

2016

Ebinport Elementary SIC

Ebinport Elementary School  
2142 India Hook Rd  
Rock Hill, SC 29732

Application for Riley Award 2016

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Where the Students Soar to Success

In this day of technology, Ebinport Elementary has found a way to combine technology and good 'ole hands-on learning to improve learning outcomes and ultimately produce students who are academically more successful. A few years ago, our kindergarten teachers approached the SIC to express concerns about students coming into kindergarten with very low letter recognition skills as evidenced by their kindergarten pre-screening assessments. Ebinport has seen a trend of students beginning school behind academically compared to their peers. In the beginning, 48% of kindergarten students began school below average in mathematics compared to their peers across our district and compared to students across the nation. In addition, 40% of kindergarten students at Ebinport began school below average in reading when compared to students in our district and across the nation. Students had the greatest area of need in principals of reading, which include such skills as letter identification and concepts about print. The teachers were looking for a program that might help these students catch up with their peers who performed better in the pre-screening. The teachers and the reading resource teacher at the time suggested the idea of a mentoring program and asked our SIC to help them recruit some student mentor volunteers by working with teachers in the upper grades. Starting in 2013-14 our SIC helped to establish this mentoring program that pairs a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade student mentor with a kindergarten learner identified by the teacher. For the Eagle Eyes buddy mentor program, relationships and peer mentoring are key elements to its continued success. At the end of the 2014-15 school year, teachers reported that this program has been an overwhelming success in raising needed letter identification skills for these kindergarten students as well as concepts about print such as the front and back cover of a book, how to properly hold a book and even how to identify the title and author. Both the mentors and mentees benefit in many ways academically and socially from this partnership. We are proud of this program that helps "graduate" young students who began with very low reading or letter recognition level and sometimes even aid in students reading on grade level by the end of the year. Additionally, students who had a low self-esteem because of reading challenges feel more self-confident and excited about reading.

As advocates for literacy at our school and in our community, our SIC saw the need in some of the lower socio-economic areas of our schools' zoned homes to provide appropriate reading books for children living in these areas. Children that practice reading only at school generally do not improve their reading skills as quickly as children that practice reading at home. The goal was to give children in these neighborhoods access to free books to read for practice. Our SIC, working with community donors and school district maintenance established five Little Free Libraries in these zones. Since those children now have easy access to leveled reading books, the positive effect is that those children now can practice their reading skills at home during evenings and weekends which contributes to their reading confidence and better reading skills. The principal, media specialist and reading coach have all noticed the Ebinport little free libraries are definitely used by the communities. These little libraries often need frequent replenishing. They are kept stocked by community businesses with an equal passion for improved literacy for our city's youth.

Communication between the school and parents is always difficult to perfect. Information about events and deadlines can be critical to parental involvement and ultimately increased student success. To improve parent communication at Ebinport, the SIC encouraged the adoption of an electronic E-News letter that is sent out to Ebinport families once a week. Subscribers receive it in their inbox or read it on the school's website for current events. Families can also be informed about school news on the horizon. Social media accounts started by Ebinport's SIC for the school's parents, faculty and staff, such as Twitter and Facebook, are also used to communicate and relate with one another. This includes, but is not limited to, a family and teacher Spanish Immersion Facebook page to promote fellowship and support for our language immersion program in its 4th year of existence, a PTO page, and an Ebinport Twitter account. The Ebinport SIC Facebook page currently has 145 "Likes" or followers. Through this conduit, the SIC is able to communicate important information, events and helpful tips that parents and Ebinport families might need in a timely manner. With this increased reach of information going out to parents and families, the school has seen an increase in parental involvement and less complaints from parents about knowing when and where events and deadlines will occur. Our SIC believes that involved parents inspire their students to do their best.

It was brought to our attention that students were not willing to try healthy food options, that they did not know where their food came from, and had a general disconnect to the natural world. In an effort to encourage and educate our students in these areas, our SIC installed a school-wide garden plot in the middle of campus. Our teaching gardens program established by SIC parent volunteers and sustained by the collaboration of SIC and Ebinport staff is second to none. It is funded by award winning grants from government agencies, businesses and community organizations. The local master gardeners of our county and the District's Wellness Committee use our gardens as a model of an excellent example of sustainable gardening that produces both beauty and bounty. All 600+ elementary students get the chance to learn, to touch and to taste their work every spring and fall in this working garden. Garden lessons taught by a Master Gardener are directly aligned with South Carolina standards taught in the classroom, and are reinforced and brought to life in the garden. From worm releases, to plant parts and animal habitats, to soil, rocks and landforms, our students wrap up elementary understanding sustainability and how ecosystems work. Our children experience it all in a hands-on environment that many say they "love" and "never would experience otherwise". Surveys given to students by their teachers show this garden experience is immeasurable in its benefits and value to our students. In addition to serving the students at Ebinport elementary, each semester Winthrop University students studying to become educators visit Ebinport's gardens as a model for these future teachers as they embark on their new careers.

Our school has a very large enrollment and after analyzing our school's climate data for two consecutive years, there was a consistent theme of behavioral issues interrupting learning noticed by both staff and the students themselves. With the help of an SIC parent led initiative, our staff and parents collaborated on a Social and Emotional Learning project whose priority was to focus on its students' social and emotional skills. During 2014-15, a few teachers at the school piloted the program that

allowed them to measure students' social and emotional skills using a strengths-based assessment that helped them not only identify areas of strength, but also pinpoint areas in need of further instruction. The program also provided strategies that the teachers will use in their classroom or could send home for individual skill building.

All in all, Ebinport's SIC and staff have worked extremely hard to identify needs and address them in new and innovative ways. We are exceptionally proud of the initiatives and the results of those initiatives at our school.

Kelly Scott, SIC Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.