

Okatie Elementary SIC named winner of 2014 Riley Award for SIC Excellence

The School Improvement Council (SIC) of Okatie Elementary School in Okatie (Beaufort County School District) was named as the recipient of the 2014 Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence during the SC-SIC Annual Meeting March 22 in Columbia.



Sec. Riley congratulates members of the Okatie Elementary SIC

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."

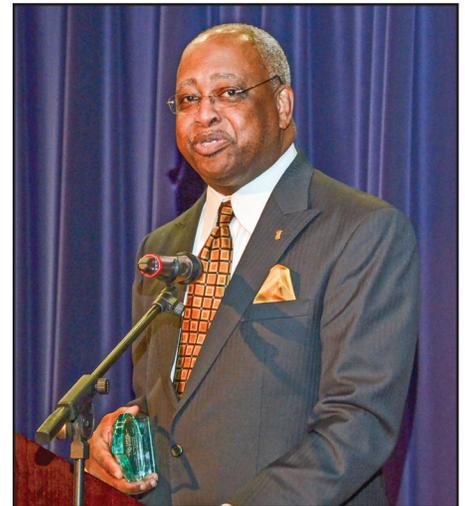
In the last school year, the Okatie Elementary SIC took steps to enhance communication with parents on school district issues and decisions, specifically those related to rezoning issues in this growing area. SIC members and school administrators participated in the school board's Bluffton Community 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.

Mack Named SIC Advocate of the Year for 2014

Dr. Percy A. Mack, Superintendent of Richland School District One, has been named by the SC School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) Board of Trustees as SIC Advocate of the Year for 2014.



Dr. Percy Mack

Presented during the SC-SIC Annual Meeting in Columbia March 22, the SIC Advocate of the Year Award recognizes

(continued)

See "Mack Named SIC Advocate of the Year" pg. 8

In this Issue

- Interim Director's Message.....pg. 2
- SC-SIC Legislator of the Year.....pg. 3
- Generate Survey Responses.....pg. 3
- Riley Awards.....pp. 4-6
- SIC Elections.....pg. 6
- Schedule SIC Trainings.....pg. 7

Message from the Interim Executive Director

Tom F. Hudson



I recently attended the Institute for Educational Leadership's 2014 Washington Policy Seminar with this year's class of the SC Educational Policy Fellowship Program. SC-EPPF is coordinated by SC-SIC with assistance from the state Department of Education's Office of School Leadership. Our SC Fellows were joined in the nation's capital by over 250 Fellows from a dozen other states for a four-day immersion into politics and national education policy-making focusing on the challenges of ensuring education equity and excellence.

This experience was enlightening and thought-provoking, as it provided us the opportunity to hear number of widely-known speakers and panelists, and to meet with members of the South Carolina congressional delegation. Hurdles, successes and realities were discussed, and several presenters touched on the sense of gridlock and partisanship which seems to have engulfed policy and decision-making at the national level.

I won't take up space here opining on the state of affairs in Washington, but I would like to stress how fortunate we are in South Carolina to have in place at the local level over 1,100 School Improvement Councils which can, and do, enact very real and positive change for the lives of their schools and students.

This issue of *Council News* highlights the activities of several such SICs which have been honored for their work through SC-SIC's Dick and Tunky Riley Award for SIC Excellence process. But in our state, we still have over a thousand more SICs and nearly 15,000 SIC members who are hard at work month after month taking steps within their communities to strengthen their local schools.

Perhaps you're reading this and thinking, "I wish our School Improvement Council would do more." Well, it's springtime, and with every Spring comes the promise of growth and a sense of rebirth. The same can hold true for your SIC.

Also in this issue is an article on preparing for and holding SIC elections. Whether you hold your elections in the Spring or Fall, having an active and involved SIC membership is essential if Councils are to do the work they were created to do. SICs are in place in each of the state's K-12 public schools to provide advice and insight on these schools' five-year plans, and to enact goals to help schools fulfill those plans. A solid cross-section of the school community as represented on the SIC is key to ensuring that all voices are heard, various perspectives considered and ideas put in to play. Such diversity can lead to interesting, and sometimes difficult, conversations – but this is a real strength of School Improvement Councils if channeled appropriately.

(continued)
See "SICs in Action"
pg. 8



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State Senator Wes Hayes receives SC-SIC Board's 2014 Legislator of the Year Award

State Senator Robert W. "Wes" Hayes, Jr. (R-District 15, York), was presented with the SC-SIC Board of Trustees' Legislator of the Year Award for 2014 during the SC-SIC Annual Meeting in March.



State Senator Wes Hayes

"Sen. Hayes has been a consistent supporter of School Improvement Councils and education in our state, highlighting the fact that education is not a partisan issue, but an issue of sound public policy," said SC-SIC Board of Trustees Chair Ellen M. Still in presenting the award. "Through his leadership, his words and his actions, he has shown time and again that he values our schools, our students, our educators, our parents, and our state's School Improvement Councils."

A native of Rock Hill, Sen. Hayes has served in the South Carolina Senate since 1991, previously serving in the South Carolina House of Representatives representing District 46 from 1985-1991. He is currently serving on the Senate's Banking and Insurance Committee (Chair), Education Committee (K-12 Subcommittee Chair), Ethics Committee (Past Chair), Finance Committee, and Medical Affairs Committee.

Sen. Hayes earned his B.S. degree in 1975 from the United States Military Academy at West Point, where he was President of his class and Battalion Commander. He served five years in the US Army's 82nd Airborne Division where he was a Master Parachutist, Ranger, and recipient of the Legion of Merit Award. Upon leaving active service, he was a member of the SC Army National Guard until 2005, in which he held the rank of Colonel. He earned his J.D. degree from the University of South Carolina School of Law in 1983, and was admitted to the South Carolina Bar and the US District Court of South Carolina in 1983, first practicing at Harrelson, Hayes and Guyton, and later founding his own firm in Rock Hill.

Active in his community, Sen. Hayes serves on the boards of the York County Chapter of the American Red Cross, Westminster Towers, South Carolina Bank and Trust of the Piedmont, and Guardian Fidelity Mortgage Corporation. A longtime member of Westminster Presbyterian Church, he also belongs to a number of other organizations, including the American Legion, Kiwanis, Elks, Gideons, Christian Legal Society, National Lawyers Association, and state and county Bar Associations.

How Do You Get Parents to Respond to Your SIC's Surveys?

by Karen Utter,
SC-SIC Coordinator of Programs and Research

In the last issue of *Council News*, we wrote about the importance of getting feedback from parents when trying to increase family engagement. We also provided some places to look for examples of different kinds of parent surveys.

For many of the same reasons that it is sometimes hard to engage parents in various school activities, it can also be difficult to get parents to respond to surveys. There is no silver bullet to ensure that parents will complete and return your survey in large numbers. The most effective method to administer a survey to parents at your school may be quite different than the method for other schools in the state or even in your district. But the bottom line is that if just a handful of parents actually return the survey, the usefulness of any results is limited.

Keep in mind also that the most effective method of delivering and collecting a parent survey may not be easy or convenient for your SIC. As with many other aspects of working in parent engagement, it takes commitment on the part of those working on a parent survey to go the extra mile to collect as many responses as possible.

If you do this work up front, however, your SIC will reduce wasted time and effort later on. Once you have good information from a large segment of parents, your SIC and school can plan family engagement strategies that you know will address the needs and priorities of many parents, and can you schedule your activities at times and places most likely to bring greater parent attendance.

There are a number of different ways that your SIC might deliver a parent survey, and you might want to choose more than one method in order to get the best results:

- Traditional US Mail (consider cost of postage)
- Send home/return with student (these may not reach parent)

(continued)
See "Engaging Parents in SIC Surveys"
pg. 7

CONGRATULATIONS Okatie Elementary School!

Beaufort County School District



**Winner of the 2014
Riley Award for
School Improvement
Council
Excellence**



L - R: Emily Bierman, SIC Co-Chair, Marva Neal, Assistant Principal, Sec. Dick Riley, JulieAnn Aaron, Teacher, Loretta Kefford, Community Member



**Buena Vista
Elementary SIC**
Greenville County Schools



L - R: Kristen Hill, Assistant Principal, Ann Mohr, Principal, Sec. Dick Riley, Kristen Griffin, Teacher, Rev. Andy Casto-Waters, SIC Chair, Leslie Cook, Instructional Coach

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 performance and closing the achievement gap.



L - R: Dave Riegel, Principal, Anita Hood, Community Member, Barb Waldman, SIC Chair, Sec. Dick Riley, Linda Byers, Community Member, Dan Koon, Parent, D.C. Terry, Community Member, Dr. Steve Hefner, Superintendent



Irmo High SIC

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.



Port Royal Elementary SIC

Beaufort County School District



L - R: Brian Herrmann, SIC Co-Chair, Rebecca Polk, SIC Co-Chair, Chavon Browne, Principal, Sec. Dick Riley

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.



L - R: James Manning, Richland Two School Board Member, Sonja Merriwether-Hawkins, Ex-Officio SIC Co-Chairperson, Brenda Mack-Foxworth, Principal, Sec. Dick Riley, Amelia B. McKie, SIC Chair, Angela Poore, SIC Member, Cheryl Wilson Worrell, SIC Secretary, Debbie Hamm, Richland Two Superintendent



Ridge View High SIC

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.

It's the Season to Spring into SIC Elections

Spring is in the air and many folks in the school community are gearing up for the end of the year just around the corner.

While the statutory deadline for election of parent and teacher SIC members (and students, in the case of high schools) is not until Fall (October 15), many School Improvement Councils hold these elections in the Spring to give them a jump on the new school year. Regardless of whether your SIC holds elections now or after the new school year begins, there are a number of things to keep in mind as you conduct the process.

Seek and Advertise – As part of the SIC elections process, make sure that you actively seek nominations (people can self-nominate or nominate others). Ask nominees to provide a brief bio and statement on why they'd like to be elected to your SIC. Such open invitations can be made through your school's website, newsletter, e-mail blasts, automated telephone calls, even your school's marquee – any means by which you believe you'll reach the widest audience. Make sure people know what the SIC's roles are and what work it has accomplished during the school year. Advertise the timeframe of your SIC elections and include information on how balloting will take place.

Conducting the Election – Elections can be conducted by paper ballot sent home with students, at open houses, during PTA/PTO meetings, and at faculty meetings (for teachers). Include the bios submitted by candidates (and a picture if possible) with your ballot materials so that members of the school community will know for whom they're voting and a little about them. In high schools, election of student SIC members should be conducted through a special line item on the ballot for student office elections, as opposed to SIC service being an "other duty as required" for class officers. Remember that parents are to elect other parents, teachers to elect fellow teachers, and students to elect their peers to serve on the SIC. Sometimes, the nomination process may bring you the exact number of candidates for SIC slots you have open. In keeping with statute, balloting for that slot should be conducted anyway – your SIC ballots should always have a spot for a "write-in" candidate.

Counting the Ballots – Ideally, ballots for SIC elections should be counted by, for lack of a better descriptor, disinterested third parties. Some SICs utilize the outgoing SIC members for this function or the SIC Chair and principal may appoint a special committee for this purpose. Whatever method your SIC uses, please make sure that it is impartial and transparent. Generally, high vote-getters are elected. However, if your SIC is filling two parent slots, for example, and there are three candidates, then the top two vote-getters will

(continued)

See "Spring into SIC Elections"

pg. 8

Schedule SIC Trainings in Your District

The Fall semester of each school year is typically the busiest SC-SIC training season, but trainings are conducted across the state throughout the entire year.

Has your district had an “SIC Basics” training session for its Council members this year? If not, why not think about scheduling training for your SIC members before the end of the 2013-14? Whether its training conducted by one of our certified SIC District Contacts or district-wide training provided by SC-SIC staff, such sessions are vital to new and more seasoned SIC members so that they can know more about their roles and responsibilities to their school communities.

To inquire about training, reach out to your SIC District Contact or call the SC-SIC office at 1-800-868-2232. For more on SIC training opportunities visit the SC-SIC website at <http://sic.sc.gov> and click on the “Training and Resources” tab.

“Engaging Parents in SIC Surveys”

continued from pg. 3

- Telephone
- Email attachment
- Survey Monkey or similar internet service (may involve some costs)
- Utilizing volunteers with paper survey and clipboard to ask parents to take a survey while in the car pick-up line, or during a school event that is well attended such as “back-to-school” night, PTA/PTO meeting, school concert, or athletic event (this only works for relatively short surveys, however there are also apps available for electronic devices that allow users to collect survey data in person)
- Open your school’s computer lab during “back-to-school” night or parent-teacher conference time and ask parents to stop by and respond to survey
- If there is a place in the community where you know many people gather (church, shopping mall, grocery store), see if your SIC can get permission to set up a table and be available to ask parents to complete a survey while they are there

The method you choose is important, but there are additional things that your SIC can do to increase the likelihood that parents will respond:

- Consider the time of year. Sending a parent survey out in the mail the week before Christmas break is probably not going to get as many responses as a survey going out in mid-January when everyone is back and settled into their normal routines.
- Incentives can help. See if community partners can donate prizes for the class with the most parent responses, or try something that is cost-free but important to students, like offering an extra five minutes of recess to the class with the most parent responses.
- Make sure that translations of your survey are available for parents who do not speak English as their first language.
- Communicating with parents about the survey from the outset is essential. Inform parents of the purpose of the survey and why it’s important, and let them know that their response matters. Ask students to encourage their parents to respond and enlist key parents to reach out to other parents. Publicize the effort at school, on social media, and in the local media as appropriate.
- Follow-up on the initial delivery of the survey with additional reminders and encouragement to respond.
- Have a dedicated phone number that parents can call if they have questions and make sure it is covered by someone who has answers.

Finally, when you do get all of those responses in, it is critical that your SIC thank parents for responding, to communicate back with parents in a timely way about what the SIC learns from the survey results, and inform them of what your next steps will be. Obviously, your SIC and school will not be able to solve every problem and adopt every suggestion received through a survey, but it is important to let parents who responded know that they have been heard and their comments considered. Without this important step, parents are likely to conclude that the whole process was a waste of their time and may not respond the next time your SIC asks.

Don't
forget to
#ThankATeacher



May is Teacher
Appreciation
month!



“Mack Named SIC Advocate of the Year”

continued from pg. 1

exemplary efforts on behalf of School Improvement Councils and is presented annually by the SC-SIC Board of Trustees to individuals who go above and beyond in supporting and promoting SICs in their particular spheres of influence.

“Dr. Mack has demonstrated a strong commitment to civic engagement and volunteerism in his district,” said SC-SIC Board Immediate Past Chair Sylleste Davis in presenting the award. “He has been an outstanding advocate for the role of SICs in the lives and successes of schools and students.”

In his nearly six years with the district, Dr. Mack has consistently met with local School Improvement Council chairs on a quarterly basis through a “Superintendent’s SIC,” sharing information regarding district initiatives, gathering feedback, urging participation in community partnerships, and encouraging SIC efforts across the district.

Prior to coming to Richland One in July 2008, Dr. Mack served as superintendent of the Dayton Public School System in Dayton, OH. Before his service in Dayton, he was assistant superintendent in the DeKalb County School System in Decatur, GA. He also served as a coordinator of personnel, a high school principal and assistant principal, a teacher and a coach in Decatur. He began his teaching career in the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System.

Dr. Mack holds a B.S. in Social Science Education from Savannah State College; M.Ed. in Social Science Education from the University of Georgia; and both the Ed.S. and Ph.D. in Administration and Supervision from Georgia State University. In addition, Dr. Mack has done further training in Reform Governance: School Board and Leadership. He attended the Harvard Institute of School Leadership and is a fellow of the Riley Institute on Diversity.

“Spring into SIC Elections”

continued from pg. 6

be elected. In the event of a tie vote, your SIC will determine how such a tie is broken. You may opt to conduct a run-off election for the candidates, or agree to do something as simple as drawing numbers or flipping a coin. Be sure to maintain records of all your ballot counts. This is essential not just from the standpoint of good records keeping but can assist your SIC in the event of a resignation – the next-highest vote-getter in the last election can be called upon to fill the vacated slot.

Publicize – Once your new SIC members are elected, let your school community know who they are and how they can be contacted. While such information is to be entered into the online *SC-SIC Member Network* each Fall (by November 15), publicize the outcome of your elections in your school newsletter, your website or any other applicable means. SIC service is an important part of the life of the school and the school community should know who is taking an active role in setting goals and working for its success.

Remember: each school, SIC and election process is different from another. Things can crop up regardless of how well you plan. Should you need assistance or have questions, don’t hesitate to contact the SC-SIC office at 1-800-868-2232 or sic@mailbox.sc.edu. We’ll do all we can to help.

“SICs in Action”

continued from pg. 2

In this *Council News* you will also find a brief reminder regarding training. To be truly effective, SIC members must have knowledge of their roles and responsibilities, and how they can best work on behalf of their schools and students. “Basics” training lays the groundwork; other SC-SIC training offerings, such as “SIC Leadership,” can help Councils go to the next levels. I encourage all SIC Chairs, principals and local SIC District Contacts to look at scheduling SIC training for their new and returning members so that they might have the tools they need to make an impact through their Councils.

SICs are all about building broad coalitions and partnerships – of parents, educators, students, and community members – bringing ideas and resources to the table for stronger schools. As the famed cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead stated, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” SICs are such a small group, comprised of committed members of school communities wanting to make a difference. Yours can too, and the SC-SIC office is here to help.

