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Media Release

"Talent Is Everywhere. Opportunity Should Be, Too:" CCSD Opens a New World of Arts Experiences for Peninsula Students

Professional artists, immersive residencies, career-connected learning, and a signature Spoleto season capstone will connect students to Charleston's world-class arts community

CHARLESTON, S.C. (August 13, 2026) – Charleston County School District (CCSD) is significantly expanding arts opportunities for Peninsula students through the Linard McCloud Cultural Arts Collective, connecting students with professional artists, immersive artist residencies, masterclasses, performances, exhibitions, career connected learning and a new capstone experience during the Spoleto Festival season.

Beginning in 2026-2027, students will have unprecedented opportunities to learn and create alongside accomplished artists, musicians and arts organizations across Charleston. From elementary students receiving instruction from Charleston Symphony musicians to middle and high school students working alongside professional artists throughout the year, the Collective is creating a continuum of experiences designed to help students discover their talents, develop their craft and see where their creativity can take them.

"This is about putting extraordinary opportunities within reach of our students," said Superintendent Anita Huggins. "Charleston is home to one of the most remarkable arts communities anywhere in the country. Our students should not simply grow up surrounded by it. They should be part of it. They should know its artists, learn from them, experience our cultural institutions and stages, and be able to imagine themselves building a future in the arts."

At Burke High School and Simmons Pinckney Middle School, students will learn alongside accomplished teaching artists through classes, immersive artist residencies and hands-on experiences in band, dance, theatre, visual arts, choir, orchestra and strings, and piano. After school programming will extend opportunities to Peninsula students of all ages, providing additional ways for students to explore new interests and deepen existing talents.

Throughout the school year, students will work with an extraordinary roster of Charleston area artists and educators. Teaching artists include acclaimed trumpeter and Charleston Jazz Orchestra Artistic Director Charlton Singleton; Grammy Award winning vocalist and Ranky Tanky lead singer Quiana Parler; pianist, composer and Charleston Jazz Academy Director Demetrius Doctor; visual artist Demetrius Bing; dancer and choreographer Jordan Giancursio; multidisciplinary textile artist Kristy Bishop; award winning lighting designer and College of Charleston professor Lauren Duffie; music educator David Richardson; teaching artists from Charleston Stage; and others.

Through artist residencies, masterclasses, mentorship and hands-on instruction, working artists will become part of students' learning. Students will create alongside them, receive professional feedback, experience new artistic disciplines and gain firsthand insight into the creative process and professional artistic practice.
The pathway will begin even earlier through a new partnership with the Charleston Symphony.

Beginning in October 2026, fourth grade students at Memminger and Sanders Clyde elementary schools will work directly with Charleston Symphony musicians through individualized and small group music instruction. The initiative will give students an early foundation in music while creating opportunities for continued study as they advance into middle and high school.

Through an expanded partnership with the Charleston Gaillard Center, students will also experience major professional performances, including Black Violin and Dance Theatre of Harlem. Those experiences will extend beyond sitting in the audience, with opportunities for artist conversations, masterclasses and school based engagement that connect students directly with professional performers and the creative process.

Across the Collective, students will also have opportunities to participate in museum visits, creative field experiences, special arts events, performances, showcases and community arts partnerships.

"We want our students to understand that Charleston's arts community belongs to them, too," said Cheryl Swinton, Program Executive for the Peninsula Promise Project. "They can sit in the audience, but they can also pick up the instrument. They can meet the dancer. They can create the painting. They can step onto the stage. And they can begin to see themselves as the next generation of artists, designers, musicians, performers and creative professionals."

For students ready to take their interests further, the opportunities will become increasingly sophisticated. The Collective is designed to move students from exploration to instruction, from instruction to practice, and from practice to authentic professional experience.

Students will develop original work with teaching artists, participate in mentorship and rehearsals, receive professional coaching and critique, and explore internships, apprenticeships and careers throughout the creative industries. As the initiative grows, the vision is to connect classroom instruction and artist residencies with work based learning and professional opportunities throughout Charleston's creative community.

That exposure is intended to show students that the arts economy extends far beyond the performer standing in the spotlight. Behind every production are lighting designers, technicians, directors, producers, musicians, choreographers, visual artists and other creative professionals. Through the Collective, students will be able to explore the many ways their interests and talents can become pathways to college, careers and lifelong engagement in the arts.

For high school students, those experiences will build toward something uniquely Charleston: the Linard McCloud Cultural Arts Collective Spoleto Arts Capstone during the Spoleto Festival season. The Capstone will be much more than an end of year performance. It is envisioned as the culmination of a year-long creative journey that mirrors the process followed by professional artists. Students will develop and refine their work through classroom instruction, artist residencies, mentorship, collaboration, rehearsals, coaching and critique before presenting it in professionally supported performances and exhibitions.

Student musicians, actors, dancers, spoken word artists and interdisciplinary performers will present polished work and receive feedback from professional artists affiliated with Spoleto Festival USA and Piccolo Spoleto. Student visual artists will experience a professional gallery environment through a public exhibition, opening reception, artist recognition and conversations with professional creatives. The goal is to give students the experience of being treated not simply as students taking an arts class but as developing artists. They will create, collaborate, revise, rehearse, receive critique and present their work while Charleston celebrates one of the world's great arts festivals.

"This is what makes this opportunity so powerful," Huggins said. "A student can discover something they love, develop that talent alongside exceptional educators and working artists, explore where that talent could take them, and ultimately have an authentic opportunity to share what they have created. We are telling our students: your talent matters, your voice matters, and there is a place for you in Charleston's creative community."

The Collective is named for longtime Charleston educator and Burke High School alumnus Linard McCloud, whose nearly five decades of teaching, mentorship and

advocacy for arts education have influenced generations of Charleston students. McCloud returned to Burke in 1978 as Director of Bands, where he built one of South Carolina's most respected music programs. Thousands of students have discovered their talents, built confidence and earned scholarships through his leadership and mentorship.

That legacy now becomes an invitation to the next generation. Whether a student picks up an instrument for the first time, discovers a new artistic passion, learns alongside a professional artist, experiences a world class performance, explores an internship or presents original work during the Spoleto Festival season, the promise behind the Collective is the same.

"Give students the opportunity, and see what they become," Huggins said. "Talent is everywhere. Opportunity should be, too."

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district dedicated to ensuring every student has access to a high-quality education and the support needed to thrive. As South Carolina's second-largest school system, CCSD serves more than 50,000 students across 91 schools and specialized programs throughout 1,300 square miles of coastal communities, representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools.

Under the leadership of Superintendent Anita Huggins, CCSD is focused on accelerating student achievement, expanding opportunities, and preparing every student for success in college, career, and life. Recent district accomplishments include record-high academic performance on state assessments, increasing graduation rates, and significant gains in college and career readiness, reflecting the district's commitment to continuous improvement and educational excellence. Through the Peninsula Promise, CCSD is also expanding access to early learning, college and career pathways, arts, and family support services to create seamless opportunities for students living on the historic Charleston Peninsula.

CCSD offers a diverse and expanding portfolio of educational choices, including neighborhood, magnet, charter, Montessori, and International Baccalaureate (IB) schools and programs. Students have access to rich learning experiences in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); visual and performing arts; world languages; military and leadership programs; career and technical education; dual enrollment and early college opportunities; and other innovative pathways designed to meet a wide range of interests and aspirations.

Working in partnership with families, community organizations, higher education institutions, and industry leaders, CCSD remains committed to creating equitable opportunities, fostering student success, and ensuring that every graduate is prepared to contribute and compete in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.