



Charleston County School District
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Media Release

Top Five Teacher of the Year Patrick Martin Leads with a Belief that Students Perform Better When They Know They are Seen

North Charleston, SC (April 29, 2026) - Patrick Martin was barely out of college when he became not just a teacher but a dorm parent at a boarding school. It was trial by fire, but an experience that shaped his way of thinking. It was where he learned how crucial it was to build learning environments grounded in relationships, community, trust, and possibility.

"There is power in 'community,' and that is something that is great to see in Charleston County - a district that is incredibly large, and at Charleston County School of the Arts," said Patrick, who teaches English 4 College Prep and Honors, AP Language and Composition, and Teacher Cadets.

Community is important to Martin because that is what pulled him out of a spiral of internalizing failure.

"Reading was difficult, my academic challenges became personal, and instead of being recognized as a student who needed support, I was often perceived as difficult, a label I eventually lived up to through incomplete work and frequent trouble," Martin explained. "By the end of seventh grade, I had failed every subject and barely made it into high school, believing that school was not a place where I belonged or could succeed."

That belief changed because of two teachers who helped him see that he was not a failure but simply different. Martin was also encouraged to pursue his own interests and questions, showing him that learning could be engaging, relevant, and deeply personal.

"Neither lowered expectations; instead, both communicated belief with clarity and consistency, reshaping how I saw school and myself," said Martin. "Those experiences are the foundation of why I teach and how I lead. I strive to create classrooms where students feel seen, capable, and valued, especially those who arrive carrying doubt, frustration, or past failure. This commitment is especially important for students living in poverty, where academic struggle is often compounded by instability and limited access to support. I am particularly attuned to students who struggle quietly or act out loudly, because I know how easily those behaviors can mask unmet needs."

Twenty-six years into his career, Martin said that every year he is reminded why he continues to teach. The progress and growth he sees in his students bring him the most joy.

"I hope my students look back and remember their time in my classroom as a turning point in their education," Martin said. "Now, as a Teacher Cadet instructor and host teacher for student



teachers, I can see the power of mentoring. This starts with trust. I design classrooms where students track their own growth, reflect on setbacks, and see effort translated into improvement rather than punishment. Through consistent check-ins, public celebration of growth, and high-interest, choice-driven assignments, I help students understand that improvement is not accidental - it is cultivated through structure, relationships, and belief. Teaching, for me, is an intentional act of hope, one that begins with belief and is sustained through daily practice.”

Martin believes teachers serve as conduits between students and the many communities that shape their lives - families, administrators, cultural institutions, and the broader civic world.

“Schools are strongest when those connections are intentional and relational, and when students see their voices reflected, respected, and amplified,” Martin explained. “I am deeply attentive to the communities my students represent, and I work to learn alongside them.”

Community partnerships are also embedded in Martin’s curriculum. He developed a Gullah Geechee unit for English 1 that includes visits to the International African American Museum and engagement with local scholars and artists, a visit to the Avery Research Center, and more.

“At the core of my philosophy is student empowerment,” explained Martin. “Students must be able to envision themselves, academically, socially, and emotionally, by the time they walk across that stage. Every relationship, project, and partnership is one step in that process. When students see their voices valued and their identities honored, they move toward self-actualization. That is the work of teaching, and it is the privilege of my life.”

In addition to putting students first, Martin has long been an advocate for his fellow educators, contributing to strengthening the teaching profession by focusing on recruitment and retention through three interconnected strategies: mentoring, amplifying teacher voice, and advocating for fair compensation. He believes that together, these approaches support educators at every stage of their careers while keeping student learning and school stability at the center.

“If selected as District Teacher of the Year, the message I would share with educators, families, and the public is simple and unifying: students first, always—and voices together to get them there,” Martin said. “When we intentionally center students and bring educators, families, and communities into shared purpose, public education becomes a powerful engine for growth, belonging, and possibility. Leadership is not just about articulating values, but about translating them into action.”

For more information, please 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 51,000 students in 90 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.

