

A photograph of two young girls in a natural setting. The girl on the left, with long brown hair, is holding a small black pot containing a green plant with long, thin leaves. She is looking down at the plant. The girl on the right, with shorter brown hair, is looking at the plant with her hand resting on her chin, appearing thoughtful. The background shows trees and a body of water under a blue sky.

2024-2025 IMPACT REPORT



Daufuskie Island
Independent School

A MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP



DR. TENNILLE SCHERIFF

Principal

KIMBERLY LUNDGREN

Co-Founder & Executive Director

May and August are certainly the busiest months of the school year! In May, we are frantically pushing to the end, ensuring loose ends are tied up, testing, and showcasing our learning experiences. In August, as teachers prep classrooms and the energy of students starts to fill the building, the whole staff is particularly focused on getting into good routines and making any last-minute adjustments needed to ensure a smooth year. Given these are such busy times, with the mountain of to-dos ever growing, we always enjoy the chance to write this report and look back on all the baby steps and giant leaps we've already taken.

The 2024–25 school year highlighted a superpower of Daufuskie Island Independent School: our ability to paddle straight into the headwinds without being pushed back or giving up. As we have reflected on some of the major headwinds we've faced this past year—starting the school year without a building to meet in, beginning with substitute math and science

teachers, Hurricane Helene postponing one of our largest fundraisers of the year—we're quick to recognize that the commitment to education of our Daufuskie community was stronger. Individuals, organizations, governmental entities, and businesses were instrumental in guiding us through. Some major milestones of the year were doubling our student body, hiring a dedicated teacher for each subject, moving into the Island House, honoring exceptional community members at our first Changemakers' Ball, starting an SAT prep camp, being recognized on the international stage for our groundbreaking work in rural education, AND becoming an accredited school!

But the fun and accomplishment didn't stop there. We also added a music program, competed in our first Mock Trial event, participated in scientific collaborations on local and national levels, held 15 amazing Encore units, showcased our students and their work in semi-annual events, welcomed talented artists in residence, and held three major fundraisers. We are excited to share more about

these programs in this report. However, what we are most proud of are our graduates (you can read more about them on page ten). Their words beautifully sum up what we strive to create at DIIS: a place where students grow academically and personally, and leave ready for a launch to high school.

In this coming year we are focused on further refining our academic programs, serving more students, increasing our extra-curricular program offerings, expanding our SAT summer programming, and beginning a capital campaign for a permanent building we can call home. We feel blessed by our Daufuskie community and are grateful to partner with you to make Daufuskie an “education destination.” To quote the International Business Times, “Ultimately, Daufuskie Island Independent School shows what happens when one creates a model of education that is rigorous, relevant, and rooted in place, designed to empower the students and the ecosystems that support them. DIIS began as a grassroots effort on a small, hard-to-reach island. Today, it stands as a case study for rural education reform, not just in America, but globally.”

It is simply amazing what we have accomplished together in three short years. We are so proud to be your partners in this work. We thank you for sharing our belief and mission that every child deserves access to a rich, rigorous, and well-rounded education. With your support, we will continue shaping the next generation of leaders and stewards —on Daufuskie Island and beyond. The future is bright!”

With gratitude,
Kimberly & Tennille

YEAR TWO: QUICK GLANCE

150%

Increase in student population

\$225,000

Raised

\$28,000

Scholarships Awarded

30+

Volunteers





OUR PURPOSE

VISION

We believe every child, in every community, deserves access to a rich, rigorous, and well-rounded education. By partnering with communities, we instill a love of learning, foster a culture of creativity, create an atmosphere of belonging, and encourage all learners to recognize and reach their potential.

MISSION

Daufuskie Island is an unrivaled experience, and its school should be equally so. Daufuskie Island is known for its Gullah heritage, tight-knit community, and connection to nature. We believe our unique environment is the perfect place for students to:

- cultivate a love of the natural world,
- develop a strong sense of self,
- witness and participate in the great outpouring of community-based service,
- foster and exercise stewardship for the historical, cultural, and environmental legacy that is Daufuskie Island,
- be inquisitive and stretch themselves in the discovery and pursuit of their untapped passions.

We envision a school that is accessible to all students on the island, providing the opportunity for secondary education aged children to remain on the island to fully participate in the unique opportunities and culture that are Daufuskie.

EMPOWERING STUDENTS

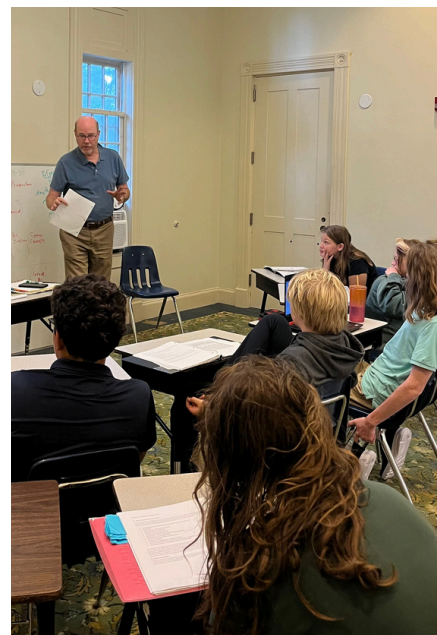
Though our test scores show that students are growing by leaps and bounds in the classrooms, our learning doesn't stop there. This past year students had the opportunity to take their learning out of the classroom by participating in South Carolina Bar Association's Middle School Mock Trial (MSMT). MSMT is an opportunity for students to flex their reading comprehension skills and learn about the basics of litigation and how the American judicial system operates. Each year a fictional case is presented. Students study the trial documents provided and create their own prosecution and defense cases in order to role-play as if in a real court of law.

The November 9th competition was the culmination of DIIS students' first quarter Mock Trial class, taught by community educator **Larry Dessem**. After Larry's wife, Beth, joined an 8th grade classroom book club in DIIS's first school year, he wondered what he could do to engage with and support the growth of DIIS students. A former law professor and dean, Larry knew Mock Trial was the answer.

On day one, few students had been in a courtroom and basic legal terms such as "affidavit," "exhibit," and "burden of proof" were all new vocabulary. But they worked hard and rose to the challenge. "It was especially rewarding to see them at the competition walk around the courtroom confidently while trying their cases," remarked Mr. Dessem. "It takes a great deal of hard work, creativity, and team collaboration to succeed at trial or in a trial competition. I am proud of them."

DIIS won the *Professionalism & Civility Award* for the region. Dr. Scheriff congratulated students. "Receiving the *Professionalism and Civility Award* speaks to the intentional culture of respect and collaboration that we focus on at school. It is evidence that you students strive to live the Student Pledge. We couldn't be prouder."

DIIS students will participate again in the 2025-26 school year, this time with a clear idea of what the goal is. Watch out!



MIDDLE SCHOOL MOCK TRIAL - GEORGETOWN, SC

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC



New this year is our instrumental music program run by professional musician **Mr. Melvin Small**. During the first semester students learned the basics of keyboard and music theory and wowed the audience at Winter Showcase with their performance of "Ode to Joy." With a generous donation of student guitars for the school from **Mr. David Bashford**, the second semester provided the option to learn guitar basics. Spring Showcase featured an original piece written by the students for guitar and piano!

"The Generations Project" was the combined vision of playwright **Corey-Jan Albert** and photographer **Joel Deitch**. Aimed at helping students connect with a member of another generation, Albert and Deitch spent two weeks with students working on writing and photography skills with a focus on creating original works. At completion, each student walked away with a two-character 10 minute play and a photographic piece inspired by what life was like when their "Elder" was a youth. This engaging and creative project helped students create and build connections as they explored their own creative voice.



ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE



CONNECTING COMMUNITY



CAROLE KIHM



VICTORIA PRICE



JAN ROSS



CATHIE MOORE



JANE BASFORD



JENNIFER NULL



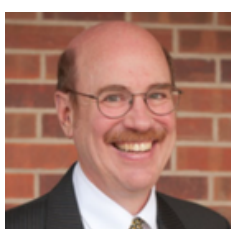
SALLIE ANN ROBINSON



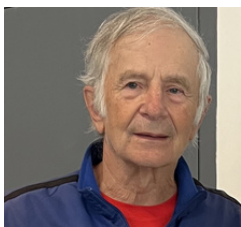
TODD NEEL



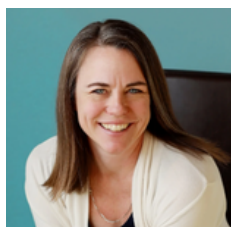
NANCY HUNTER



LARRY DESSEM



ALEX RADACANU



SHANNON NEEL

DIIS Encore Course offerings expand every year thanks to our talented and engaged community. Encore classes are taught by community volunteers who generously offer their extensive knowledge and expertise to our students. These instructors lead four to six-week units on a variety of subjects. This year our lineup included swimming, pickleball, tennis, yoga, sculpture, introduction to art, printmaking, dance, personal finance, Mock Trial, character development and Tai Chi.

12

community teachers

15

units taught

The Encore program not only enriches our curriculum but also connects students directly with the vibrant skills, culture, and wisdom of the Daufuskie community. It's a unique hallmark of DIIS that sparks curiosity, builds confidence, and inspires lifelong learning.

If you are interested in sharing your passion and expertise as a volunteer community instructor, we would love to hear from you!

Encore classes are often a “window to the world” for students. Many have never had the opportunity to play sports or be in a musical. If you'd like to help a student find their passion, please reach out and let us know how you would like to get involved!

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP



2

New environmental projects



1

New research collaboration



9

Budding marine scientists

WORKING TO PROTECT OUR WATERS AND SHORELINES

Through a generous grant from the Daufuskie Island Conservancy, DIIS students are playing an active role in protecting Daufuskie's shorelines and waters. Building off of the research they published on Daufuskie's shorelines last year in [Daufuskie Shoreline GIS Story Map](#), DIIS students have spent the year learning about their local ecosystem and looking for ways to help ensure good water quality and to slow erosion in problem areas.

To this end, DIIS students and teachers, in conjunction with SC Sea Grant, NOAA, and Daufuskie Island Farm, participated in the *From Seeds to Shorelines Program* in which they collected, germinated, grew, and planted their native spartina shoots in areas of greatest erosion. Furthermore, DIIS has joined the National Phytoplankton Monitoring Network, with a commitment of at least 12 months, to collect and analyze water samples from our coast to monitor any potentially dangerous algae blooms. Thanks to marine science teacher Cathie Moore and collaborating NOAA scientists, students continue to learn how to be precise in their data collecting methods and reporting. Data collected from water samples is entered in to the national database, so the quality of DIIS students' work matters!



STUDENT SUCCESSES

NOTEWORTHY
STUDENT
GROWTH BY
MAP SCORES



6th Grade Math
19 percentage
points

8th Grade Reading
21 percentage
points

In their own words...



"The main way I have grown in my two years [at DIIS] is in resilience for sure. I have been pushing through when it gets hard— that's something I didn't used to do. I've been turning in nearly all of my work and that's something. Another thing I've grown in over these last two years is responsibility. Those two things go hand-in-hand; you've got to be responsible to be resilient and vice-versa."

Jackson

"I really think we have all learned a lot from this school and we've been taught a lot. When I first entered DIIS, I didn't know what a slope was or what the quadratic equation was. I couldn't angle sticks on a graph, but we've learned a lot and grown a lot. If it weren't for this school we'd have to go to Hilton Head every day and we'd not have been able to go beyond the South Carolina curriculum."

Ari



"When I was asked about ways that I've grown over the past two years at school I couldn't really think of anything. But then I realized that over 75% of the things that I've done through the school I hadn't done before I came to DIIS. I hadn't played tennis or pickleball. I hadn't played any instruments or danced. I hadn't done track and field, and I hadn't spoken publicly."

"After coming to this school, my life has changed. I believe that speaking publicly frequently has helped develop courage. I didn't used to speak publicly at all. It just feels like this school has given me a lot of courage. I thank all of the teachers and volunteers for their efforts."

David



"I was a bit nervous about the transition from DIIS to a huge public high school, but it went really smoothly. I have a great group of friends and I'm on the tennis team. Something I really loved about DIIS is that because it is so small they can tailor the learning experience to you. I was able to take three high school honors classes while still at DIIS which made it easy for me to take all honors and AP classes once I got to high school. I had a great time at DIIS!"

Nora



LEGACY LEADERS

>\$10,000	Haig Point Foundation	Cathy & Howard Bos	Fred & Kelly Waite
	VELA		
\$5,000 - \$7,499	Barbara Reining	Janus Coastal	Laura & Dan Rollman
	Lundgren Family	Anonymous	Mary & Wade Keisler
\$1,000 - \$4,999	Daufuskie Island Conservancy	Paulette & John Hinchey	Terry & James Meara
	Erin & Jeremy Quinn	Bonnie Schroeder	Kathleen Simmons
	Lindsey & Don Peterik	Wells Anderson	Scott & Lorraine Sloan
	Beaufort County Tennis Association		Kayttie Melo & Jeff Fagan
\$500 - \$999	Frosty Frog	David & Jennifer Bashford	Sara Deitch
	Don Hunter	Marla & Steve Lundgren	Kimberly Medley
	Kelly & Mike Perriccio	Kathy & Rick Wagoner	Cynthia & David Sandefer
	Mindy & Andy Parham	Emily & Bryce Loader	
\$100 - \$499	Beth & Larry Dessem	Kelly Wooldridge	Laura Leigh Miles
	Laurel & Justin Smith	Dr. Joan Thomas	Annena & Lou Hampton
	Steve Hill	Tammy & Kris Kelley	Mary Grace Crawford
	Jerseys & Dresses	Carol & Richard Monahan	Deborah Smith
	Lillian Mortensen Willis	Glend Mikulak	John & Diane Hurley
	Vicky & TJ Wasser	Karen O'Grady	Community Foundation of the Lowcountry
	Bethany & Scott Kohn	Kyle & Kristen Mercer	Ray Bailey
Major Fundraiser Event Donors (>\$1,000)	Elizabeth Rogers	John Reed	Karen Catalano
	Kelly Anderson	Kelly & Carl Easterling	Nancy & Doug Egly
	Jackie Reynecke & Mark Anders	Katrina & Matt Taylor	Nicole & Steven Yarborough
	Christy & Adam Chafe	Julia & Matt Sullivan	Danita Moyers
	Lori & David Cumming	Kristi & Anthony Chase	Robin Nelson

Our circle is wide!
200 + Individual Donors
100 + Businesses & Organizations

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

2024-2025 Actuals

REVENUES

General Donations	\$80,991
Grants	\$45,310
Fundraising Events	\$90,376
Tuition & Fees	\$59,510

TOTAL REVENUE **\$276,187**

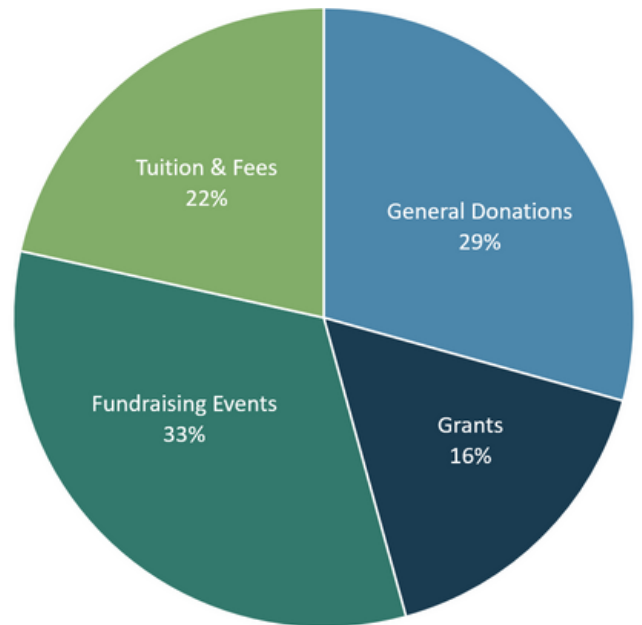
EXPENSES

Staffing	\$134,621
Operating Expenses	\$10,472
Fundraising Expenses	\$11,102
Occupancy	\$43,703
Scholarships & Awards	\$27,700

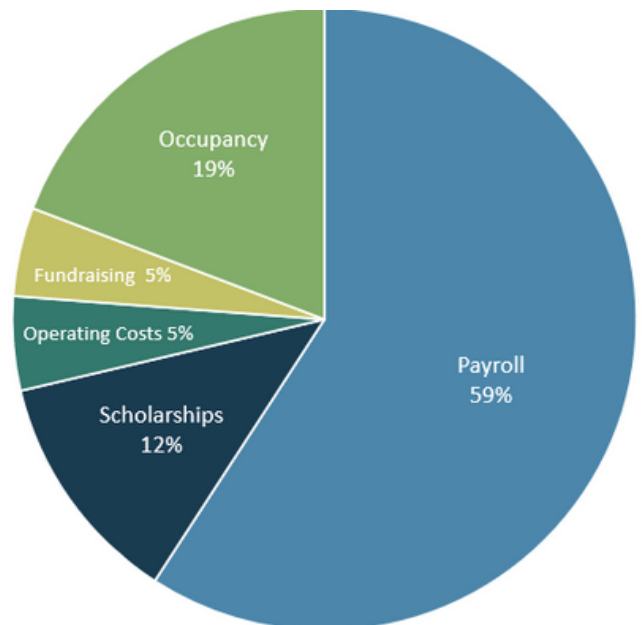
TOTAL EXPENSES **\$227,598**

NET ASSETS **\$73,765**

REVENUES



EXPENSES



HOW WE'VE BEEN GROWING

DIIS is now officially accredited!

Extra! Extra! Read all about us in International Business Times!



Capital Campaign Launch!

Stay tuned for how can you help build for the future.

FUNDING LEGACY SCHOLARSHIPS



Meet Laurel Smith, JD New Director of Development

The truth is, you've likely already met her! She's that smiling face you see out and about, because this director embodies the characteristics of our Student Pledge—respectful, uplifting, kind, a lifelong learner, honest, and let's not forget, resilient. In fact, she believes in DIIS's mission so deeply that nothing will stop her from advocating for the youth of our island! "To whom much is given, much is required."

lsmith@diis-sc.org

We are excited to announce the **PJ Fitz Scholarship**, generously donated in PJ's memory by a loved one. An educator by profession, he was in love with life, his family, his work, his church, his garden, and hockey. Known as a man of character, he was also passionate about the English language. He believed all children should have the opportunity to excel in any school and they should be able to pursue their hearts' passion.

One scholarship will be awarded each year to a family in need of support. We honor PJ's life and are grateful for the gift of continuing to give and help another.



Thank You!

We appreciate your continued support
and dedication to our mission.

Give Now!



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