

**THE DICK AND TUNKY RILEY AWARD FOR
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COUNCIL EXCELLENCE:**

A Collection of Selected SIC Activities

Volume III

Family-School Partnerships

Published Spring 2016



Message from the SC-SIC Executive Director

Dear SIC Member:

Across South Carolina each year, nearly 15,000 School Improvement Council members like you come together on 1,100-plus SICs with a common goal – to make a difference in the lives of the schools and students they serve.

Each school community (and each SIC) has its own unique personality, set of needs, and available resources to help their school be successful. But sometimes, local School Improvement Councils can wonder just exactly what they can do to make a real difference.

This series of six publications developed by the SC School Improvement Council is intended to provide examples of what some effective SICs have accomplished and to offer ideas in a number of topic areas so that your SIC can undertake its work in a planned, thoughtful, and meaningful fashion.

Presented in each of them are a variety of projects and endeavors of SICs that have been recognized through SC-SIC's *Dick and Tunky Riley Award for SIC Excellence* process. Many of these examples are applicable to most school communities, while others may be more specialized. Review them and identify those which might be a good fit for your SIC and school community.

As always, please consider the SC-SIC office as a ready resource to assist you in your efforts. We are only a phone call or an email away.

Thank you for your service on your School Improvement Council. Your dedication of time and energy to help your school and its students is valuable and appreciated.

You have my best wishes for a year of successful and significant SIC work!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom F. Hudson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tom F. Hudson
Executive Director
SC School Improvement Council

I. Introduction

This volume is one in a series highlighting activities undertaken by *Riley Award* honorees since the inception of the Award in 2002. SC-SIC has collected and organized these activities by general topic areas.

These activities were selected from among case statements submitted by SICs who participated in the *Riley Award* process and were named to the Honor Roll, received an Honorable Mention award, or were named a *Riley Award* winner. The name of the SIC, the school district, and the *Riley Award* year follow each activity. This series is not intended to catalogue every activity undertaken by *Riley Award* honorees; activities were selected to provide readers with examples from a broad cross-section of topic areas.

In some cases, you will find additional resources listed at the end of a topic. These are only a sampling of the many resources available online or through universities, non-profits, and government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. Please contact SC-SIC if you need assistance in identifying additional resources in a particular topic area.

II. How to Use the Information in this Collection

Identify Your School's Needs and Define Your Goals before Choosing Activities

This collection was prepared in response to SIC member requests for more information about *Riley Award* honoree activities from past years. It is important to remember, however, that SICs selected these activities based on their school's unique needs and goals for improvement.

To help ensure that your time and effort are directed toward activities that are appropriate for your school, consider the following questions before selecting, planning and implementing specific activities:

1. Are we addressing a need that was identified in our school's Five-Year School Improvement (Renewal) Plan?
2. If not, have we looked at other existing data or collected data ourselves in order to verify that the need actually exists? Have we confirmed that this need impacts student achievement either directly or indirectly? Do we have enough information to know what factors contribute to this need at our school?
3. Have we defined the goal that we hope this activity will help us achieve? Is our goal aligned with one or more goals in the School Improvement (Renewal) Plan?
4. Will this activity help us meet our goal by addressing one or more of the factors that contribute to the need we are working on?
5. Will this activity duplicate activities that are already being implemented by others? Is it a good fit for our school community?
6. What resources do we need in order to implement this activity with quality? Do we have these resources? If not, can we get the resources we lack through partnerships with other individuals or organizations in the school or community?

Lessons Learned from *Riley Award* Honorees

In reviewing the many case statements describing the experiences of *Riley Award* honorees, SC-SIC staff made several general observations that may be helpful to your SIC:

- It will likely take more than a single, one-time activity in order to achieve an SIC goal. Most *Riley Award* honorees undertook several, strategically linked activities which together were directed toward achieving one of their goals.
- It will likely take several years of sustained SIC effort in order to meet longer-term school improvement goals. For this reason, it's important that SICs plan ahead on how they will transfer information and responsibilities for key activities from year to year.
- Collaboration and partnerships are essential to SIC effectiveness. *Riley Award* honorees often worked together with various combinations of administrators, teachers, school staff, and other school and community organizations to implement school improvement activities.
- It's important to do your homework! *Riley Award* honorees took the time to review their School Improvement (Renewal) Plan and school performance data, gather input from stakeholders using surveys and other tools, and research what has worked for other schools like theirs by going out and visiting other schools, consulting with nearby universities or non-profit organizations, and using online resources.
- Don't hesitate to ask for help. *Riley Award* honorees often invited experts in to help educate themselves about their area of focus. They called on teachers, guidance counselors, dieticians, district staff, local law enforcement, traffic safety experts, marketing and communication professionals, college professors, pediatricians and school nurses, and others in order to better understand their schools' needs and find effective solutions.
- Effective SICs divide their work among committees that are organized around each specific goal or area of focus. Many *Riley Award* honorees reported that forming a committee was an important step in moving forward with work on their goals.

The staff at SC-SIC hope that you will find this collection of *Riley Award* activities to be a source of ideas and inspiration as you work through the school improvement process. More information about the *Riley Award* and recent *Riley Award* honorees is available on our website at <http://sic.sc.gov>. If your SIC needs individualized assistance in any area of your work, please don't hesitate to contact a member of the SC-SIC staff. We are here to help!

III. Riley Award Activities

Family - School Partnerships

1. Parent/Teacher/School Engagement

Parent University. This SIC organized four Parent Universities consisting of about 50 breakout sessions during the school year to engage and educate parents on a variety of topics. The Universities, which attracted a total of approximately 300 attendees, addressed subjects such as school culture, teenage behavior, drug and gang trends, school of choice options, and college preparation. Many of the sessions were led by community partners such as the local Boys and Girls Club, local churches, police officers, guidance counselors, and behavior specialists. Students also had an opportunity to showcase their talents at these events. (*H.E. McCracken Middle SIC, Beaufort County School District, 2016*).

Welcome Wagon. As this school was located in a fast growing area, the SIC developed a "Welcome Wagon" to welcome new families to the school. Each month, new families receive welcome letters in orientation packages and emails itemizing useful information and suggested resources for parents. The information covers a variety of topics such as how to register online to be a parent volunteer at the school and upcoming school events and announcements. Members of the SIC follow up with a phone call to new families to assure them of SIC support. (*Jennie Moore Elementary SIC, Charleston County School District, 2016*).

Reaching out to families where they live. This SIC's family engagement plan included an open house cookout held at a local subsidized-housing community center in collaboration with feeder elementary and middle schools and the local police department. The event created an opportunity for families to get to know school staff in an informal, fun environment. School staff then returned to the center for a five-week series of dinners and educational family sessions for all ages. (*South Florence High SIC, Florence Public School District 1, 2016*).

Fridays with Felder & Fitz. This monthly event gave parents an opportunity to spend time with the principal in a casual atmosphere while getting updates and information on topics of interest. Each session was opened and closed by the principal with comments by SIC members. Some months the event used an open question and answer format while other months were dedicated to two-way conversations on specific topics such as new parent orientation, middle school readiness, or holiday stress relievers. **Update:** *To sustain the success of this program, the SIC conducted a survey to find out what topics parents wanted to cover at these meetings, and suggested that parents ask up to three school-related questions to be answered by the administration. They also alternated the time of the meeting so that some were held in the morning and some in the evening.* (*Jennie Moore Elementary SIC, Charleston County School District, 2016, 2012*).

Family Clay Night. This SIC, together with the principal and art teacher, created Family Clay Night as a means for parents to engage in their children's learning and school life and to promote their school as a center for family learning. Students and parents sculpted blocks of clay and enjoyed a catered dinner provided at a reduced price by a school business partner. SIC volunteers then helped to fire, glaze, and refire the sculptures and delivered them to classrooms to go home with students. (*Brushy Creek Elementary SIC, Greenville County Schools, 2011*).

Parent Resource Room. An SIC committee designed a plan for a new Parent Resource Room within their school. The room provides parents with a place to meet, plan, utilize technology, and participate in trainings. The SIC partnered with local businesses who provided monetary contributions as well as in-kind donations of computers, printers, and furniture. (*Bradley Elementary SIC, Richland School District 1, 2007*).

First Day Celebration. This SIC, the PTO, and school partnered to host a First Day Celebration for incoming kindergarteners and their parents. Every child/family received a personal invitation to attend. They were greeted with breakfast in their child's classroom, had a first day of school picture taken, enjoyed a pep rally, and each child received a treat bag. Adults won door prizes for participating. (*Chukker Creek Elementary SIC, Aiken County Public School District, 2007*).

Parent Resource Center. This SIC helped to create a Parent Resource Center within the waiting rooms of the Nurse/Guidance Department office suite. While open to all parents, it was especially intended to serve as an ice-breaker for parents who rarely enter the school building. It also provided a central source of information for parents who might not be aware of available resources in the community. Information was provided on all aspects of the school including the availability of tutoring and adult education programs, health screenings for preschool-aged children, support services from local mental health and social service agencies, and assistance in paying for utilities and other essentials. (*Stone Academy of Communication Arts SIC, Greenville County Schools, 2007*).

Back to School Bash. This SIC sponsored a Back to School Bash during the early evening so that more parents and students would be able to attend. SIC members worked to create a carnival-like atmosphere so that students and parents would want to come to school, participate in fun and games, and meet their teachers for the upcoming year. The SIC also used this opportunity to conduct a parent survey and to distribute state, district, and school educational information to families. (*Martha Dendy 6th Grade and Bell Street Middle SIC, Laurens School District 56, 2006*).

New parent orientation night. This SIC coordinated an orientation night at which new families have an opportunity to meet administrators, faculty and school staff. The SIC Chair addressed the audience on the SIC and its commitment to the school. There was a question and answer period for parents and students modeled the school's uniform. The program also included forums for all parents to learn more about district-level school safety efforts, transportation, No Child Left Behind, and a recent bond referendum. (*Lake Carolina Elementary SIC, Richland School District 2, 2005*).

Student project to introduce school faculty and staff to parents. This SIC and school enlisted 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders to interview school faculty and staff and write biographies that were featured in the school's weekly newsletters. This introduced school faculty and staff to the school family while expanding student communication and writing skills. (*River Springs Elementary SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties, 2005*).

Greet, Meet, and Eat event for parents and teachers at local grocery store. The school's teachers and SIC members partnered on a Greet, Meet, and Eat event at a supermarket in their community. The school offered incentives for students to come to the store with their parents during the event. Students were given a treasure map with learning activities to use during their visit, and teachers were available to talk informally with parents and to schedule

future conferences. At the same time, the SIC asked parents to participate in a parent interest survey and passed out information about upcoming events. (*Martha Dendy Sixth Grade Center/Bell Street Middle SIC, Laurens School District 56, 2005*).

Back to School Fair. This SIC sponsored a Back to School Fair in the gym at the end of July. It provided families and students with an opportunity to meet teachers and guidance counselors, join PTA, and purchase school supplies. Free hot dogs, chips and drinks were provided thanks to donations from local churches, attorneys, area businesses, and others in the community. Each grade level, special area, and support group (such as the school nurse, food service, and guidance department) had a booth at the fair. PTA, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, and District Intervention/Special Assistance Teams also participated. (*Manchester Elementary SIC, Sumter County School District, 2004*).

Parent Ambassadors for new families. This SIC developed a Parent Ambassador program to welcome and shepherd families who were new to the school. The SIC held a training session for the Ambassadors once every semester and provided every new family with a list of Ambassadors in their neighborhoods. (*Ridge View High SIC, Richland School District 2, 2004*).

2. Parent Engagement in Student Learning

Reading/Writing Nights. This SIC co-sponsored monthly trainings/parent conferences on ways that parents can reinforce classroom learning. To ensure good attendance, SIC members designed and distributed flyers, talked to families in their neighborhoods, sent brochures about the events to local apartment complex managers and asked them to advertise the event to tenants, and used the school's messenger system to send reminders. Teachers also encouraged students to get their families to participate. (*Baron DeKalb Elementary SIC, Kershaw County School District, 2012*).

Parent University. This SIC helped to organize a series of seminars for parents throughout the school year on topics such as literacy, preparing their children for college, state assessments, and health and safety. All sessions were free and open to the public. (*Sullivan Middle SIC, Rock Hill School District 3, 2011*).

E.M.P.H.A.A.S.I.S. (Educators Mentoring Parents and Helping African American Males Succeed in Society). This SIC worked to support this intensive mentoring program by publicizing it in the community and by advising the school on the logistics of implementing the program. Developed by three teachers, (Dawn Duke, Dee Murph, and Tami Richardson), the program offered Saturday Academy sessions for a core group of African-American male students and their families. While students participated in hands-on activities and lessons in small groups, parents were provided with information to help them better address the needs of their children at home. The sessions also included breakfast, lunch with sharing time, and enrichment trips to destinations such as the SC State Fair. (*Brookland-Cayce Grammar School 1 SIC, Lexington School District 2, 2010*).

Administrator/Teacher/Parent/Student commitment covenant. The covenant is based on the principle that schools, parents, and students share responsibility for student learning outcomes. The document, which the SIC helped to create, lists specific responsibilities that each partner agrees to strive to carry out during the school year. Each was asked to sign the document to demonstrate their commitment to student success. The school hung a framed copy

of the covenant in the school entryway for everyone to see. (*Round Top Elementary SIC, Richland School District 2, 2010*).

Getting ready for PASS. This SIC provided parents with a tri-fold brochure entitled *Getting Ready for Pass: A Parent's Guide to Preparing Our Children for PASS* that included the school's testing schedule, lists of foods that are "Brain Boosters" and "Brain Blockers," and tips for dealing with test stress. (*Doby's Mill Elementary SIC, Kershaw County School District, 2009*).

Parent-friendly schedule for parent/teacher conferences. At the SIC's request, the school changed the time parent-teacher conferences were held from the traditional daytime hours to late afternoon/early evening. The SIC sponsored a meal for parents attending conferences with the help of PTO donations and Title I funding programs. (*J. Paul Truluck Middle SIC, Florence School District 3, 2007*).

Math/Science, AYP, state standards. This SIC partnered with the school's parent educator to develop a series of parent workshops conducted by teachers, the curriculum resource teacher, and an SIC member who was also a consultant with the SC Department of Education. Family Math/Science workshops emphasized parents doing fun hands-on math and science activities with their children. In H.O.S.T.S. workshops (Helping Our Students to Succeed), parents took a mock assessment test based on state standards in reading, math, and science. In addition, SIC members conducted quarterly AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) workshops to help parents understand state standards and the criteria that Title I schools must meet in order to meet AYP under No Child Left Behind. (*A.J. Lewis Greenview SIC, Richland School District 1, 2005, 2004*).

Classroom breakfasts, Peek at PACT sessions, and winter open house. This SIC partnered with its school on several parent engagement initiatives throughout the year. Once a month, every teacher held a Pastries for Parents event in his/her classroom. During breakfast, teachers would review with parents what their children were learning at that particular point in the year. Peek at PACT sessions gave parents an opportunity to discuss state assessment tests and the winter open house (in addition to the traditional fall open house) gave parents additional opportunities to talk with teachers. (*Martha Dendy Sixth Grade Center/Bell Street Middle SIC, Laurens School District 56, 2005*).

SIC parent breakout sessions during PTO meeting. In response to parent needs as determined by a parent survey, the SIC sponsored several break-out sessions at a PTO meeting. Sessions were led by SIC members, other parents, and educators on topics requested by parents including homework, state assessment scores, and parent/teacher interaction. (*River Springs Elementary SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties, 2004*).

Parent Report Card Pick-Up conference nights. This SIC hosted three Parent Report Card Pick-Up conference nights during the school year. Teachers and administrators were available to meet with parents between 5:00 and 7:30 PM on these nights. Attendance ranged between 1,000 - 1,400 parents and students. (*Dutch Fork High SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties, 2003*).

3. Parent Engagement at School

Parent attendance at Title I meeting. An SIC teacher representative had her second grade class perform *Bugz, the Musical* at the school's Title I parent meeting to encourage higher parent attendance. Invitations to the event were translated into Spanish for non-English speaking parents. (*Brookland-Cayce Grammar School No. 1 SIC, Lexington School District 2, 2010*).

Parent volunteer opportunities. This SIC regularly canvassed teachers at each grade level to identify each teacher's volunteer needs and then worked with the PTO and homeroom parents to match parent volunteers with specific needs. This volunteer needs list was also posted on the school website and published in weekly newsletters. (*Round Top Elementary SIC, Richland School District 2, 2010*).

Menu of volunteer options, parent volunteer award. This SIC partnered with the PTA to increase the number of parent volunteers by creating a menu of all parent volunteer opportunities available throughout the year and by sponsoring a Parent of the Quarter award. (*Pineview Elementary SIC, Lexington School District 2, 2009*).

Broad cross-section of school community attend event. In past years, the Family Clay Night at this SIC's school had attracted approximately 300 people (about 100 families) each year. The SIC took several steps to increase the both the total number and the diversity of families attending the event. Information about the event was published in Spanish as well as English in the school newsletter. Flyers were sent home with every student, announcements were made on the daily morning news show and again in the afternoon announcements, and the event was extended to include 4K families. As a result of the SIC's publicity efforts, attendance increased to approximately 600 people (about 250 families). There was great representation from among the school's Hispanic families, all grade levels, special education students, and free and reduced meal students, some of which were attending a school event for the first time. (*Brushy Creek Elementary SIC, Greenville County Schools, 2007*).

4. Parent-School Communications

List of sources of school information. This SIC put together a colorful and comprehensive list of the many ways that parents can keep informed of what's going on at their school. (*Greendale Elementary SIC, Aiken County Public School District, 2015*).

New bi-weekly e-newsletter and broader distribution of career information. This SIC used information from its surveys and focus groups as a guide in helping to create the school's new bi-weekly e-newsletter. It is a full-size, color publication with news for families regarding upcoming events, deadlines, sports, news, student awards, career and guidance information, extra-curricular opportunities, and more. The content is developed by various school groups, staff, and parents, and is put together in-house by the lead teacher for the school's convergence media magnet and her students. The SIC and school administrators oversee and manage the general direction of the newsletter. The school also adopted the SIC's recommendation that it expand distribution of all guidance and career development information from seniors and their families to all school families. (*Richland Northeast High SIC, Richland School District 2, 2013*).

Principal's podcast and blog. This SIC helped drive creation of a principal's podcast and blog, providing new places for students, parents, and community members to find up-to-date information about the school as well as tips on reading, safety, and other timely topics. A new

school Twitter page also updates the school community on upcoming events. Additional strategies to improve information flow included increased use of electronic signs and electronic telephone messaging. (*Sullivan Middle SIC, Rock Hill School District 3, 2011*).

School contacts and parent FAQ's. This SIC developed a school contact list for parents together with a guide to parents' frequently asked questions. (*Indian Land Middle SIC, Lancaster County School District, 2010*).

School performance ratings. When its school failed to meet AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind), the SIC sent a letter to parents explaining AYP and the SC School Report Card rating in a more parent-friendly way in order to address parent concerns about their school's overall progress. The SIC also assisted the school in designing a parent survey and helped review the school's family compact and family engagement policy. (*Nursery Road Elementary SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties, 2010*).

Teacher websites. This SIC conducted a parent survey to solicit feedback on the school's website. They asked parents things like how often they visited the site, how effective it was, and what changes they would like to see in the future. Results showed that parents wanted more access to teacher information such as homework assignments, upcoming test schedules, newsletters, and parent resources. Based in part on the data collected by the SIC and the SIC's recommendation, the school implemented the Blackboard system for all teachers. (*Round Top Elementary, Richland School District 2, 2009*).

Automated telephone messaging system. This SIC researched vendors that provide automated telephone messaging systems for schools and then wrote letters to the district asking that the district purchase a system for their school. The district ultimately provided the school with the requested help. (*Bradley Elementary SIC, Richland School District 1, 2007*).

Call All Parents. SIC members launched a program that they named C.A.P. (Call All Parents). Volunteer SIC members assisted teachers in making sure a personal phone call was placed to every parent who had not corresponded with their child's teacher within 30 days of the start of school. The SIC planned to extend the program to additional times during the school year. (*Wilder Elementary SIC, Sumter County School District, 2007*).

Wildcat postcards. This SIC provided teachers with colorful postcards with the school logo to encourage them to communicate more frequently with parents. (*Martha Dendy 6th Grade/Bell Street Middle SIC, Laurens School District 56, 2006, 2005*).

Student agendas. Although students were supposed to record their homework assignments in their student agendas and have their parents initial them daily, the agendas were not being closely monitored and many students were not using them. In response to SIC requests, the school administration wrote emails to faculty urging them to check for parent initials more consistently and created incentives (such as ice cream socials) for students who brought in signed agendas over a designated period of time. Administrators visited classes and checked to see if students were writing their assignments in their agendas and having them initialed. Students who did so received special coupons that they could redeem for an incentive award. (*Martha Dendy Sixth Grade Center/Bell Street Middle SIC, Laurens School District 56, 2005*).

SIC column in school newsletter. This SIC used its column in the weekly school newsletter to update parents on the district's building plan, attendance rezoning plan, and other

important issues impacting their school. The SIC column also included "Did You Know" and "News You Can Use" sections that answered frequently asked questions and explained new school policies and procedures. Parents, faculty, and students were invited to submit questions to the column which were answered by school administrators. (*River Springs Elementary SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties, 2005*).

Additional Resources

Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty at Francis Marion University (NNPS tab, Promising Practices section)
(http://www.fmucenterofexcellence.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=142&Itemid=121).

National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University
(<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/>).

National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) (www.pta.org).

Project Appleseed: The National Campaign for Public School Improvement
(<http://www.projectappleseed.org/>).

Henderson, A., Mapp, K., et. al. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. (New York: The New Press).

Many thanks to the SICs whose work is featured in this Collection.

A.J. Lewis Greenview SIC, Richland School District 1
Baron DeKalb Elementary SIC, Richland School District 1
Bradley Elementary SIC, Richland School District 1
Brookland-Cayce Grammar School 1 SIC, Lexington School District 2
Brushy Creek Elementary SIC, Greenville County Schools
Chukker Creek Elementary SIC, Aiken County Public School District
Doby's Mill Elementary SIC, Kershaw County School District
Dutch Fork High SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties
Greendale Elementary SIC, Aiken County Public School District
H.E. McCracken Middle SIC, Beaufort County School District
Indian Land Middle SIC, Lancaster County School District
J. Paul Truluck Middle SIC, Florence School District 3
Jennie Moore Elementary SIC, Charleston County School District
Lake Carolina Elementary SIC, Richland School District 2
Manchester Elementary SIC, Sumter County School District
Martha Dendy 6th Grade and Bell Street Middle SIC, Laurens School District 56
Nursery Road Elementary SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties
Pineview Elementary SIC, Lexington School District 2
Richland Northeast High SIC, Richland School District 2
Ridge View High SIC, Richland School District 2
River Springs Elementary SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties

Round Top Elementary SIC, Richland School District 2
South Florence High SIC, Florence Public School District 1
Stone Academy of Communication Arts SIC, Greenville County Schools
Sullivan Middle SIC, Rock Hill School District 3
Wilder Elementary SIC, Sumter County School District