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Media Release

Charles Pinckney Elementary Students Come Together for O.N.E.E. Cause

Charles Pinckney Elementary School

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Mount Pleasant, SC – Third graders at Charles Pinckney Elementary School (CPES) are partnering with a special education class at Laurel Hill Primary School (LHPS) in an effort to spread empathy and acceptance to those with differing abilities. The partnership is called Project O.N.E.E. (Open minds + New knowledge + Empathy = Extraordinary change), with the hashtag #ItOnlyTakesONEE used for social media promotion.

Students in Samantha Shealy's third grade class began the school year reading R.J. Palacio's Wonder, a story about an ordinary boy with an extraordinary face. The story sparked a great deal of conversation and question regarding differences, abilities, and empathy for all.

"My students could not get enough," Shealy said. "The questions, the connections, the curiosity. It was at this point I knew I had to find more books that promoted the same ideals and put them in my kids' hands."

That is what she did. In November, The Citadel Foundation supplied a class set of Wonder and small group sets of five more books that were all based around characters living or interacting with peers with disabilities. These books were introduced in an effort to provide various perspectives, engage students in meaningful conversations, and promote deeper thinking. This quickly led to student-led conversations, but more importantly, a thirst for more information. As the third graders' curiosity grew, Shealy integrated the book sets into daily reading lessons. This spurred their passion for learning more about real children facing these same challenges.

"My kids were making these unbelievable connections, asking higher-level thinking questions, and wanting more," added Shealy. "They needed more."

Shealy decided to reach out to LHPS's special education teacher, Elizabeth O'Brien, in hopes of creating a collaborative classroom. O'Brien agreed to the partnership, and since early January, the two classes have interacted on a regular basis. Shealy's third graders walk over to Laurel Hill twice a month and serve as "Big

Buddies" to the special education students, or "Little Buddies," as Shealy's students call them. What started as a reading program transformed into much more.

"Project O.N.E.E. has shown us that even though we may not learn or communicate the same way, we are all capable of respect, love, and compassion for everyone," O'Brien explained. "Miss Shealy's class is a phenomenal group of students who truly care and respect their buddies with disabilities. They love and care for each other like a family."

According to both teachers, the Big Buddies from Charles Pinckney immediately took on a leadership role and adored their Little Buddies from Laurel Hill. The compassion, empathy, patience, and overall acceptance shown by the Big Buddies is evident to everyone involved in this effort.

"We are doing this because we want to show people that someone with a disability is just like us," said Emma, a third grader from CPES. "We want to spread acceptance and teach others to see someone with a disability for who they are on the inside, and not as someone with a disability."

Big Buddies are now taking their Little Buddies' learning goals and creating games and activities.

"My 8-year-old students were discussing one-to-one correspondence, phonemic awareness, letter recognition, number recognition; you name it," Shealy described. "Not only were they using these terms, but they knew what the terms meant. They were taking these skills and creating thoughtful and purposeful activities for their buddies. The higher-level thinking, conversations, and planning went beyond all expectations."

After establishing a bond with their Little Buddies, Shealy's students conducted research on varying disabilities such as dyslexia, Down syndrome, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, autism, and muscular dystrophy. Their learning about these topics culminated with a Valentine's Day-themed event on February 10, 2017 called "Passionate About Special Education Showcase of Learning." Students presented their research to family and friends through iMovie presentations, and quizzed their audience's knowledge of the topics covered through student-created review games.

"Through Project O.N.E.E., my students are taking the South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards and making them meaningful to our everyday lives," said Shealy. "My students are reading, researching, integrating technology, and making the four C's of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity purposeful for the rest of their lives. This is something Big Buddies and Little Buddies will remember forever."

“It only takes O.N.E.E. person to do big things,” summarized CPES third grader, Noah. “If O.N.E.E. person spreads acceptance, it could spread farther than we ever know.”

For more information on Project O.N.E.E., contact Shealy at (843) 856-4585, or visit the program’s Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/ProjectONEE/>.

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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.