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"Civic Engagement at Work for Public Education"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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South Pointe High SIC named winner of 2017 Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence

COLUMBIA – The School Improvement Council (SIC) of South Pointe High School in Rock Hill Schools/York School District 3 has been named the recipient of the 2017 Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence.

The award was presented Saturday afternoon by former US Education Secretary and SC Governor Richard W. Riley during the SC School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) Annual Meeting at the South Carolina State Museum 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 14,000 School Improvement Council members who volunteer in every public school in the state. The award is named in honor of Secretary Riley and his late wife, and recognizes the couple's longstanding commitment to quality public education.

"The South Pointe High SIC has done wonderful work in the past year that is well-deserving of this statewide recognition," said SC-SIC Board of Trustees Chair Amelia B. McKie. "When parents, educators, students, and community members work together as a School Improvement Council to identify needs and take proactive steps to meet them, it does have significant, positive, and lasting impact for our schools, our students, their families, and our communities."

Presented with Honorable Mentions for their work last school year were: Bluffton Middle SIC (Beaufort County School District); Harbison-West Elementary SIC (District Five of Lexington & Richland Counties); South Florence High SIC (Florence Public School District One); and St. James Elementary SIC (Horry County Schools)

Brief descriptions of the work of this year's Riley Award winner and Honorable Mention SICs are included with this release.

Part of the Center for Education Partnerships within the University of South Carolina College of Education, the SC School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) was established in state law 40 years ago to provide the member training, technical assistance, statutory accountability, and other operational resources necessary for the continued success of the community-based SICs in each of the state's 1,110-plus K-12 public schools. More information on SC-SIC's programmatic efforts can be found online at <http://sic.sc.gov>.

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2017 Finalists

Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence

2017 WINNER – South Pointe High SIC – Rock Hill Schools (York School District 3)

This SIC was concerned that its school was developing an undeserved reputation as the high school that students in its district didn't want to attend. After reviewing data on all three of the district's high schools showing that South Pointe compared well and in fact excelled in many areas, the SIC made the following requests to its School Board: adjust attendance zones to even out student populations; analyze and fund the actual cost of operating student activities at the high schools; reduce the class size required to offer certain advanced classes; review the district's elective transfer policy; zero out existing deficits in student activity funds; and form an "Equity Committee" to foster equity among the district's high schools. The district's initial response was to better enforce elective transfer policies, eliminate half of the school's \$185,000 activity deficit, and lower the number of students needed for some advanced courses. Progress on other issues required additional sustained effort by the SIC. The Board eventually granted all three high schools an increase of \$20,000 for band and athletics with an additional \$15,000 to South Pointe for transportation costs, and created an Equity Committee composed of representatives from the three high schools. The Committee developed a shared definition of the elements of equity: similar curricular offerings; similar co-curricular and extra-curricular offerings; autonomy; comparable, well-maintained facilities; demographic balance; consistent accounting practices; and similar access to funding. It then developed recommendations, broken down by these elements, including a request for a complete analysis of the three schools' attendance zones. Work on these recommendations is ongoing. The SIC also began to market its school more intentionally, organizing events for eighth graders to learn about their new school and meet future classmates, and publicizing school achievements in traditional and social media. The SIC reports that the 2016-17 registered freshman class is the largest in the last five years.

Honorable Mention – Bluffton Middle SIC – Beaufort County School District

This SIC continued to work toward its goal of closing the achievement gap and increasing parental engagement. In light of changes in the school's grade configuration and an increase in the percentage of Hispanic students attending the school, the SIC expanded its "Family Challenge" focus to include targeted outreach to Hispanic families. The result was a successful ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) Family Fun Night, which the SIC organized in partnership with their school's ESOL department. Parents were invited to attend a potluck dinner and participate in gallery walks that provided information about the district's high schools as well as programs available through the Technical College of the Lowcountry (TCL). TCL staff also helped parents learn to use technology to check their children's assignments and grades. Other new initiatives have included a separate 5th grade parent night in Spanish (in addition to the one in English) in order to more fully engage both groups. The ESOL Family Fun Night also spawned the first Latino Town Hall in southern Beaufort County, hosted by Bluffton Middle School and facilitated by the district superintendent.

Honorable Mention – Harbison West Elementary SIC – School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties

This SIC has sustained impressive growth over the past several years as it has focused on two key priorities: health and wellness and literacy. To address health and wellness, it worked with key school and community partnerships to support activities aimed at increasing student activity levels and improved health measures for teachers and staff such as the "Biggest Loser" challenge for teachers and staff, an activity log challenge for students, and the SIC/PTO's "Hero's Hustle Fun(d) Run" that gets students running to raise funds for the school. The SIC also connected its school with a USC College of Education program that, since 2014, has provided the school with professional development on how to increase physical activity in class and during recess. In addition, the SIC spearheaded formation of a "School Wellness Committee" to coordinate nutrition and fitness initiatives undertaken by different parts of the school. With respect to its literacy goal, beginning in 2014-15, the SIC created the "Reading Heroes Project" which gave each of the school's 600 students three free books to take home and start a summer reading library. It also connected the school with programs like the Midlands Reading Consortium which provides struggling readers with volunteer tutors from the community. In addition, the SIC partnered with its school and Richland Library to establish "Summer Stride," a program to mitigate summer reading loss, and "Here Comes Kindergarten" which meets twice monthly in a nearby public housing development to help prepare young children for the transition to kindergarten.

2017 Riley Award for SIC Excellence Finalists, continued

Honorable Mention – South Florence High SIC – Florence Public School District 1

This SIC focused on building trusting partnerships with families and the community, increasing support for student services, and redefining the school's culture. Much of the SIC's work on family and community engagement was organized within the framework of its National Network of Partnership Schools' (NNPS) action plan. For example, in collaboration with feeder elementary and middle schools and local police, the SIC facilitated faculty training and an open house for families living in a local subsidized housing community -- the school followed up with additional opportunities for parents and teachers to socialize and take part in educational family sessions. The SIC also wrote a successful grant proposal to fund the school's "Man-Up" mentoring initiative for at-risk male students, in which several SIC members participated as volunteers. The SIC's efforts to increase support for at-risk students included a successful search for alumni donors who covered the cost for five seniors to attend the summer school sessions they needed to graduate. It also provided the promotional energy needed to gain approval for Telemedicine through a partnership between MUSC, HopeHealth, and their district. Finally, the SICs sustained its work on improving its school's self-image as well as its image in the community. It completed a project to paint a nearby water tower with the SFHS logo and the motto, "Simply the Best." SIC members also created and installed framed posters displaying messages about positive thinking and behavior to create a more positive and updated look for the school, won a grant from Lowe's to improve the school's appearance, and organized the school's annual arts and academic showcase, *Simply the Best*, at which students showcased arts and arts infusion in the basic curriculum.

Honorable Mention – St. James Elementary SIC – Horry County Schools

This SIC addressed both its goal of developing student leadership capacities and increasing the number of school-local business partnerships through a new partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce. Together they created a Leadership Day for 4th and 5th graders and a new Leadership Academy for students at the school. Volunteer parents and community members manned various stations at Leadership Day where students participated in leadership and team-building exercises such as the "Communications Game" and "Leadership Quotes." Twenty-four students were subsequently accepted into the new Leadership Academy after going through an application process that involved creating a portfolio demonstrating their existing leadership qualities, a semi-formal interview with business leaders, and submitting letters of recommendation. The Academy met four times during the school year and students participated in additional leadership and team-building activities such as writing a letter to a leader who inspired them. In addition, this SIC addressed its goal of celebrating the contributions of local faith-based institutions by holding the first "Faith and Fellowship Breakfast" for over 30 local clergy and guests. Clergy signed up for the school's mailing list to keep up on school news and expressed a desire to work with the school to help families in need. Also, after reviewing the results of a parent survey, the SIC sought to create an additional opportunity for families to connect with each other as well as with teachers and staff through the school's first Family Game Night, which was attended by over 400 parents, grandparents, teachers, and students.



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