



South Pointe High School  
801 Neely Road  
Rock Hill, SC 20730

## SC-SIC 2017 Riley Award Application

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York County School District Three

South Pointe High School is the youngest of three high schools in Rock Hill, South Carolina. It had an enrollment of 1290 students (grade 9-12) coming from wide socio-economic backgrounds, including 55% receiving free and reduced lunch. South Pointe offers International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement and dual-credit college level courses. Unique to it in the city is its Freshman Academy. The academy philosophy is to help facilitate a smoother transition from middle school to high school, with ninth grade students attending core classes only with ninth grade students, on their own hallway, and with a separate lunch. They are also required to take the South Pointe 101 Class, where they learn skills such as time management, organization, and goal setting to prepare them for success in high school and beyond.

Issue:

South Pointe High School was just 10 years old and running a deficit for three years straight, in total \$185,000 in the red. The student enrollment was declining, while other schools were growing. SPHS was dropped to 3A, which led to a decrease in revenues generated by gate receipts and concessions. With a smaller population than the other two high schools, we had less capability of generating money. In addition to finances, the teams were traveling farther for competitions, leaving less time for study. Connected to this challenge was a growing negative perception of the school within the community. Community members with no association or personal experience to SPHS had formed opinions about the school. A major factor in this mischaracterization is the division of middle school students in the high school zoning map. Of the centrally located schools, 70% of one attend Northwestern High School, and 85% of the other attend Rock Hill High School. No thirteen-year-old wants to leave their friends. Eight out of ten students were thankful that they don't have to go to "that school". It was starting to affect the kids in the school (who were proud of their school), and it definitely affected the parents.

Actions:

The SIC began this journey with an initial meeting with our new Superintendent, Dr. Kelly Pew. She is the fourth superintendent for our district since SPHS was opened. We discussed with her our concerns about the effect of the negative perception of the school in our community, the declining enrollment, the abuse of the hardship transfer policy to change attendance zone, the change in the growth pattern of our community, and the change to a 3A athletic class decreasing the amount of revenue generated by the booster clubs. She listened to our concerns, genuinely cared, and asked to meet again after she had time to address each item.

Following our initial meeting with Dr. Pew (October 2014), the SIC formed a subcommittee that examined district data to learn the truth. Enrollment projections, testing results, educational opportunities, school assignment plan, zone segment mean family incomes, the district transfer policy, athletic ticket sales, lower booster club participation, and higher expenses for travel were all examined. We learned South Pointe not only compared better than we knew, but quietly excelled in many areas, including a 60% teacher retention rate from the hand-picked opening.

The committee presented the SIC with recommendations to make to the district, which it did in February 2015:

- Reassign the high school zones to even out the student populations, with attention to mean family incomes. Other high school populations were 1800 to 2100.
- Analyze the actual cost to run student activities at all three high schools and fund the actual cost. Booster funds should not be needed for security, transport, or basic capital maintenance.
- Allow relief from the district policy for a minimum classroom size of 15, in order to maintain equal options of advanced classes offered.
- Fully examine the district transfer policy. Motivated parents (of the 60 - 90 kids removed from SPHS a year) equate to \$10,000 - \$30,000 a year removed from booster money, and seemed to be spreading the negative reputation outside our school the most.
- Zero out all deficits in the student activity funds. The district running a year-end surplus during this period seemed illogical.
- Adjust the allocation of district funds to SPHS to accommodate equity, if you are going to zone kids there make it equal.

Superintendent Dr. Pew immediately started enforcing zoning policies fairly, stopping elective transfers. The district hired auditors (Greene, Finny & Horton) to examine student activities at all three high schools. The SIC met with the auditor and spoke individually with school board members. Three months after meetings and inspections, the auditor recommended that our school activity deficit be reduced by 50% from district funds and the other 50% be paid back to the district by future activity funds and booster revenue. At the June 2015 School Board Meeting the SIC made a presentation with our own recommendations including clearing the entire school debt, rezoning, and forming a committee to maintain equity among the city's high schools. The school board voted to follow the auditor's findings. The district did lower the number of students to make a class at South Pointe to 12 students.

The SIC concurrently focused on marketing the school to the community. It began with regular social meetings. We formed a committee to outreach to the rising ninth graders being pulled from their current peers. We started an eighth-grade orientation at the middle schools for future South Pointers (with gifts provided by community businesses), we organized functions for the eighth graders to meet their future classmates off campuses, and boosters started a picnic for rising ninth graders at the spring exhibition football game. We ran a newspaper ad of the past year's state achievements, requiring a full page spread. We began to use social media to promote not only the successes at the school but also the progress of the SIC.

Result:

In August 2015 our School Board created The Equity Committee to examine the student opportunities and experiences at all three high schools and to determine if the experiences were equitable across all. The committee was made up of five members selected by the SIC of each high school and the principals, totaling 18. The committee met six times between September and December 2015, each meeting lasting three to four hours. The committee toured all three high schools, received a presentation of academic testing data, a report of high school funding by the district, and demographic profiles of the high school attendance zones. Our goals were to define

"an equitable high school experience", gather and review data from all three schools, identify areas in which equity is achieved, and make recommendations to maintain or reach equity where improvements need to be made. The first was the most productive, identifying these elements as the basis of equality: 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.

Greene Finney & Horton went on to perform an evaluation of equitable funding of band and high school athletics (limited in that booster club activity was not included). The report focused on "base costs" of transportation, security and officials. Based on the analysis of expenditures, the School Board approved an annual increase of \$20,000 to each high school, and an additional \$15,000 a year to South Pointe (due to transportation expenses).

Through January 2016, The Equity Committee brought three historically territorial schools' SIC's and their principals together, resulting in fair recommendations to help all the district children, including a unanimous desire for a complete analysis to address the high school attendance zones. The committee presented their findings and recommendations to The School Board in a twelve-page report broken down into the elements of equity. The district and school board are still working through the recommendations of the committee. Currently another firm has been hired to determine the essential costs of running the student activities at all three high schools, so that we don't end up in our situation again.

In addition to identifying the need, creating the political will, and doing the work of the Equity Committee, we cleared \$88,000 of past debt, are to receive \$35,000 more in annual funding, curtailed unsupported transfers from South Pointe's zone, have started addressing the school's image like a business, and importantly addressed continuity of middle school programs feeding into the high schools appropriately. The SIC is proud that South Pointe has been made the only school of choice for the continuation of the successful middle school STEM project-based learning program. Elements of five different school programs were recognized as best in the state last year, and we are on track to do it again. In this age of school choice in York County, we recognize the need for a strong SIC.



Rebecca Gilleland