said Smith. "Relationships are the most important piece. We have to build trust with each other in order to have hard conversations. I always like to think from a teacher's perspective. I am here to support whatever they need so that their students can and will rise to the occasion."

Ukeisha Gilmore teaches fourth grade ELA and Social Studies at North Charleston Creative Arts. She met Smith through professional development, and there was an instant connection because Gilmore saw someone in leadership who looked like her.

"Everything we do here is with love," said Gilmore. "We are all driven and goal-oriented, and Mrs. Smith made it clear that we will be challenged as educators, and she will push us. The model works. The students and staff know the expectations are non-negotiable because the

children need that discipline and structure. However, she trusts us to make learning fun, and we do.”

Norvell said she feels trusted, which is comforting.

“We are all here to do what’s best for children,” added Norvell. “We as teachers know the expectations, and we move along with them. We know what is possible, and every day we are working toward that. She has empowered us, and it shows with the scores. And we are not going to stop.”

Gilmore added that the improvements and the thriving school community are confirmation that she is where she is supposed to be.

“Under her leadership, we are all thriving,” said Gilmore.

“The work we do every day as educators is very rewarding,” Smith added. “As a servant leader, education is my passion, and I have really enjoyed watching the growth at this special school. We truly do elevate learning through the arts. The arts give students another way to express their learning and shine in ways that traditional instruction sometimes can’t. Every child has strengths worth celebrating, and the arts allow them to tap into their other strengths, deepening their learning and understanding.”

For more information, please 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.