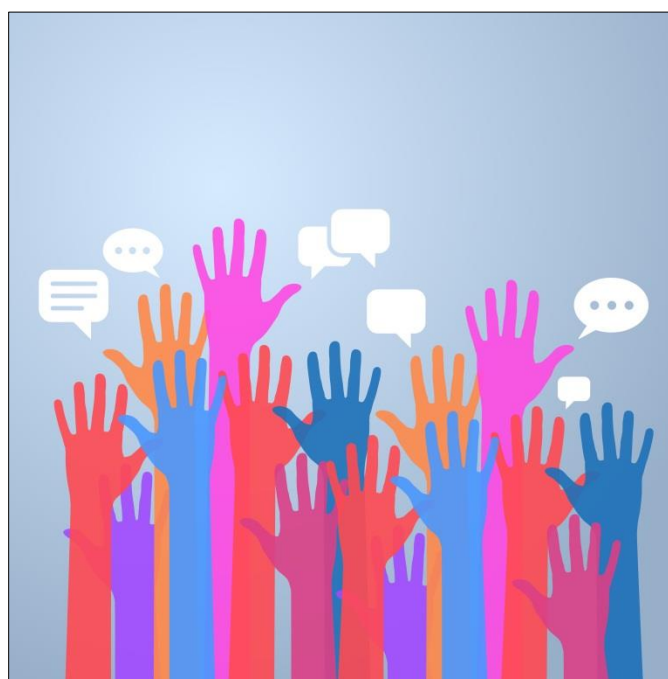


**THE DICK AND TUNKY RILEY AWARD FOR
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COUNCIL EXCELLENCE:
A Collection of Selected SIC Activities**

Volume VI

SIC Advocacy and Civic Engagement Projects

Published Summer 2017



Message from the SC-SIC Executive Director

Dear SIC Member:

Across South Carolina each year, nearly 15,000 School Improvement Council members like you come together on 1,100-plus SICs with a common goal – to make a difference in the lives of the schools and students they serve.

Each school community (and each SIC) has its own unique personality, set of needs, and available resources to help their school be successful. But sometimes, local School Improvement Councils can wonder just exactly what they can do to make a real difference.

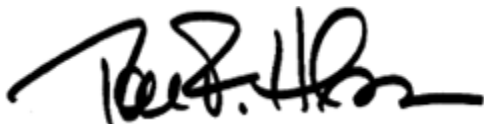
This series of six publications developed by the SC School Improvement Council is intended to provide examples of what some effective SICs have accomplished and to offer ideas in a number of topic areas so that your SIC can undertake its work in a planned, thoughtful, and meaningful fashion.

Presented in each of them are a variety of projects and endeavors of SICs that have been recognized through SC-SIC's *Dick and Tunky Riley Award for SIC Excellence* process. Many of these examples are applicable to most school communities, while others may be more specialized. Review them and identify those which might be a good fit for your SIC and school community.

As always, please consider the SC-SIC office as a ready resource to assist you in your efforts. We are only a phone call or an email away.

Thank you for your service on your School Improvement Council. Your dedication of time and energy to help your school and its students is valuable and appreciated.

You have my best wishes for a year of successful and significant SIC work!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom F. Hudson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tom F. Hudson
Executive Director
SC School Improvement Council

I. Introduction

This volume is one in a series highlighting activities undertaken by *Riley Award* honorees since the inception of the Award in 2002. SC-SIC has collected and organized these activities by general topic areas.

These activities were selected from among case statements submitted by SICs who participated in the *Riley Award* process and were named to the Honor Roll, received an Honorable Mention award, or were named a *Riley Award* winner. The name of the SIC, the school district, and the *Riley Award* year follow each activity. This series is not intended to catalogue every activity undertaken by *Riley Award* honorees; activities were selected to provide readers with examples from a broad cross-section of topic areas.

In some cases, you will find additional resources listed at the end of a topic. These are only a sampling of the many resources available online or through universities, non-profits, and government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. Please contact SC-SIC if you need assistance in identifying additional resources in a particular topic area.

II. How to Use the Information in this Collection

Identify Your School's Needs and Define Your Goals before Choosing Activities

This collection was prepared in response to SIC member requests for more information about *Riley Award* honoree activities from past years. It is important to remember, however, that SICs selected these activities based on their school's unique needs and goals for improvement.

To help ensure that your time and effort are directed toward activities that are appropriate for your school, consider the following questions before selecting, planning and implementing specific activities:

1. Are we addressing a need that was identified in our school's Five-Year School Improvement (Renewal) Plan?
2. If not, have we looked at other existing data or collected data ourselves in order to verify that the need actually exists? Have we confirmed that this need impacts student achievement either directly or indirectly? Do we have enough information to know what factors contribute to this need at our school?
3. Have we defined the goal that we hope this activity will help us achieve? Is our goal aligned with one or more goals in the School Improvement (Renewal) Plan?
4. Will this activity help us meet our goal by addressing one or more of the factors that contribute to the need we are working on?
5. Will this activity duplicate activities that are already being implemented by others? Is it a good fit for our school community?
6. What resources do we need in order to implement this activity with quality? Do we have these resources? If not, can we get the resources we lack through partnerships with other individuals or organizations in the school or community?

Lessons Learned from *Riley Award* Honorees

In reviewing the many case statements describing the experiences of *Riley Award* honorees, SC-SIC staff made several general observations that may be helpful to your SIC:

- It will likely take more than a single, one-time activity in order to achieve an SIC goal. Most *Riley Award* honorees undertook several, strategically linked activities which together were directed toward achieving one of their goals.
- It will likely take several years of sustained SIC effort in order to meet longer-term school improvement goals. For this reason, it's important that SICs plan ahead on how they will transfer information and responsibilities for key activities from year to year.
- Collaboration and partnerships are essential to SIC effectiveness. *Riley Award* honorees often worked together with various combinations of administrators, teachers, school staff, and other school and community organizations to implement school improvement activities.
- It's important to do your homework! *Riley Award* honorees took the time to review their School Improvement (Renewal) Plan and school performance data, gather input from stakeholders using surveys and other tools, and research what has worked for other schools like theirs by going out and visiting other schools, consulting with nearby universities or non-profit organizations, and using online resources.
- Don't hesitate to ask for help. *Riley Award* honorees often invited experts in to help educate themselves about their area of focus. They called on teachers, guidance counselors, dieticians, district staff, local law enforcement, traffic safety experts, marketing and communication professionals, college professors, pediatricians and school nurses, and others in order to better understand their schools' needs and find effective solutions.
- Effective SICs divide their work among committees that are organized around each specific goal or area of focus. Many *Riley Award* honorees reported that forming a committee was an important step in moving forward with work on their goals.

The staff at SC-SIC hope that you will find this collection of *Riley Award* activities to be a source of ideas and inspiration as you work through the school improvement process. More information about the *Riley Award* and recent *Riley Award* honorees is available on our website at <http://sic.sc.gov>. If your SIC needs individualized assistance in any area of your work, please don't hesitate to contact a member of the SC-SIC staff. We are here to help!

III. Riley Award Activities

Advocacy and Civic Engagement Projects

Equity Among District High Schools. This SIC found that, even though data showed that its high school compared well to the two other high schools in the district, their school was developing an underserved reputation as the school students didn't want to attend. The SIC developed a body of evidence in support of its requests to its School Board: adjust attendance zones to even out student populations; analyze and fund the actual cost of operating student activities; reduce the class size required to offer certain advanced classes; review the district's elective transfer policy; and zero out existing deficits in student activity funds. 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. Eventually, after an auditor's review, the Board granted all three schools an increase of \$20,000 for band and athletics with an additional \$15,000 going to the SIC's school for additional actual costs. The SIC's continued advocacy also resulted in the formation of an "Equity Committee" made up of representatives from the SICs of 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 for equity. Work on these recommendations is ongoing. (*South Pointe High SIC, Rock Hill School District 3, 2017*).

Candidate forums. This SIC's goals included ensuring that community members had an opportunity to learn about all of the candidates for state superintendent of education and the local school board. The SIC organized a two-hour debate for state superintendent candidates, moderated by a local TV news anchor. Before the debate, the SIC hosted a "Meet and Greet" session for school board candidates to meet and talk with potential voters one-on-one. As a part of this event, the SIC also asked the CFO of the Charleston County School District to give a presentation on a bond referendum to fund new schools and facilities that was also on the ballot that fall. (*Laing Middle School SIC, Charleston County School District, 2016*).

Accelerating completion of school construction projects. This SIC's school was in the first of an eight phase construction/renovation program that was expected to take 20-40 years to complete. The SIC reached out to city, county, and state officials to help identify an alternative funding mechanism that would speed up completion of badly needed improvements to their 45-year-old school building. The General Assembly subsequently passed a one-percent local sales tax option that would provide supplemental funds for this and several other renovation projects in the district. This measure then had to be approved by county citizens in a fall ballot referendum. By attending public meetings and other gatherings and going from door to door, the SIC worked together with other citizens and local businesses to educate the community about the need for these projects. Their joint advocacy efforts resulted in the passage of the referendum, which is expected to reduce the expected construction time down to 10 years. (*North Augusta High SIC, Aiken County Public School District, 2015*).

Facilitating parent engagement in attendance rezoning process. This SIC's school was located in a high growth area. As a consequence, students were frequently rezoned to new schools. The SIC wanted to ensure that parents in neighborhoods that were under

consideration for rezoning were informed of that fact and encouraged these parents to express their views to the School Board. In one case, the SIC facilitated a meeting between parents, district staff, and the school principal to answer parent questions and concerns and to help ease the transition to the new school for which their children had been rezoned. (*Okatie Elementary SIC, Beaufort County Schools, 2014*).

Sponsoring town hall-style meeting on school funding cuts and candidate debate. This SIC partnered with several other SICs in their district to host a town hall-style meeting on the impacts of recent school funding cuts. Two local members of the state House of Representatives answered parent questions submitted both before and during the meeting, and an SIC member moderated the discussion. The SIC also partnered with SICs in their district to sponsor a debate for Republican primary candidates for state Senate. (*Beck Academy Middle SIC, Greenville County Schools, 2013*).

Building ongoing relationships with elected representatives. This SIC invited their State Representative to attend one of its monthly meetings. The Representative updated the SIC on funding measures pending in the General Assembly. In order to further increase the Representative's understanding of the school and its instructional needs, the School Board hosted a tour of the SIC's school and feeder schools. The SIC is planning future meetings to facilitate this type of exchange of information with additional elected officials. (*North Augusta High SIC, Aiken County Public School District, 2013*).

Maintaining a balanced, diverse student population. In the course of participating in an attendance rezoning process, this SIC worked together with local elected officials, the Urban League, the local NAACP, and attorneys with specialized skills in maintaining racially diverse populations, to advocate to the School Board and district for new attendance lines that would maintain a well-balanced, diverse student population both at their own school and in other schools impacted by the process. (*Richland Northeast High SIC, Richland School District 2, 2013*).

Funding safety wall for school's front entrance. When the school's PTO was forced to divert monies intended to improve the safety of the school's front entrance to more immediate classroom needs, this SIC advocated successfully with their district to fund the needed upgrades. The SIC shared a report evaluating a lock-down drill conducted by the local county Sheriff's Office that recommended the purchase of a store-front with a magnetic lock. Through continued conversations with district administrators and regular attendance at School Board meetings, SIC members were successful in persuading School Board trustees to approve the purchase. (*Baron DeKalb Elementary SIC, Kershaw County School District, 2012*).

Building motivation and skills to educate and advocate on policy issues impacting school. This SIC undertook a number of initiatives to educate itself and other parents and community members on strategies for effective advocacy, including attending trainings on advocacy offered by SC-SIC and the local Public Education Partners. The SIC then shared what it learned by conducted trainings on advocacy for other SICs and PTAs/PTOs in its district. When additional parents began volunteering to write letters and make phone calls when needed, the SIC and PTA created a system to notify volunteers when their help was needed on a particular issue and to track the contacts volunteers made with elected officials. The SIC also worked to build relationships with federal and state officials, inviting them to the school for question and answer sessions, providing them with information on school performance, and taking them on tours of their school. (*Blythe Academy of Languages SIC, Greenville County Schools, 2012*).

Defeating proposal to close school. District budget shortfalls prompted a recommendation to close this SIC's school. In response, the SIC rallied all parts of the school community to communicate a single message: their school had been an essential part of life in their community for 100 years and should not be closed. The SIC worked together with local officials, businesses, associations, and neighbors to speak at School Board meetings, advocate on social media sites, contact local newspapers, online news outlets, and regional television stations, write letters, send emails, and call School Board members and local legislators. When the recommendation came to a vote, the School Board voted unanimously to keep the school open. (*Port Royal Elementary SIC, Beaufort County Schools, 2012*).

Funding for security cameras and capital improvements. SIC and PTO representatives attended monthly School Board meetings and parent advisory cabinet meetings to increase their school's visibility and call attention to their school's needs. As a result, the district sent staff to the school to assess the need for security cameras on campus, and parents were invited to additional meetings concerning renovations to the feeder high school in their district. (*Nursery Road Elementary SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties, 2010*).

Funding for school playground. This SIC successfully advocated to their School Board for the purchase of additional land for a new school play space. (*Stone Academy of Communication Arts SIC, Greenville County Schools, 2010*).

Raising awareness of potential traffic problems related to proposed landfill near school. This SIC was concerned about the impact that a proposed new landfill would have on traffic in the area, especially during school arrival and dismissal times. SIC members met with city representatives and the president of the landfill company and kept parents updated on the information they collected. SIC members also attended DHEC public hearings on the proposal to voice their concerns and assess the landfill company's plans to mitigate the traffic issue; the SIC arranged to make its school's media center available to DHEC for these hearings. (*South Pointe High SIC, Rock Hill School District 3, 2007*).

Building support for district building plan. This SIC undertook to educate citizens in their community about its school's space needs and the district's 10-year building plan. The SIC published and distributed an informational flyer detailing the current population and projected growth of surrounding neighborhoods in order to correct misperceptions of the facts. It also used its column in the school's weekly newsletter to update parents regularly on building plan progress. A report entitled *Design vs. Use of Space* helped establish that the existing school grounds and facilities were being utilized to their maximum potential. (*River Springs Elementary SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties, 2005*).

Educating community on impacts of impending cuts to education budget. This SIC invited education advocates to come and speak to school faculty and members of other SICs and PTOs in the district about the impact of anticipated cuts to the education budget. The SIC's efforts were complimented by the principal's efforts to educate the school community about this issue in his *Wildcat Wire* publication and through an op-ed published in the local newspaper. (*Saluda Trail Middle SIC, Rock Hill District, 2005, 2004*)

Increasing school visibility at the district level. The SIC sent a representative to every School Board and committee meeting during the year, an effort that not only increased the SIC's influence but also gave the SIC more insight into the district's concerns and areas of emphasis. The SIC also learned about effective programs in other schools such as the Robotics

Team, which the SIC was successful in bringing to its school with the help of community partners. (*Saluda Trail Middle SIC, Rock Hill School District 3, 2005, 2004*).

Obtaining communication systems upgrades. This SIC successfully advocated with its district for funds to update the school's outdated telephone and internet systems. The SIC also recommended scripting for individual telephone messages and the incoming school message. (*Ridge View High SIC, Richland School District 2, 2004*).

Educating the community on current education issues. This SIC's Advocacy Committee sponsored a School Board candidates' forum, disseminated information regarding the state budget process and school funding, and participated in the creation of a district-wide Governmental Relations Committee. (*River Springs Elementary SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties, 2004*).

Obtaining variance for school's electronic sign. This SIC chair and the principal appeared before the city planning commission to resolve a zoning issue regarding the school's large electronic message board. The commission granted the school a variance for the sign, which had become an important means of communicating school information to parents. (*Saluda Trail Middle School SIC, Rock Hill District, 2004*).

Securing approval for renovation of aging school campus. The SIC was concerned about the condition of physical facilities at its 40-year-old middle school which was composed of nine separate buildings spread over a large tract of land. SIC members successfully advocated to the School Board for numerous improvements including construction of a new three story state-of-the-art classroom building, construction of a central, covered, connecting school lobby with elevator, and the remodeling and reconfiguring of other existing buildings. (*E.L Wright Middle SIC, Richland School District 2, 2003*).

Additional Resources

SC-SIC Training: Effective, Ethical Advocacy with Elected Officials (visit <http://sic.sc.gov> or contact the SC-SIC office for more information).

Many thanks to the SICs whose work is featured in this Collection.

Baron DeKalb Elementary SIC, Kershaw County School District

Beck Academy Middle SIC, Greenville County Schools

Blythe Academy of Languages SIC, Greenville County Schools

E.L Wright Middle SIC, Richland School District 2

Laing Middle School SIC, Charleston County School District

North Augusta High SIC, Aiken County Public School District

Nursery Road Elementary SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties

Okatie Elementary SIC, Beaufort County Schools

Port Royal Elementary SIC, Beaufort County Schools

Richland Northeast High SIC, Richland School District 2

Ridge View High SIC, Richland School District 2

River Springs Elementary SIC, School District 5 of Lexington & Richland Counties

Saluda Trail Middle SIC, Rock Hill School District 3

Stone Academy of Communication Arts SIC, Greenville County School

South Pointe High SIC, Rock Hill School District 3