

2013

RICHLAND NORTHEAST HIGH SCHOOL

Richland School District Two

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2013 DICK AND TUNKY RILEY AWARD SUBMISSION

Richland Northeast High School – CASE STATEMENT

RNE – Who We Are

Richland Northeast High School (RNE) is one of five high schools within Richland School District Two (RSD2) in Columbia, SC. RNE currently has the smallest high school student population at 1,406 students. The current total student population is 933 African American Students, 296 Caucasian students, 118 Hispanic students, 38 Asian students, 5 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students, and 4 American Indian students and 12 bi-racial students. The free and reduced lunch student population is 846 out of 1406. The SACS Survey results that include the statistics such as 1 parent household %, two parent household %, living with guardian %, parent occupations, poverty index %, average yearly family income are kept now at the District level and not available on a per school basis.

RNE is the second oldest high school, being founded in 1978. Since then, three other high schools have been built in the District as the student population has continued to grow at an accelerated pace and has moved increasingly further and further in the opposite direction towards the Kershaw County line. While RNE used to be considered centrally located in the District, it now finds itself on the outer edge of the District in an area without opportunity for new residential growth. The Decker Boulevard Corridor is the closest business and consumer area to the school and it too has suffered an economic downturn as major retailers that anchored the area have moved further across the county to be closer to new housing where family incomes tend to be higher. The businesses that remain are largely independent internationally flavored stores including restaurants, specialty grocery stores, clothing stores and some gift shops, reflecting local populations in the immediate area including Hispanic, Korean, Chinese, Indian, African and Vietnamese. The county, capitalizing on this unique character of the area, has defined the area as the "International Corridor" and continues to work to revitalize the area in which RNE is located.

This economic impact affects RNE in a variety of important ways. The depressed economic area causes RNE to have a higher than average number of students who are minority, financially disadvantaged, and speak English as a second language. It has also generated a negative image of RNE by families within the district and community who equate the older facilities/large minority population with an inferior opportunity for quality education.

Issues of the SIC

The RNE SIC this past year has had the following three top goals that were devised as a result of the changing nature of the student population as detailed above:

- Goal 1: Work to maintain a well-balanced student population, demographically, economically and academically
- Goal 2: Institute a Re-Branding initiative with a local Marketing/PR professional to improve RNE's reputation and standing within the District and community
- Goal 3: Improve communications between RNE and students/families/community

Actions and Results

RSD2 has a reputation of having ground-breaking magnets and "schools within a school" to offer students specific educational opportunities geared towards their academic abilities and interests. The District also has a school choice initiative that gives students the ability to attend schools outside their zoned area. These features, coupled with RNE's recent designation as an International Baccalaureate School have helped the SIC immeasurably with achieving its Goal 1. The SIC worked extensively with the administration and District to promote the IB status within the community via billboards, print materials and special IB interest meetings. The largest effort towards this goal came about during the recent District re-zoning process as a result of the opening of the 5th district high school this school year. Several drafts were debuted to the public and each of the scenarios showed RNE with a disproportionately high minority and lower-socio economic population in relation to the other high schools, whose populations saw a decrease in these areas. It was disconcerting to the SIC in its efforts to maintain a diverse student population. It was felt that a diverse student population was necessary in all schools to benefit all students. To that end, the SIC raised public awareness not just within the RNE population, but also within the community. The SIC partnered with local elected officials, the Columbia Urban League, the local chapter of the NAACP, and attorneys with specialized skills in maintaining racially diverse populations in schools to lobby the school board members and influence their ultimate decision to re-draw the zoning lines that took RNE SIC's concerns into consideration. The end result was much more favorable to not only RNE, but also to most constituents in the District.

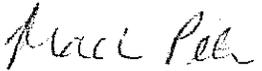
As a result of the re-zoning efforts, the RNE SIC immediately began a close working relationship with the School Board and District to improve the physical facilities. It became apparent during the re-zoning effort that the negative public perception of RNE had a lot to do with physical appearance. RNE is currently the recipient of a long list of physical improvements, as a result of the issues brought to light during the zoning process that includes a complete renovation of athletic fields and the creation of a RNE sports-complex that is comparable to what the newer high schools in the district enjoy; a parking lot re-design with new attractive signage and fencing in the front of the campus; a media center upgrade; and other additions/upgrades.

Another important result of the re-zoning initiative was the need to work with a professional Marketing firm to improve the image RNE had with the public. SIC did this with a local Marketing Professional and RNE Parent, Ginger Bates. It was a several month process that began with a series of meetings with her to ascertain what RNE was looking to achieve, what the concept of Re-Branding entailed, and how best to begin the process. This was followed by a survey developed by Ms. Bates with the SIC's input that was sent to current students, alumni, faculty, parents, community members and local businesses. The survey's purpose was to determine what the public perception of RNE was and why and to develop a list of positives and negatives surrounding the school. From there, various individuals were invited to come onto campus and be a part of focus groups to garner more in-depth information on public perceptions regarding RNE. The end result of all this information gathering was solid, concrete information that could be used by the SIC to Re-Brand and improve the community image of the school. An updated Cavalier Logo was developed as well as an accompanying tag line, "RNE – The Right Direction". The SIC is in the process now of incorporating that new logo and tagline in all its promotional materials including stationary, sporting uniforms and promotional items, website, print materials, etc....There was

also the return to the school's original colors. These efforts are meant to give RNE a uniform and consistent appearance which had been a problem identified in the re-branding process.

The results of the re-zoning and the re-branding effort led to formulation of Goal 3 which was to make an intentional effort to increase and improve communications. The SIC began with creating a bi-weekly E-newsletter that is sent out to every parent email list in the system. It is also posted on the school website as well as on various social networking sites. It is a full scale, color publication with news for families regarding various upcoming events, deadlines, sports news, student awards and highlights, career and guidance information, extra-curricular opportunities and much more. It is usually 4-5 pages long and has become an excellent tool to give the families opportunity to feel involved and connected with RNE. The content is submitted by various groups and staff members and parents, and put together in-house by the Lead Teacher for the RNE based Convergence Media Magnet and her students. The direction of this communication effort is overviewed and managed by the SIC and school administration. The second major communication effort was to expand all guidance and career news to include all RNE families and not just limited to families of seniors. This has generated positive feedback as families feel better informed as to what is required from students as they begin the process of college investigation, scholarship applications and financial aid.

The affirmation that the RNE SIC has recently received that it is moving in the right direction came from the SC State Board of Education which awarded the RNE SIC the 2012 School Improvement Council of the Year.



Michael Peterson, SIC Co-Chair



Butch Owens, SIC Co-Chair