

For Immediate Release

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Media Release

CCSD Offers Family Style Dining at CD and Head Start Schools

Charleston, SC – The three-year-old students in Shirley Alston and Marie Bennett’s class at Sanders-Clyde Elementary School have table manners that could rival most adults. That’s because the teachers spend every single day modeling proper mealtime etiquette through Family Style Dining.

Watch the proof in this [video!](#)

Federal guidelines dictate that Early Head Start and Head Start students must be served all meals using the pass/serve model. According to Sanders-Clyde Head Start Site Manager Frances Shaw, it helps students develop fine motor skills.

Charleston County School District (CCSD) Head Start and Early Head Start programs are funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to serve 877 preschool children, 152 infants and toddlers, and pregnant women. Head Start programs are offered at 13 sites throughout CCSD. Early Head Start is available at five CCSD sites as well as in the home-based option.

“Family Style Dining creates communication between the teacher and the students using food as the interaction,” said Shaw. “The teachers discuss with the students the type of food we are serving and how we create the meals, which in turn helps to build their vocabulary. We’re showing them that not everything comes out of the frozen food section and into the microwave.”

For many of these students, it is the only time they sit down at a table with family or friends to enjoy a meal. Many come from a culture of eating in front of the television, Shaw explained.

“We hope they take what they learned and use their enthusiasm to encourage Family Style Dining at home,” Shaw said. “This type of instruction gives the children a chance to show off what they’ve learned, such as what utensils they are using and portion control and ingredients.”

Family Style Dining

Adult role-modeling, peer to peer interactions and teaching mealtime etiquette are the pillars of Family Style Dining being offered throughout CCSD.

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Establishing healthier eating practices in schools demands innovative approaches and purposefulness that reaches beyond the focus of meeting children's physical food and nutrition requirements and economic hurdles. From that philosophy, the idea of Family Style Dining in the school cafeteria was born.

With this method, food is placed in the center of the table in common dishes and children are allowed to serve themselves. The shift from traditional school cafeteria service to Family Style Dining has resulted in positive outcomes. It allows students to take responsibility for the food selected and eaten.

According to Sarah W. Bates, Nutrition Services Officer, children learn and practice social and motor skills such as taking turns sharing and passing, pouring and scooping foods.

"Classroom teachers act as good role models for the students by sitting at the same table and eating the same meal," said Bates. "It creates an intimate, family-like environment."

Alston leads her students in a discussion about the daily menu, helping them to differentiate between fruits and vegetables and grains and proteins. Just before lunch arrives, she leads the students in song. Two students are then selected to pass out napkins and plates.

Before the food is placed in the center of each table, Alston leads the students in a hand washing routine to remind them how to properly handle food in the mealtime setting.

Midland Park Primary School is another is one of the many CCSD schools that features Family Style Dining.

Jasmine Wright's students use appropriately sized utensils to not only scoop food onto their plate but to feed themselves as well.

"Each student is given the recommended portion and is often treated to second servings of fruits and vegetables if they desire," said Wright.

Like all Head Start teachers, Wright sits with her students and instructs them on proper manners and corrects them when needed and is there to offer assistance.

How quickly the students catch on proves the model is a success, according to Bates.

"It's interesting to watch the students self-serve at the beginning of the school year and then by January you're awestruck at how capable they are and how their dexterity has improved," said Bates. "They can get the corn from the pot without

making a mess and all the while the teachers are there at the table with them to help them navigate those skills.”

For more information about the Child and Adult Care Food Program Community (CACFP) which brings healthy foods to tables across the country for children in child care centers, homes, and afterschool programs as well as adults in day care, visit their [website](#).

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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 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. 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.