



# SC School Improvement Council

*“Civic Engagement in Public Education”*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Saturday, March 22, 2014

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## **Okatie Elementary SIC named winner of 2014 Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence**

COLUMBIA – The School Improvement Council (SIC) of Okatie Elementary School in Okatie (Beaufort County School District) has been named the recipient of the 2014 Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence.

The award was presented Saturday afternoon during the SC School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) Annual Meeting at St. Andrews Middle School in Columbia.

The annual Riley Award for SIC Excellence was created in 2002 to recognize the significant contributions made to public education by the nearly 15,000 School Improvement Council members who volunteer in every public school in the state. The award is named in honor of the former SC Governor and US Education Secretary and his late wife, and recognizes the couple’s longstanding commitment to quality public education.

“The Okatie Elementary School Improvement Council has done some wonderful work that is well-deserving of this award,” said SC-SIC Board of Trustees Chair Ellen M. Still. “When parents, educators, and community members cooperatively come together as an SIC to look at needs of their school and then undertake effective steps to meet them, it has a positive and lasting impact on the lives and futures of their school and students.”

In the last school year, the Okatie Elementary SIC took steps to enhance communication with parents on school district issues and decisions, specifically those related to rezoning issues in this growing area. SIC members and school administrators participated in the school board’s Bluffton Community Committee, working with other SICs and community members to discuss new school needs, rezoning and community involvement in the process.

This SIC also established Ladies and Gentlemen’s Club Mentoring Programs for identified students, partnering with school staff and community leaders to empower boys and girls by growing self-esteem and confidence. The SIC collaborated with the school’s PTO, a local church and the Lowcountry Food Bank on the HOOT Bag program, a food donation effort serving 20 identified school families with a box providing a week’s worth of food each month. Additionally, the SIC worked to improve procedures and safety of student car rider drop-off and pick-up, to include traffic direction, improved signage and a no cell phone use policy.

Presented with Honorable Mentions for their work last school year were: Buena Vista Elementary SIC (Greenville County Schools); Irmo High SIC (School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties); Port Royal Elementary SIC (Beaufort County School District); and Ridge View High SIC (Richland School District Two). A brief description of the work of each of these SICs follows the text of this release.

A core partner of the Center for Educational Partnerships at the University of South Carolina College of Education, SC-SIC was established in state law over 35 years ago to provide the member training, technical assistance, statutory accountability, and operational resources vital to the continued success of the community-based School Improvement Councils in each of the state’s 1,100-plus K-12 public schools.

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## ***2014 Dick and Tunky Riley Award for SIC Excellence***

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### **2014 Winner – Okatie Elementary SIC, Okatie (Beaufort County School District)**

#### **Honorable Mention – Buena Vista Elementary SIC, Greer (Greenville County Schools)**

This SIC undertook efforts to assist academically struggling students through three initiatives scheduled during and after school. The Early Risers Club for at-risk students in grades 3-5 uses computer based programming to help increase student proficiency through remediation in Math, English Language Arts and Reading. The Brainbuilders program is a volunteer-based in-school tutoring program working with identified students in grades 1-5. After School Enrichment Programs based on the STEAM curriculum (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math), and programs promoting healthy living through Movement, provide 29 grade-level activities directly tied to classroom learning. Through these combined SIC initiatives, the school has seen tangible increases in students scoring “exemplary” or “met” on end-of-year assessment tests in ELA, Math and Social Studies (all over 90 percent), with over 86 percent scoring “exemplary” or “met” in Science, and over 91 percent in Writing – garnering a Palmetto Gold rating for the school in both performance and closing the achievement gap.

#### **Honorable Mention – Irmo High SIC, Irmo (School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties)**

To increase community awareness of the successes and true story of their school, this SIC established a Positive Promotions Committee. Members of this committee attended local school board meetings to call attention to student and staff accomplishments, and comment on issues pertaining to the school; submitted letters and articles to local media outlets and for inclusion on the district's website; countered rumors and misinformation with accurate data and materials correcting misperceptions; and developed a full-color brochure highlighting the school's history, programs, accomplishments, and future direction, partnering with the school's PTO to publish the piece. The SIC also provided input on the selection of new principal, soliciting feedback from SIC members, parents and teachers, and providing this information to district administrators for consideration in the hiring process. Additionally, the SIC helped mediate a school discussion regarding the naming of facilities, which led to adoption of a specific school board policy pertaining to such requests.

#### **Honorable Mention – Port Royal Elementary SIC, Port Royal (Beaufort County School District)**

This SIC partnered with a local church to provide scholarships for a number of needy students to receive afterschool care at the nearby YMCA. This partnership also led to the establishment of a school uniform voucher program sponsored by the church, as well as the provision of school supplies for the entire student body for the year. As the school celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2011, the SIC worked with the Town Council and the Historic Port Royal Foundation on the challenging process of getting the school listed on the National Register of Historic Places, with a decision on the designation by the National Park Service expected this spring. The SIC also believed that the historic and cultural nature of the Town of Port Royal had considerable educational value. Walking field trips called “In Our Own Backyard,” were initiated by the SIC, utilizing a map of designated sites developed for them by the town.

#### **Honorable Mention – Ridge View High SIC, Columbia (Richland School District Two)**

This SIC undertook efforts to improve communication and celebrate school and student successes. It instituted mass email distribution to inform parents of SIC meetings and activities, and to solicit feedback to promote the school's interests and address parent concerns. Through a new Public Relations Campaign, the SIC partnered with the PTSO and school administration to create the Blazer Press Corps providing consistent branding, improved electronic and written communications, and to publicize events and achievements within the school and beyond. This led to an enhanced school website and newsletter, and a blog containing real-time information. The SIC launched a campus beautification initiative fully documenting many areas needing upgrade, repair and attention, resulting in an architectural plan drafted by the district to address these issues. Also, the SIC worked with school and district administrators to improve traffic and pedestrian safety, leading to roadway and directional signage improvements, flashing school zone lights, and a fully-marked school crosswalk.

<http://sic.sc.gov>