

2012

Baron DeKalb Elementary School

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Kershaw County School District

Case Statement:

Nestled in a picturesque community inhabited by wild turkeys, foxes and deer, Baron DeKalb Elementary (BDK) sits in a rural section of Kershaw County. BDK serves 190 students in grades PreK-5th. The student demographics consist of 71% white, 19% African American, 2.6% Hispanic/Latino, 1% American Indian, and 6.3% bi-racial. Twenty-four percent of the students are served by the gifted and talented program, and 3.4% have a disability other than speech. Baron DeKalb Elementary met Adequate Yearly Progress for the 8th consecutive year, since 2003. In 2011, the school exceeded the district and the state on PASS in ELA and math, with 86.3% of the students scoring met or exemplary in both subjects.

The most recent Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) survey results showed 48.5% of the students live in a two-parent household, while 36.9% live in a single parent household, and 14.6% live with another guardian. According to the survey, parent occupations include 22.5% homemakers, 12.3% textile, 8.6% clerical, 7.9% self-employed, 7.4% agriculture, 6.5% medical, 4.3% education, 21% other and 9.5% unemployed. With a poverty index of 84.82%, the yearly income of families at Baron DeKalb is from \$20,000 to \$30,000. Although there are no major businesses or stores within walking distance of the school, the City of Camden Water Treatment Plant and the Baron DeKalb Fire Department are within two miles of the school.

Test scores, sign-in sheets, surveys, report card information, and feedback via the suggestion box are used to identify the needs of the students and the school. The School Improvement Council participates in the development of the School Renewal Plan, and works with the school and community to monitor the plan. In the school's continuing efforts to improve student achievement, the plan is reviewed each year and revisions are made as needed.

In 2008-2009, the School Improvement Council at Baron DeKalb Elementary was reorganized and all members attended an SIC training. The session was very beneficial because it gave members a better understanding of the role and responsibilities of the SIC. With a new sense of purpose, the School Improvement Council has been instrumental in spearheading or supporting initiatives to increase student achievement, to provide a safe learning environment, and to promote family involvement.

Erecting a safety wall in the front entrance of the school has been an ongoing item on the School Improvement Plan, since 2008-2009. The PTO had agreed to raise funds to help cover the cost for the wall. However, due to major

budget cuts in 2009 and 2010, the PTO was forced to reconsider its plans. Money raised by the PTO was primarily used to purchase library books, and necessary instructional supplies. The School Improvement Council began to focus its attention on securing funds through the Kershaw County School District's Installment Purchase Plan. In December 2009, a commander with the Kershaw County Sheriff's office conducted an evaluation of a lockdown drill at BDK. The officer's report included a recommendation that the school erect a store-front with a magnetic lock to better secure the school. The report was shared with the School Improvement Council and the appropriate district administrators.

The SIC kept the need for a safety wall in the forefront through ongoing communication with district administrators and by attending school board meetings. In the fall of 2010, the Kershaw County Board of School Trustees approved the purchase of a store-front intruder prevention entrance at BDK. After returning from spring break, students, parents, and staff were delighted with the new look of the school's main entrance area. The safety wall was constructed in April of 2011, which was a major accomplishment for the School Improvement Council.

Due to the grant writing efforts of the School Improvement Council, Baron DeKalb Elementary has an outdoor classroom to enhance teaching and learning. Second grade used the classroom to release butterflies after a study on the life cycle. The students have also used the outdoor classroom to record the environment that would help the butterflies survive. First grade students observed the changes in the season, compared areas that received sun with areas that did not, observed leaf shapes, and any possible habitats that could be observed. The classroom is also used as a place for reading, poetry and journal writing, making and recording observations, reflecting after a nature walk, and listening to the sounds of nature. Although the classroom was constructed in 2010, it is still a work in progress. The completion of the landscape, with an official opening of the classroom, was one of the School Improvement Council's goals for 2010-2011. Parents, students, staff, and community members completed the landscape in April, and the official opening of the outdoor classroom was part of the school's Earth Day celebration. Parents and community members attended this special event, which aired on the 6:30 and 10:00 WACH 57 News. The SIC was also responsible for forming a landscape committee, consisting of parents, staff, and a community member to maintain the outdoor classroom and school grounds.

The School Improvement Council partnered with the United Way of Kershaw County's Hand in Hand Together mentoring program to recruit volunteers to assist selected 5th grade students with academic, behavior and/or social

challenges. The coordinator of the mentoring program spoke at the SIC meeting in February of 2011 to discuss the program; the School Improvement Council responded by actively participating in the recruitment of volunteers to serve as mentors. Each student was paired with a mentor, and one of the mentors is also a member of the School Improvement Council. The students received academic assistance, help with decision making skills, and extra attention from a positive role model. Although the program was implemented late in the school year, students made gains on MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) assessments, and there was a reduction in the number of office disciplinary referrals from fall to spring. One hundred percent of the students made gains in math from fall to spring, and 80% made gains in reading on MAP from fall to spring. In addition, the participants had a 40% reduction in disciplinary office referrals from fall 2010 to spring 2011.

As a Title I school in a rural community, BDK is often confronted with financial challenges. Also, because of the school's location, there are limited opportunities to form partnerships with businesses. However, due to the commitment and efforts of the School Improvement Council and other stakeholders, Baron DeKalb Elementary is making tremendous progress towards achieving the school's vision-*A small school with a big heart where everyone excels!* The accomplishments of the School Improvement Council, which includes being named to S.C. School Improvement Council's 2011 Honor Roll, are a reflection of the positive relationship between the school's stakeholders. Everyone works together to provide a safe and nurturing learning environment for the students.



Candace Anderson, Chair