

SC School Improvement Council
Board of Trustees
Quarterly Meeting – December 1, 2006
SC Association of Counties
Amended and approved May 11, 2007

Board members present: Nell Stewart, Maria Taylor, Carlos Primus, Sylleste Davis, Nancy Hanley, Bob Staton, Bruce Field, Tom Hudson, Barbara Weston, Patrick Cobb, Ray Fleming, Linda Weaver-Griggs, Gregory McCord, Judy Wilson, Thessa Smith, Cindy Smith

Staff members present: Cassie Barber, Diane Jumper, Claudia Wolverton

Board Chairperson Nell Stewart called the meeting to order at 10:10 AM. Minutes of the August 16 meeting were approved.

SC-SIC Associate Director Cassie Barber gave the executive director's report in the absence of Dr. Jean Norman who was recovering from major surgery. Ms. Barber provided an overview of the fall training report included in board member packets. In recent years the staff has provided training at six regional, half-day, mini-conferences – three in the fall and three in the spring. This model was developed after budget cuts and the addition of the proviso mandating "targeted" training for unsatisfactory schools made it impossible for the office to conduct trainings at the district and school levels. While the regional model was somewhat successful, staff wanted to increase the numbers of SIC members who could attend training. This fall the staff conducted nine one and a half hour trainings on "The Basics" for SICs in Greenwood, Greenville, Beaufort, Rock Hill, Columbia, Florence, Aiken, Anderson, and Charleston.

A total of 447 individuals from 213 schools were served by the nine trainings, an increase over the totals from last years' fall trainings, which served 314 individuals representing 149 schools. Costs for these trainings were also reduced since districts often provided the meeting space and snacks. While some attendees expressed disappointment that there were no breakout sessions and the trainings were shorter, staff feels this is a more effective model for reaching more members with information on SIC basics. A conference will also be held in the spring on March 10. This conference will include the annual awards luncheon.

Ms. Barber noted that those fall trainings which were fully supported and promoted by district contacts or education consortia were well attended. Attendance was poor in areas where SICs are not supported and promoted by local leaders and/or administrators. An example was in Anderson where only 16 people attended. Several Anderson area SIC members spoke out about the lack of support for councils in their districts. Conversely, the Greenville training boasted 116 excited and motivated attendees. The Greenville district would like SC-SIC staff to conduct two trainings next fall and board member Judy Wilson from Greenville indicated she would like a spring training also to help newly elected members get prepared over the summer. Nell Stewart suggested changing legislation to require spring elections so new SIC members could be trained in time for the new school year.

SC-SIC Council Specialist, Diane Jumper, reported on her work with unsatisfactory schools. Until last month when this year's report card results were announced, Ms. Jumper was working with 53 schools. That number will just to 120 schools under the new ratings. Ms. Jumper invites other schools in the districts where the unsatisfactory schools are located to attend her trainings and this has enabled her to train 132 schools. The office has also been providing targeted services

to below average schools when possible, but will have to discontinue this practice in light of the current budget and the significant increase in unsatisfactory schools that must be served.

Ms. Jumper reports a “rollercoaster of progress.” Principal leadership is crucial to our success with these schools. When it works; the results are astonishing, but when there is no support from the principal and/or district, there is little chance for success. Principal turnover in these priority schools is 40% and that complicates our ability to train them to meet their SIC benchmarks. Ms. Jumper shared several stories illustrating the many challenges of bringing the SICs in the unsatisfactory school into compliance.

Ms. Barber informed the board that serving these schools uses 20% of the entire SC-SIC budget. Some schools and districts have arranged training with Ms. Jumper and then cancelled at the very last minute or have not communicated with their SIC members about attendance; some have done this repeatedly. The board gave their approval for charging schools that do not honor their appointments with staff a fee to reschedule training.

Ms. Jumper’s report prompted a lively discussion. Bob Staton felt it would be helpful to add a member of SCASA to the SC-SIC board to promote greater compliance among principals. He suggested that the board meet with and/or survey principals to learn more about their response to councils. Ms. Barber noted that the office conducted an online survey of principals a few years ago that found those who responded found SICs beneficial. It is unknown how those who did not respond felt about councils.

The question of how to make administrators and school boards accountable for convening effective SICs was discussed. In fact there are no clear consequences if the law is broken. Some board members would like to open the law to provide for spring elections, earlier data collection each year, and to create some accountability measures to ensure greater compliance. Judy Wilson suggested that SC-SIC might garner greater compliance by educating superintendents about the positive aspects of council development and activities instead of threatening them with consequences for breaking the law. Patrick Cobb cautioned that opening the law could lead some in the legislature to try abolish SICs altogether. Mr. Staton said that a debate about the viability and value of councils could be very productive. He suggested that the board and staff should be very clear about mission and goals before going to legislators for changes in the law.

The board also discussed additional methods of garnering public awareness and support including better use of technology, holding board meetings in schools, and conducting focus groups with various stakeholders.

Ray Fleming reported on the countywide training he spearheaded in Aiken with help from Public Education Partners (PEP). SC-SIC also provided assistance and 150 people attended. Mr. Fleming and PEP went advocates on behalf with the superintendent and school board members to promote SICs. Since this training and the resultant publicity interest in SICs has mushroomed in the Aiken area. The district office followed up by conducting SIC training over the summer. Mr. Fleming has since been elected to the Aiken school board.

Bruce Field stated that the education community does a poor job of promoting the value of education. He shared about work he is doing to promote partnership building and increased activity among teachers. SC-SIC staff participates in the USC School University Partnership Network, which includes 100 Midlands area schools. Last year Dr. Field expanded the range of the Network to engage educators in the public conversation about education policy. Cassie Barber serves as co-chair of the Network Advocacy Committee. The Network is sponsoring a forum focused on school choice at Richland Northeast High on February 22, 2007.

Nell Stewart reported on the Parent Involvement Conference sponsored by New Carolina Foundation and the SC Council on Competitiveness. Attendance was large and diverse with many areas of the state and various interests represented. Dr. Norman serves on the committee that convened the conference.

The board agreed that the membership committee should explore the possibility of including students on the SC-SIC Board of Trustees.

Patrick Cobb reported that the Riley Award process was going along smoothly, though there were not as many Level One applications received as hoped. This may be because the stakes are higher this year with more points required to achieve Honor Roll status.

The board agreed that additional former members should be approached to return to the board as advisory members. Jeff Nicholson will develop a list and issue invitations.

During a working lunch the board continued to brainstorm solutions to problems discussed earlier in the meeting and came to the conclusion that a retreat is necessary. The board would like to revisit the organization's mission due to changes in the educational climate and changes within the organization. A tentative date of February 9th was set.

Future board meeting will take place May 11, August 10, and November 9. Bob Staton suggested that board members begin promoting SICs now by talking with at least two principals and a superintendent prior to the next meeting.

Ms. Stewart reminded board members to register for the annual Day at the Capitol on February 22, 2007. She adjourned the meeting at 1:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Cassie Barber
Executive Secretary to the Board