

# SOUTH CAROLINA SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT Council News

"Civic Engagement in Public Education"

Volume 36, Issue 1, 2014



## 2014 SC-SIC Annual Meeting to Focus on "The Power of Partnerships"

The 2014 SC School Improvement Council Annual Meeting, Saturday, March 22, will focus on "The Power of Partnerships – Making the Most of What You've Got," and will be held at St. Andrews Middle School, 1231 Bluefield Road, Columbia, from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.

The meeting will feature a variety of sessions and information for local SICs as they plan goals, strategize actions and identify resources at their disposal.



A highlight of the day will be the presence of former SC Governor and US Education Secretary Dick Riley who will be on hand to present the 2014 Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence. The SC-SIC Board of Trustees will also recognize Dr. Percy A. Mack, Superintendent of Richland District 1, as SIC Advocate of the Year, and State Senator Wes Hayes (R-York) as Legislator of the Year.

The morning will begin with greetings and remarks from Mr. Christian Soura, Deputy Chief of Staff for Governor Nikki Haley. Dr. Lemuel Watson, Dean of the College of Education at the University of South Carolina will also share some remarks and welcome attendees.

Dr. David Taylor with Clemson University's Institute on Family and Neigh-

borhood Life will share highlights of an initiative in the Upstate, the Momentum Bike Clubs, which through a network of community partnerships provides group mentoring services based on principles of positive youth development to children who may have multiple risk factors.

Ms. Karen Utter, SC-SIC Coordinator of Programs and Research, along with Ms. Bunnie Ward, Director of Early Education and Policy for United Way of the Midlands and Chair of the Harbison West Elementary SIC in Columbia, and Harbison West Principal Arthur Newton, will present an overview of SC-SIC's pilot project, "Engagement for Outcomes." This project, working with five SICs in various parts of the state, is an effort to help these Councils build capacity through the essential elements of effective program planning, implementation and evaluation.

Dr. Joseph Watson and Ms. Vanessa Rhoden, assistant principals at Richland Northeast High School in Columbia, will share some insights and updates on how last year's Riley Award winning Richland Northeast SIC has built on its outstanding work and continued its efforts through to the current year.

Following lunch, Annual Meeting attendees will hear from Mr. Frank White,

*(continued)*

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## Five School Improvement Councils named finalists for annual state Riley Award for SIC Excellence

Five South Carolina School Improvement Councils (SICs) have been named statewide 2014 award finalists for their accomplishments in parent and civic engagement.

The SC School Improvement Council's annual Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence was created in 2002 to recognize the significant contributions made to public education by the nearly 15,000 local SIC members who volunteer in the state's 1,100-plus K-12 public schools.

In alphabetical order, this year's Riley Award finalists are:

- Buena Vista Elementary SIC (Greenville County Schools)
- Irmo High SIC (District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties)

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Tom F. Hudson

## Message from the Interim Executive Director

**Tom F. Hudson**

As the Third Century biographer of Greek philosophers Diogenes Laertius stated: "Nothing endures but change." The same is true for the SC-SIC, as we have seen changes

in staffing, our growing participation in the Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP) at the USC College of Education, initial successes with SC-SIC's pilot project, "Engagement for Outcomes," and a refocused commitment on our direct services to local SICs.

We will miss the steady and committed leadership of former Executive Director Cassie Barber and wish her well on her new professional endeavors. And we're excited that, for at least the remainder of the school year, we'll have the skills and insights of three new part-time Regional Council Specialists – Dr. Sallie Cooks, Ms. Jane Brandis and Ms. Martha Hannah – working in the field directly with SICs in the CSRA and Pee Dee areas of the state. To help SICs accomplish the valuable work they are mandated to perform, having a face-to-face, experienced presence in our schools is important. Our new Regional Council Specialists can do that for us, helping SC-SIC to better identify how we can help local SICs in their efforts.

Our "Engagement for Outcomes" pilot project, ably developed and spearheaded by SC-SIC Coordinator of Programs and Research Karen Utter, is working closely with five volunteer SICs in various parts of the state to harness the kind of knowledge and skills that help them identify, prioritize and examine realistic goals and use their school improvement plans and other existing school data to assess for themselves how they can best help their schools. This project, which has significant potential for SICs statewide, integrates all of the essential elements of effective program planning, implementation and evaluation through the support of ongoing training, coaching and technical assistance.

SC-SIC's involvement with the Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP) at the USC College of Education continues to evolve and grow. The CEP, created through last year's state budget process, includes five programs at USC which receive at least part of their funding through Education Improvement Act (EIA) monies: SC-SIC; SC Geographic Alliance; Writing Improvement Network; Middles Grades Initiative; and the SC Education Policy Center. As the mission of the CEP is to provide educational extension services to schools, families and communities facilitating collaboration among education stakeholders, SC-SIC is uniquely positioned – with 1,100-plus local SICs and nearly 15,000 SIC members – to work as part of the CEP as it strives to leverage existing resources and build local capacity to improve student achievement in our state's K-12 schools.

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**USC College of Education**  
**Wardlaw Bldg., Suite 001**  
**Columbia, SC 29208**  
**Phone: 803-777-7658**  
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# Three Regional Council Specialists Join SC-SIC Staff



*Sallie Cooks, Ed.D.*

The SC School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) is pleased to welcome three new part-time Regional Council Specialists who will work directly with identified schools and SICs in two areas of the state, providing them on-site visits, targeted technical assistance and other resources.

Serving Councils in SC-SIC's Central Savannah River Area region (Allendale, Aiken, Barnwell, Edgefield, Hampton, Saluda) will be Dr. Sallie Cooks. Serving Councils in SC-SIC's Pee Dee region (Clarendon, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Lee, Marlboro, Marion, Williamsburg) will be Ms. Jane Brandis and Ms. Martha Hannah.

These three part-time positions are funded through the end of the school year by the Center for Educational Partnerships at the University of South Carolina's College of Education, of which SC-SIC is a partner.



*Jane E. Brandis*

"Like many entities in South Carolina, SC-SIC has faced reduced and very limited budgets over the last half-dozen years," said SC-SIC Interim Executive Director Tom F. Hudson. "Our ability to provide direct, localized services to individual SICs has not been what we would have liked. Through the support of the College's Center for Educational Partnerships and these three Regional Council Specialist positions, SC-SIC will again have the ability to provide vital services to local SICs which most need them.



*Martha Hannah*

"We're very fortunate to have three highly qualified professionals with a real passion for public education and the work of School Improvement Councils on our staff to help us in this effort, to conduct needs assessments and to find out how we can best assist local SICs," Hudson said.

Dr. Cooks is a former 12-year member and chair of the Edgefield County School Board. A past CSRA and Edgefield County Woman of the Year, Dr. Cooks has been a volunteer behavior specialist at Edgefield County's Strom Thurmond High and has served as a juvenile arbitrator for the 11th Circuit Solicitor's Office. Dr. Cooks is both a SC Education Policy Fellow (2010) and Global Education Policy Fellow (2011).

Ms. Brandis is currently Assistant Professor of Education and Coordinator of Clinical Experiences at Francis Marion University. A former elementary classroom teacher and school-level curriculum coordinator in Florence School District One, Ms. Brandis has prior service as a local SIC member and as a member of the Florence School District Three SACS Accreditation Committee.

Ms. Hannah recently retired from the Lee County School District after 29 years as a guidance counselor in that district, Williamsburg County School District, Sumter County School District, and Clarendon School District One. During her career, Ms. Hannah has served as a local SIC member, as coordinator of the Parent Education Program, has conducted in-service and training sessions for faculty and staff, and served as a certified ADEPT evaluator.

All three Regional Council Specialists have begun contacting SIC District Contacts in their respective districts, and will soon be scheduling appointments with the principals and chairs of identified SICs.

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## ***"Message from the Interim Executive Director"***

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So while "the times they are a-changin'," to quote Bob Dylan, I believe they are changing in a bright and meaningful way for SC-SIC. These are times of new approaches, new initiatives and new focus. But regardless of the wisdom of Laertius and Dylan, I believe some things remain enduring and unchanging: the commitment of our local SIC members to marshal their perspectives, experiences and resources to best help the schools they serve, and the dedication of SC-SIC to provide the services and assistance SICs need to realize true civic engagement in public education.

Our 2014 SC-SIC Annual Meeting, themed "The Power of Partnerships – Making the Most of What You've Got," is centered on these efforts. I hope that you will be able to join us for this day full of ideas, resources and celebrations on Saturday, March 22.



# Cassie Barber Leaves SC-SIC After 14 Years of Service



Cassie Barber

SC School Improvement Council Executive Director Cassie Barber has left SC-SIC after 14 years of service.

Ms. Barber became the Executive Director for the Alabama Chapter of the ALS Association in her native Huntsville in early February.

“We will greatly miss Cassie’s passion, commitment and expertise in working with our state’s School Improvement Councils,” said SC-SIC Board of Trustees Chair Ellen M. Still. “Her dedication to the well-being of South Carolina’s children and her belief in the importance of civic engagement in our public schools has truly strengthened SC-SIC and the vital roles it plays across the state.”

Ms. Barber, known for her work as a child and family advocate, first came to SC-SIC in 1999 as Director of Program Services. She later became Associate Director and began serving as SC-SIC Executive Director in July 2007.

Dr. Lemuel Watson, Dean of the College of Education at the University of South Carolina, has named SC-SIC Associate Director Tom F. Hudson to serve as Interim Executive Director.

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## “2014 SC-SIC Annual Meeting to Focus on “The Power of Partnerships”

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retired from the SC Department of Education following 39 years of service, who will provide an entertaining look at “Twenty-Six Ways to Build Involvement and Partnerships.”

Also part the afternoon’s agenda will be presentations from the five finalists for this year’s Riley Award for SIC Excellence – Buena Vista Elementary SIC; Irmo High SIC; Okatie Elementary SIC; Port Royal Elementary SIC, and Ridge View High SIC – who will offer highlights of the accomplishments which garnered their recognition for 2014 Riley Award consideration.

The Annual Meeting will culminate in the presentation of this year’s Riley Award by Secretary Riley.

The \$30.00 registration fee for the meeting includes meeting materials, a continental breakfast and buffet lunch. The registration form, as is a flyer for the event, is located on the home page of the SC-SIC website, <http://sic.sc.gov>. Advance registration is required no later than Monday, March 17, as there will be no on-site registration the day of the meeting.

Please plan to join us for this year’s SC-SIC Annual Meeting, “The Power of Partnerships,” on Saturday, March 22 in Columbia!

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## “Five SICs named finalists for Riley Award”

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- Okatie Elementary SIC (Beaufort County School District)
- Port Royal Elementary SIC (Beaufort County School District)
- Ridge View High SIC (Richland School District 2)

“These SICs are to be congratulated for their outstanding work on behalf of the schools and students they serve,” said SC-SIC Board of Trustees Chair Ellen M. Still. “The efforts of the parents, educators, students, and community members serving on these Councils help demonstrate the vital roles that SICs play in sharing ideas, developing strategies, and identifying resources to support our schools and our state’s children.”

The SC-SIC Riley Award is named in honor of former South Carolina Governor and US Education Secretary Richard Riley and his late wife, Tunky, and recognizes the couple’s longstanding commitment to quality public education.

Secretary Riley will present to the award to the 2014 winner at the SC-SIC Annual Meeting, Saturday, March 22, 2014, at St. Andrews Middle School in Columbia. Five of the Honor Roll SICs will be chosen to compete for the Riley Award which will be presented to a single SIC on March 22, 2014 during the SIC Annual Meeting in Columbia.



# Wondering How to Get More Parents Involved? A Parent Survey Can Help

by Karen Utter,

SC-SIC Coordinator of Programs and Research

Does the following sound familiar? “We’ve tried everything to get more parents involved in our school. No matter what we do, it’s always the same few parents who show up.” A good response to this question is: “Have you tried asking your parents how they would like to be involved?”

Surveys can be an effective way for School Improvement Councils to find out what parents want and need from parent engagement activities, and the barriers that keep them from getting involved.

*Where do We Start?* There are many model parent surveys available that address different aspects of the school-parent relationship. (A sampling is provided at the end of this article.) SICs can adapt one of these or they can develop their own particular survey questions. Even if an SIC plans to write its own, it is helpful to look at several examples to decide what kind of questions the SIC wants to ask.

*How Welcoming is Your School?* One area that SICs may want to assess is whether parents experience their school as welcoming. Is parking set aside for parents? Is the way to the main office clearly marked? Is front office staff friendly and well-informed? A survey can help your SIC see your school through the eyes of your parents and identify strong points and where improvements can be made. Understandably, schools must always balance open access with concerns about security. Even with these constraints, however, there are often changes that can be made that are relatively easy to accomplish and have a significant impact on parent perceptions about your school.

*Are Parents Getting the Message?* There are many tools available to communicate with parents today, but what particular combination works best for your parents? How many have easy access to an internet connection and email? Can parents who are English language learners access important school information? Does communication travel both ways, or only from school to the home? A survey can help SICs develop a communication strategy most likely to be effective for the specific needs of the individual school community.

*Are You Planning Events and Activities that Match the Schedule and Priorities of Parents?* Many schools and SICs struggle to find a day and time when most parents are likely to be available to attend school events. Instead of guessing, why not ask? If parents are not stepping forward to fill traditional volunteer roles, ask them what talents or skills they would like to offer to the school. SICs can then help match those resources to the needs of your school. What do parents need the most help with in supporting their child? What if the school’s priority is helping parents help their children with homework, but many parents are struggling with discipline issues? Knowing this, the school and SIC can focus efforts on the areas that will attract the greatest parent participation, while at the same time helping parents to be more ready to engage with their children over homework.

*Where Can I Find Model Surveys?* The following is a list of sources for model surveys that address many different aspects of the school-parent relationship. A fee is associated with using some of these, but others are free. Please consult the providers for further information.

- A sample Family Information Survey is available for download free of charge on the SC-SIC website ([sic.sc.gov](http://sic.sc.gov)). It is located in the Training and Resources Section under Training Handouts.
- Henderson, A., Mapp, K., Johnson, V., and Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* (London: New World Press). Chapter 11 includes examples of questions that could be used on a family welcome questionnaire, a homework survey, a parental needs assessment, a student information survey, a parent volunteer survey, and a school climate survey.
- SurveyMonkey has partnered with the Harvard Graduate School of Education to develop an extensive parent survey template. It provides sample questions in the areas of parental support of student learning, child behaviors, parent engagement, parent self-efficacy, school climate, school program fit, and parent roles and responsibilities. (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/harvard-education-surveys/>)
- School and family partnership surveys for teachers, parents and students at the elementary, middle and high school levels are available through the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS). Spanish language surveys are also available. (<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/survey.htm>)
- In 2006, New Carolina published a resource guide on increasing parent involvement in education that includes a form developed by NNPS for use in taking inventory of your school’s present practices in school, family and community partnerships. The entire guide can be downloaded free of charge at <http://www.newcarolina.org/UserFiles/publications/parent-involvement-8.pdf>

