

**For Immediate Release**

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## Media Release

### **James Island Elementary to Rededicate Outdoor Classroom**

**James Island Elementary  
School**

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Superintendent of Schools

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Associate Superintendent of Schools

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**Jonetta Gregory**  
Principal

**James Island, SC** — Even as the budget cuts are being felt throughout the Charleston County School District, some local campuses are discovering that great projects rely on people, not dollars. James Island Elementary School's (JIES) rededication of their outdoor classroom is one example.

JIES' new principal, Jonetta Gregory, who up until this year served as assistant principal at St. Andrew's Math & Science, has been impressed with the partners who have come together for the rededication on Thursday, October 6. "We have had such an inspiring collaboration among teachers, parents, community leaders, and government officials," says Gregory. "People have been unfailingly generous with their time and have come up with such good ideas."

The JIES outdoor classroom is a landscaped outdoor teaching area at the edge of a large stormwater pond on campus. It is planted with local plant species, many of which tell a story. "The landscaping itself is educational. Students can see firsthand which plants are used for sweetgrass baskets, or get to see our state tree up close," Gregory adds.

First built in 2007, the outdoor classroom became underutilized in recent years; however, the resource was too good to go to waste. The pond itself has an osprey platform, turtles, fish, and regular visits from waterbirds and pelicans. Teachers can use the Learning Deck with its rows of benches as a simple extension of their classroom teaching space, or spend time on the Observation Deck learning about the natural systems of the pond and its wetland fringe.

This year, engaged parents, teachers and the new principal decided to reinvigorate the space. "I realized that it is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service," says Outdoor Classroom Committee Chair Tavia Sessoms, who has a third-grader at JIES. Once JIES selected that as the year's theme for the classroom, pieces started falling into place. "Since the 100<sup>th</sup> day of school is such a milestone for elementary students, we decided to create a series of activities to build on that idea."

The first step for the year's programming is coming up on October 6 at the Outdoor Classroom launch where students will get to hear from a National Park Service Ranger, biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and South Carolina Audubon naturalists. Parent chaperones will accompany teachers on tours of the classroom throughout the school day as well.

"This entire campus is beautiful," says Gregory. "The outdoor classroom is a jewel, of course, but we also have rich local history and wildlife throughout." The SC Audubon Society is helping Gregory research options for creating a bird-friendly campus, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has developed a federal wildlife protection partnership with JIES. Parents, community members, and media are welcomed and encouraged to attend the rededication and celebration.

The school, located on Grimball Road, also neighbors the former W. Gresham Meggett High School, which was one of the first high schools built after equalization in the civil rights era. Along with the upcoming Gullah Cultural Center, ancestral graveyards, and the new James Island Library, the outdoor classroom area provides a wealth of habitat, history, and natural resources for students to study in an experiential learning environment.

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#### **About the Charleston County School District**

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools that span 1,000 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 86 schools and several specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities led by associate superintendents. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.