Charleston County SCHOOL DISTRICT excellence is our standard

STUDENTS ARE THE HEART OF OUR WORK!

Thomas C. Cario Middle School

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Media Release

Cario Middle Recognized as a Palmetto's Finest School

Mount Pleasant, SC - Thomas C. Cario Middle School made history for Charleston County School District (CCSD) on April 30, 2025. Cario is the first school in CCSD in more than two decades to be named a Palmetto's Finest School by the South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA). This prestigious award goes to schools that offer the best in innovative, effective educational programs.

"We are incredibly honored and humbled to be recognized as Palmetto's Finest middle school," explained Principal Bryan Coleman. "At the core of everything we do is the power of 'WE' - our strong belief in the value of community and collective effort. This recognition is especially meaningful because it reflects the dedication and partnership of our entire school family - students, staff, parents, and local businesses. It's truly inspiring to see how the hard work, innovation, support, and collaboration of all our stakeholders have come together to earn this distinguished honor."

Cario students and staff watched a live stream showing representatives from SCASA making the announcement. The Comets join Academy for the Arts, Science, and Technology (Horry County Schools), Fairforest Elementary School (Spartanburg School District 6), Socastee Elementary School (Horry County Schools), and South Florence High School (Florence School District 1) as the recipients of the 2025 Palmetto's Finest Award.

Principal Coleman cited several factors that made Cario Middle a strong candidate for this honor. Academically, students have recorded seven straight years of improved growth in English Language Arts (according to internal district assessments), and the Comets have achieved their highest proficiency averages on the state ELA and Math tests (SC READY) in school history for three consecutive years. In addition, Cario has received Superior ratings for its music programs from both the South Carolina Band Directors Association and the Carowinds Festival of Music, maintains a strong STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) program, and consistently does well in middle school athletics in Charleston County and the Tri-County region.

Earlier in the fall of this school year, 29 South Carolina schools submitted a 20-page application, followed by an onsite examination visit from a review committee. From that group, SCASA selected 12 finalists, and those schools went through a second onsite evaluation.

“Cario is great because of the Cario community,” added Roz Stever, a sixth-grade English Language Arts teacher. “We have supportive administrators who encourage creativity, teachers who embrace collaboration and care deeply for our students, students who truly have a voice and feel confident taking educational risks, parents who wholeheartedly support and actively participate in their children’s education, and support staff who are invested in all of the finer details that make the student and staff experience peerless.”

Cario Middle becomes just the sixth school in CCSD to earn this recognition; Ashley River Creative Arts Elementary School (2002) was the last school in the district to receive this award.

“When you walk into the building, you can feel the excellent and passionate atmosphere which is created by our vigorous culture,” explained Callie DiTullo, a seventh grader at Cario Middle. “Our school would never be able to accomplish this award without our outstanding teachers and staff who deserve much recognition for their dedication to teaching and their love for the students. We students thank them deeply for adding meaning to our education. In the end, all of these pieces come together to construct our brilliant middle school.”

The Palmetto’s Finest Award is celebrating its 45th year and is one of the most coveted and respected awards among educators.

For additional 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.