

# SC-SIC Council News



**SC School Improvement Council**

**"Civic Engagement in Public Education"**

Volume 37, Issue 4, 2016

## Save the Date for SC-SIC's 2016 Annual Meeting

Be sure to register for SC-SIC's 2016 Annual Meeting, scheduled for Saturday, March 19, at EdVenture Children's Museum in Columbia. This year's meeting will focus on the importance of the quality and character of the school environment, with a variety of speakers and sessions looking at this vital part of the educational process. Highlights of the day will be presentations from this year's finalists for the SC-SIC Riley Award for SIC Excellence, a question and answer session with the finalists, and the naming of the 2016 Riley Award winner. The day will begin with check-in at 9:00 a.m. and will wrap up around 3:00 p.m.

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## Five Finalists for SC-SIC Riley Award Selected from 2016 SIC Honor Roll

Five South Carolina School Improvement Councils (SICs) have been named statewide award finalists for the 2016 Dick and Tunky Riley Award for SIC Excellence for their accomplishments in parent and civic engagement within their school communities.

The finalists were selected from a group of 10 local SICs which were named to this year's SIC Honor Roll in January.

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.



This year's Riley Award finalists are: Ebinport Elementary SIC (Rock Hill Schools/York County School District Three); H.E. McCracken Middle SIC (Beaufort County School District); Jennie Moore Elementary SIC (Charleston County School District); Laing Middle School of Science & Technology SIC (Charleston County School District); and South Florence High SIC (Florence Public School District One).

"We salute these School Improvement Councils and the wonderful work they have undertaken for their schools and students," said SC-SIC Board of Trustees Chairman Michael Guarino. "When the ideas and energies of parents, educators, students, and community members are combined to strengthen public education, we all benefit – particularly our children."

The remaining five local School Improvement Councils recognized on the 2016 SIC Honor

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# Message from the Executive Director

*Tom F. Hudson*



During the course of their work for their schools, SICs often take a look at something that is known as “school climate.” This has absolutely nothing to do with the HVAC system. But it does have everything to do with the warmth or coolness of the school community and its learning environment.

“School climate” refers to the quality of relationships, the actual physical setting, and the personal atmosphere of a particular school. It’s not just touchy-feely stuff – school climate has a very real impact on teaching, learning, and student success.

The 2016 SC-SIC Annual Meeting on Saturday, March 19, in Columbia, is titled “Warming Up to the Importance of School Climate,” and will focus on various aspects of the topic, why it’s so vital, and how local School Improvement Councils can work with school leaders to positively shape the climate of their schools. More on the SC-SIC Annual Meeting, the day’s agenda, and registration information can be found online at <http://sic.sc.gov>.

For nearly 20 years, South Carolina has worked to assess the climates of its schools through annual surveys put in place by the 1998 Education Accountability Act (EAA), legislation which also provided additional responsibilities for our local School Improvement Councils. Some of the results of these surveys are reflected on each school’s annual SC School Report Card. Research on multiple levels has consistently demonstrated that schools with better climates see higher levels of student achievement, more classroom engagement, fewer behavioral problems, increased teacher job satisfaction and retention, as well as better relationships between the school and students’ homes.

So, yes, school climate is kind of a big deal. But it doesn’t happen magically or spontaneously. It doesn’t occur in a vacuum, nor does it materialize just because a state or district edict mandates it. And this is where School Improvement Councils have a vital role and can have a significantly positive influence in the lives and futures of their schools.

Now I’m not what would be considered a foremost expert on school climate, although I’ve been around SICs for the better part of a couple of decades. From my experience as one who could be called a “non-traditional educator,” I see a school’s climate as best viewed through a framework of three Cs – culture, collaboration, and continuity.

A school’s culture – its values, its character, its personality if you will – sets the stage for positive school climate. What does the school believe? What is its mission, vision, and how does it go about achieving

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# Boost Staff Morale by Creating a Culture Founded in Effective Communication

By Margaret Van Duch

Staff morale is like your bank balance – even when you have money in your account, the balance can always be higher. Savvy principals consider “boosting morale” one of their weekly tasks to be attacked in a strategic and systemic fashion. Just as you carefully craft a school improvement plan, you plan strategies to boost morale.

## Get a “read” on your staff

School climate and culture have a direct correlation to employee morale. Effective communication strategies can boost morale by building a positive climate – the short-term “mood” of the school, and over time, a highly effective culture – the long-term “personality” of the school.



But, the first step before planning strategies is getting a “read” on the current level or morale among your staff. There are several tactics you can use to assess employee morale:

- focus groups can be assembled to discuss hot topics;
- surveys can help gauge and measure employee morale over time;
- spending face time at team meetings; and
- holding informal, spontaneous hallway conversations.

## Find strategies and tactics that work for you

Once you’ve assessed the state of the current morale among your staff, consider the following strategies and tactics to enhance communication and build stronger relationships with your most important stakeholders.

- Sincere appreciation

Expressing your appreciation of staff efforts can go a long way towards building morale. This should be done regularly. For appreciation to be effective, it must be authentic, personalized, and individualized.

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## SC-SIC Launches New Website Design

SIC members and others seeking information on the SC School Improvement Council website <http://sic.sc.gov> will find a pleasant surprise the next time they visit: a fresher, more easily navigable site with a modern feel.

When landing on the Home page, users will see a series of three portals, “SICs and SIC Leaders,” “Parents and Community,” and “Schools and Districts.” Upon entering any one of these portals the user will be presented with a list of resources to access with a simple click. Quick Links are featured on each page, offering easy access to some of the website’s most popular features such as the *SC-SIC Member Network* and the current SIC Training schedule. The design is responsive across platforms, offering ease of use on your phone, tablet, laptop, or desktop.

SC-SIC hopes that the updated look and additional resources will make the new site a staple for all SICs in their weekly, monthly, and yearly operations and that community members, school districts, and others interested in School Improvement Councils will find answers to their questions here. We welcome your feedback – contact us at [sic@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:sic@mailbox.sc.edu) or 800-868-2232!

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# SICs and Role of Student Voices in Improved School Climate

By Karen Utter, SC-SIC Coordinator of Council Services

No one has a greater stake in creating and sustaining a positive school climate than students. That is one of the reasons why SICs at the high school level are required to include student representatives, and many middle school SICs are choosing to include student representatives as well.



SICs can provide students with an important opportunity not only to be heard, but also to be part of the solution to difficult challenges schools may face around issues such as low student engagement in learning, drug and alcohol abuse, disciplinary and attendance problems, or a lack of connectedness.

One way SICs can do this is by ensuring that SIC student representatives have the opportunity to be an active part of the school improvement planning process. For ideas on how to do this, check out the online toolkit called *Speak Out, Listen Up! Tools for Using Student Perspectives and Local Data for School Improvement*. This publication explains three different tools that educators (or SICs!) can use to give meaningful expression to student voice and hands-on experience in collaborating with adults to achieve positive change. The toolkit can be found at [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL\\_2014035.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL_2014035.pdf).

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## “From the Executive Director”

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them? SICs, as the representatives of the many different stakeholders within the school community, can play an important role in bringing everyone together to develop a shared vision and mission that is uniquely their own.

Collaboration -- open communication, dialogue, input -- is essential to a positive school climate. Administrators, teachers, and parents work together as equal partners for the good of students. Students too have a voice and are actively engaged in their own learning. SIC's can encourage collaboration by providing multiple types of opportunities for all of these groups to both talk and listen to one another.

Once a positive school climate has been established, continuity can only be achieved through sustained and intentional effort. SICs can help by continuing to monitor the "temperature" of their school's climate, advocating for the adoption of formal policies and procedures that promote a positive school climate, and by undertaking activities that help create positive physical, social, and learning environments.

Want to learn more about school climate and how SICs can make a difference? You can register to attend the SC-SIC Annual Meeting, March 19, in Columbia. You can visit the SC-SIC website, where you'll find lots of resources and materials. Or just give us a call at 1-800-868-2232. We'll be happy to provide whatever assistance you might need.



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## “2016 Annual Meeting”

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This year's registration fee of just \$25.00 includes the cost of a continental breakfast, lunch, and materials. The registration form can be found on the home page of the SC-SIC website, <http://sic.sc.gov>. Advance registration is required no later than Monday, March 14, as there will be no on-site registration the day of the meeting. We look forward to seeing you at the 2016 SC-SIC Annual Meeting on Saturday, March 19!

# *“Boosting Staff Morale”*

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- Recognition programs

Employee recognition programs are associated with feelings of greater satisfaction at work. Recognition programs need not break your budget; they can be simple acknowledgements of extra effort.

- Personal notes

Handwritten notes can be given to any staff member who is going the extra mile. In these days of electronic communication, there is something special about an envelope in a staff member’s mailbox. You might be surprised how many people post these for their colleagues and students to see.

- “Shout outs”

Special notices of thanks or recognition can be a regular feature of your staff newsletter. Encourage staff members to “shout out” co-workers – they can be your “eyes on the street” looking for employees that make a positive impact. “Shout outs” are also a subtle way to reinforce the types of behaviors you want to promote with your staff.

- Short stories with photos

Positive news stories about personal or classroom achievements can be submitted to your PR professional or to local news outlets. Photos bring the story alive. Try to capture pictures of adults working with students and focus your content on student learning. Catch staff members in action to promote the positive work of your school.

- Internal notices or recognition

Dedicated staff communication vehicles are a great place to post personal and career milestones. Did someone complete an advanced degree program? Has someone recently gotten married? Had a baby? Create a sense of family by posting these moments and photos in a secure location on your website.

- Social media

Engaging staff through social media is a strategy that can expand your morale boosting efforts. Inform your stakeholders about activities and events that have had a positive impact on students. Teachers and staff members feel good when their hard work is promoted publicly. Let parents add positive comments and retweet the messages. Good news can travel quickly, too!

- Back-to-school videos

A video can be a fabulous way to start the school year. Ask all staff members to send in one or two summer photos. Compile a slideshow set to snappy music, and you will feel the energy surge in your staff as you begin your “Welcome Back Faculty” meeting. Everyone likes to catch up by seeing where people went, whom they visited with, and how they spent their summer. Be sure you include your own photos so that staff can see what you enjoy doing outside the office.

## **It starts in the front office**

Make boosting staff morale a primary outcome of your communication efforts. Tell the stories of the good work that happens in your building. Share photos of staff members demonstrating the culture you want to develop. Take a few moments every day to boost morale by being a positive influence in your school.

Positive morale starts in the front office of schools and reaches every hallway and into every classroom.

*Author Margaret Van Duch is communications director for Fremont School District 79, Mundelein, Ill.*

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# ***“2016 Riley Award Finalists Selected”***

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Roll are: Bluffton Middle SIC (Beaufort County School District); Denmark-Olar High SIC (Denmark-Olar School District Two of Bamberg County); Meadowfield Elementary SIC (Richland School District One); Port Royal Elementary SIC (Beaufort County School District); and St. James High SIC (Horry County Schools).

The winner of the 2016 Riley Award will be announced from this year’s finalists at the SC-SIC Annual Meeting, Saturday, March 19, at EdVenture Children’s Museum in Columbia.

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

More information on SC-SIC, the Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence, and award winners from previous years can be found online at <http://sic.sc.gov>.