

For Immediate Release

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Media Release

Students Treated to “Taste of Gullah” During Black History Month

Charleston, SC – Charleston County School District’s (CCSD) Nutrition Services Department teamed up with Chef GioVanni Richardson, founder of ‘A Taste of Gullah,’ to connect curriculum to the cafeteria during Black History Month.

The Gullah culture is important to the Lowcountry, and James Simons Elementary School Principal Chris Ryan wanted a fitting way to recognize and commemorate Black History Month.

On February 28, 2019 students enjoyed a Gullah cuisine menu of okra gumbo, all meat pilau, rutabagas with greens, southern succotash, mandazi, and assorted fruit.

“This vision came about two years ago while researching ways to tie in the local community to our schools,” said Joe Pettit, CCSD’s Nutrition Services Field Officer. “In years past we’ve done similar things like Farm-to-School initiatives where we’ve partnered with local farmers. The Gullah culture is part of the academic curriculum. By connecting the curriculum to the cafeteria, we’re completing that circle for the students and allowing them to taste what they are studying.”

Richardson is not just any chef, but an expert in Gullah cuisine. She and her team worked side-by-side with CCSD Nutrition Services staff, helping to assure they stayed true to her authentic recipes to properly commemorate Black History Month.

“It is very important that we celebrate Black History Month and the Gullah culture,” said Richardson. “I want the students to have self-awareness and know who they are as a person so they can be open to their history, culture, and language.”

She hopes the recipes used at the “Taste of Gullah” luncheon will be infused into the school menu throughout the district, so students experience a variety of authenticity.

“We honestly look at the students as being the heart of our work so it makes complete sense that there should be no distinction between what is taught in the

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classroom and served in the cafeteria,” said Pettit. “It is our duty to help children by hitting all of their senses to help them grasp information and help educate by bringing awareness to different cultures and food especially the Gullah culture which is the heartbeat of Charleston and the Lowcountry.”

Ashley Henderson, cafeteria manager at James Simons, explained that Montessori curriculum is rich with cultural lessons and bringing the lesson to the meal table is a natural part of the learning experience.

“Creating special menus is helpful for the little ones because of the sensory value of eating items from the cultures that they’re learning about,” said Henderson. “It introduces the children to tastes and flavors that they have never experienced and it really brings their studies to life.”

This is the first time such a partnership has happened through Nutrition Services. Pettit said that because of its success, the idea could be expanded to other schools.

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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.