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Sumter School District

Application for 2020 Riley Award

### Case Study

**How the SIC identified needs and challenges in the school and then responded to create positive results for the school and its community?** Millwood Elementary School is located in Sumter, South Carolina. Millwood continues to see an increase in the school population as the Open Enrollment policy of the school district allows parents to choose a school based on the needs of their child. In 2018-2019, the school population was 834, up from 787 the previous year. The diverse population included 18 Asians, 391 African Americans, 14 Hispanics, 2 American Indians or Alaska Natives, 11 students who are two or more races, and 394 caucasian students. The entire Sumter School District qualifies for free breakfast and lunch. Millwood has a poverty index of 61.3% and is a Title I school. The school's mission statement is Students First and together the SIC, PTA, school, and local community are committed to this mission.

**Issue:** In 2017-2018, Millwood identified the need to reduce discipline referrals and took proactive action with our SIC to affect positive change. As we noticed the decrease in the number of referrals with our students, we became aware of data indicating the social and emotional needs of our students needed to be addressed. According to the Committee for Children, "social-emotional learning supports provide students with skills that both promote well-being *and* protect against negative outcomes." Using the results from the state survey, the SIC and school leadership became concerned about the Below Average rating on the school report card on the Student Engagement portion. Considering the Good rating on the Academic portion, the Below Average on engagement raised a red flag about the social and emotional health of our students. Together with school leadership, the SIC dug deeper into the 2018 student engagement survey results and discovered that only 64.5 percent of our students rated "committed" on the behavioral and emotional portion of the survey. Looking at additional survey results, 58.7% of students responded they could go to an adult if they felt bullied at school, and 8.7% agreed with the statement, "Students at my school behave well in the hallways, in the lunchroom, and on school grounds." When asked if students from other backgrounds get along well, only 23.1% of the students agreed with the statement. Overall, 52.9% of the students indicated that they were satisfied with the social and physical environment. Using this information and understanding the importance of social and emotional health and its ties to the school environment as a whole, the SIC developed the following goals. **Goal 1:** The Millwood School Improvement Council will increase community involvement with opportunities for volunteering, mentoring, and providing positive role models within the school. **Goal 2:** The Millwood School Improvement Council will increase student support with opportunities for clubs, leadership, student collaboration, and mentoring. The two goals developed by the SIC supports the previous year's work on reducing the number of referrals by rewarding positive behavior by addressing a common root cause of negative behavior tied to social and emotional well being. Additionally, the SIC seeks to improve the students' feelings about school as it relates to their emotional and behavioral health as measured by the surveys.

**Action Taken:** To begin addressing the goals, a plan of action needed to be implemented. Building off of the 2017-2018 year's work, we emphasized the training we received which included How to Reach the Sometimes Hard to Reach, Girl Drama, Cyberbullying and Emotional Violence, and collaborative discussions on empathy. The SIC identified key areas we could begin to address. For the first goal, **with the help of the SIC leadership, we initiated a mentoring program** by inviting the Combat Veteran group into the school once a month to meet

with identified students who would benefit from a mentor. **The students had the opportunity to attend a program, The NED (Never Give Up) Show,** focusing on the growth mindset and positive self esteem. During Literacy Night, a combination of a PTA and school sponsored event, **members of the community came into the school to read to our students and represent positive role models from our community.** A local church, First Presbyterian, **partnered with Millwood to provide snack bags for students who may be in need of additional resources.** The guidance counselor identified students in need and provided the snacks to the students in a discreet manner. The school was able to provide over 700 snack bags over the course of the year and additional opportunities for partnering is desired by the church. **The Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity partnered with Millwood to offer mentoring** and visits to our school to meet with and explore role model opportunities. The fraternity proposed to the SIC a joint effort to plan and implement a Back to School Bash to be held the summer before the 2019-2020 school year. This event would include back to school supplies, hair cuts, medical screenings, food, games, and other agencies all free to, not just our school community, but the community as a whole and become an annual event held at Millwood Elementary School.

To address the second goal, we continued to foster a positive social and emotional environment with **Dr. Leach continuing his “Words of Wisdom” on the morning show encouraging students each day with a positive message.** The club that first emerged during the 2017-2018 school year, **The Men of Distinction (MODS), led by our behavior interventionist, became better organized as we enlisted the help of several mentor teachers and the guidance counselor.** The MODS proudly wore their collared shirts and ties and met after school to discuss leadership, integrity, and learn important social skills like eye contact and how to shake someone’s hand. From this idea, **The Girls Empowered and Motivated for Success (GEMS) emerged.** The GEMS sponsors and student leaders created goals for the students to maintain a positive attitude, become role models for other students, and engage in meaningful discussions within the school and with invited guests. With support, several **students formed their own Anti-Bullying Club.** They created posters and hung them around the school encouraging each other to confront bullying and to report it when necessary. To further encourage leadership opportunities, **the principal met with the student council** once per month to gather information on the pulse of the student body. Together they set goals on how to improve the school. **The principal also met with the entire student body twice during the year in town hall meetings** to encourage and to allow the students to ask questions about a broad range of topics including leadership ideas and how to improve the school. The meetings that were held with students were discussed in the SIC meetings as we planned and evaluated our progress regarding our goals. During a winter SIC meeting, a discussion arose about the length of time between breaks for students due to make-up days being held during scheduled days students would normally be off. The suggestion to offer a positive incentive sparked the idea of special Friday events during the long period of time with no break. **The result was several “Fun Friday” outdoor events were scheduled for the Spring to encourage continued behavior and school commitment.** Students were involved in the planning and executing of these competition based activities during the months of March and April. Not only did this help lower discipline referrals for these critical months leading up to state testing, many of the events led to increased collaboration within the classrooms and fostered a strengthening of the relationships between peers and teachers as the students enjoyed the activities together. Before the statewide testing, the fifth grade **students organized a Pep Rally to encourage each other**

**and offer advice about the stress of testing.** During all of these events, the focus remained on cultivating a positive school culture to foster the social and emotional well being of our students.

**Results:** When determining if the SIC met the goals they implemented during the 2018-2019 school year, data from surveys and achievement tests were considered. For the first goal, Millwood did increase community involvement with the Combat Veteran group, the Kappa Alpha Psi (Kappa League) fraternity, and First Presbyterian Church. Our second goal, to increase student leadership opportunities and clubs, was met through the MODS and GEMS and several opportunities for students to show leadership and voice their opinions and promote positive, actionable ideas. As a result, the focused areas in the school surveys showed positive growth. The percentage of students satisfied with the social and physical environment on the state survey increased from 52.9% in 2018 to 57.8% in 2019. Furthermore, on the 2019 survey, 17.2% of students responded they thought students behaved well in the hallways, in the lunchroom, and in school grounds, up from 8.7% in 2018. Following this positive trend, students who felt they could go to an adult if bullied increased from 58.7% to 67.2% responding they agreed they could go to an adult. When asked if students from different backgrounds got along well at school, the percentage responding agree increased from 23.1% to 28.7%. On the student engagement survey, our percentage remained steady at 64.63% of students indicating they are committed on the behavioral and emotional portion.

Along with positive growth in survey results, the students continued to improve academically as well. On the 2019 SC Ready and PASS assessments, Millwood's students outperformed the state average in all four subjects, ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies. The students also made gains in each of the four tested areas increasing in ELA from 50.6% met or above in 2018 to 52.6% in 2019. In math, the students improved from 58.6% met and above in 2018 to 64.4% met or above in 2019. The Science PASS assessment scores increased from 58.6% met or above in 2018 to 66.9% met or above in 2019. Finally, the Social Studies PASS assessments scores were 69.1% met and above in 2018, and in 2019, 87.1% of the students scores met and above. Achievement and social emotional well being go hand-in-hand. Our student council reported a positive school culture exists at Millwood and expressed thanks for the opportunities to lead their peers and participate in executing student led activities. The clubs, MODS and GEMS, sparked even more interest among teachers and students with a drama club, newspaper club, and science club in the works for next school year. Discussions in the SIC meetings have centered on creating equal opportunities for our students to attend clubs with providing time during the school day to participate. The students are embracing the necessity of a safe social/emotional environment, as supported by the survey data and increase in the number of students seeking to belong to school clubs. The SIC members agreed the 2018-2019 year was successful in meeting the goals it had set. However, as we celebrated what was accomplished, the SIC knew there was much more work to do to continue to meet the needs of **all of our students**. As Millwood continues to work cooperatively with all stakeholders, a safe environment conducive for student learning to take place is promoted. Millwood's SIC continues to set goals and work toward accomplishing them by building partnerships with parents, community members, teachers, and students. We look forward the the 2019-2020 school year as we further the work the SIC has begun and place students first in all of our endeavors.

Respectfully submitted,   
Jeannie Ward, School Improvement Committee Chair

## Narrative

The 2018-2019 Millwood School Improvement Council celebrated success in making progress towards their goals by continuing to put students first and focusing on the top priorities of Attendance, Academics, and Behavior. In determining the success of our goals to **increase community involvement, provide positive role models within the school and increase student support with opportunities for clubs, leadership, student collaboration, and mentoring**, we looked to the survey data collected from our students each spring. The **survey results**, in all of the areas we identified as markers for growth, **improved**. Students indicated an increase of 4.9 percentage point in satisfaction with the social and physical environment, an 8.5 percentage point increase in describing if students behaved well in the school, and 4.5 percentage increase in number of students who felt they could go to an adult in the school if they experienced bullying. While proud of these improvements, the council recognized there is more work to be accomplished. On the student engagement survey reported on the state report card, the percentage remained steady from 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 at about 64.63% of students indicating they were committed on the behavioral and emotional portion. The area of social and emotional health remains a top priority and drives the discussions and the direction of the SIC.

The Kappa League, along with the SIC, undertook a large initiative at the beginning of the school year. The planning began at the end of the 2019 school year for a Back to School Bash to be held at the school. The Bash was a community event offering book bags, school supplies, health screenings, haircuts, food, and entertainment. **The event was an excellent collaboration and helped Millwood meet its 2018-2019 goal of increasing community involvement.** The school, the SIC, and the Kappa League intend to make this an annual event.

**The second goal of the SIC for 2018-2019 was to increase opportunities for student leadership through clubs, organizations, collaboration, and mentoring.** We made strides toward this goal, but knew this was an area to improve upon even more. Our 2019-2020 goals continue to put students first. **One goal in 2019-2020 is to institute a Club Day during school hours to include more students and allow choice for students to explore new ideas and activities.** After attending the state SIC meeting and hearing from the Dick and Tunky finalists, we also made **creating a Clothing Closet a goal.** Both of these goals continue to address the social and behavioral needs of our students. **Many of the initiatives from the 2018-2019 school year remain active in the 2019-2020 school year.** Both the GEMS and the MODS student clubs continue to improve in the opportunities provided to the students. This school year, the GEMS and MODS are hearing from invited guests to talk about self-esteem, positive attitudes, and the importance of education. The MODS and GEMS meet in the mornings at school so more students have an opportunity to attend. Students continue to create and display signs in the hallways expressing support for the anti-bullying initiative students began in 2018-2019. The student council continues to meet and express their views and vision for the school. Our students continue to receive snack bags through First Presbyterian Church. Many of the SIC members contribute volunteer hours to help these initiatives stay relevant and focused. Many more clubs such as a Newspaper Club, an Author's Club, and a Shag Club have formed and others are being discussed.

The data continues to show positive growth. Although survey results for the current year are not yet available, discipline referrals continue to decrease from 89 office referrals in 2017-2018 to 68 office referrals in 2018-2019 to 29 office referrals in 2019-2020 (as of February 4, 2020), student achievement, as measured by MAP assessments at this point in the year, continue to show an upward trend in achievement and growth. **The SIC itself is growing.** More parents are showing up to the meetings and contributing ideas to continue to help Millwood improve. In the fall of 2018 we had 11 people attend our SIC meeting and September of 2019 we had 16 people attend our meeting. More importantly, the discussions are being followed through with action and commitment from the SIC. There has never been a better time to be a Millwood Mustang as we work together to put our students first!