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## Media Release

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### **James Costner Brings Creativity to Learning**

**Charleston, SC** – James Costner has just five years of teaching under his belt, but longevity isn't necessarily a requirement when applying for consideration as the Charleston County School District (CCSD) Teacher of the Year.

The seventh-grade math and Honors pre-algebra teacher at Laing Middle School of Science and Technology is a University of South Carolina graduate. He holds a Bachelor's of Science in Middle-Level Education with an emphasis on Math and Science.

Having taught at two other middle schools before coming to Laing, he never really set out to be an educator. He had his sights set on law school. But with a mom and a sister in the education field who are very passionate about their calling he eventually switched his major.

Costner was hired to teach in Lexington County and then Richland County before coming to CCSD. He is honored to represent Laing, a learning institution that he credits to teaching to the whole student.

"What makes Laing special is that you can instantly see the opportunities that every single kid has," said Costner. "It offers an award-winning STEM program not specific to just one class but the whole school. Every single student gets a STEM education."

Costner said his favorite thing about teaching is the autonomy he is allowed in the classroom.

"While teachers must follow the set curriculum, I can always add my spin on the lesson and make it my own and bring creativity to learning," said Costner. "I enjoy the impact I can have on even just one student because I know it will carry over and he or she will impact others."

Costner lives by the saying, "always be hungry for more but enjoy the opportunities that come with the successes." He said it falls in line with the school culture Laing Principal Jay Whitehair has created.

"Our principal is a forward thinker," said Costner. "He is not good with the status quo and pushes us and challenges us every day to make sure we're giving our best."

### **Becoming a Top Five Finalist**

Costner said that nothing will compare the feeling he had when he was surprised with the announcement by the selection committee.

"It is an incredible honor, particularly since I have only been here for two years," said Costner. "I knew the Top 5 announcement was coming, but I thought there was no way it would be me since there are just so many great teachers in our district. Now I am among them and getting to know them. It's like another door has opened for me with endless possibilities."

Costner has impacted hundreds of students in his few short years in the classroom. One, in particular, he remembers with fondness.

"I had a student write me a letter that said he appreciated my daily positivity in the classroom," said Costner. "When I reflect on that, and what he appreciated about me, I realize he couldn't have said any of that if I were not giving it my all every single day."

When Costner gets to work, he leaves his personal life behind and is 100 percent focused on the children.

"All I think about is 'what can I do to help every single person here,' and I keep that in perspective to make sure that I am doing everything I can for those kids."

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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.