

Application for 2018 Riley Award

School District of Oconee County

Walhalla High School
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Walhalla High School SIC Case Statement

The School Improvement Council (SIC) at Walhalla High School (WHS) strives to promote a positive school climate and to create a welcoming environment for students, parents, community members, faculty and staff. We work closely with our school administration to ensure that our efforts are aligned with the WHS Strategic Plan. Below you will find a summary of five major issues we were facing, the actions we undertook to make a difference, and the results achieved in the 2016-2017 school year.

1. SIC Student Involvement

Issue: Student representatives were not attending our SIC meetings and did not feel like they held an important role on our committee; in other words, they were disengaged.

Actions: In the spring of 2016, we actively recruited students by asking them to complete a questionnaire reflecting on their experience at WHS. We were looking for students who were thoughtful and willing to engage in this reflective process. We were also beginning to plant the seeds that their voice mattered.

We understood that students had many obligations to sports and clubs that would interfere with their ability to attend evening meetings; so, in the fall of 2016, we changed the time of our meetings to 7:15 a.m. to encourage student participation.

We identified a teacher advisor to guide the students and hold regular meetings outside of monthly SIC meetings. The principal and SIC Co-Chairs also met with the students and their advisor to welcome them to SIC and let them know they had a unique and valuable perspective that was needed to help us meet our school improvement goals.

We created time on the SIC meeting agenda for students to report on their accomplishments and share their ideas, comments and concerns. To create a culture promoting students' expression of their own opinions, beliefs and ideas, other members were asked to consciously avoid speaking and/or offering suggestions during the students' allotted time.

Results: Student engagement in the school improvement process was increased as evidenced by:

- 15 students actively participating on SIC in 2016-17; vs. two students with low attendance in 2015-16
- Increased student attendance at every SIC meeting
- Students met twice a month outside of the monthly SIC
- Students created their own SIC t-shirts
- Students volunteered at SIC sponsored events
- Students voiced their concerns and offered suggestions for improving student engagement
- Students had a proposal approved to place a suggestion box in the school Commons Area
- Students held a canned food drive to donate to community organizations

2. Integration of Tamassee-Salem High School (TSHS) SIC with Walhalla High School SIC

Issue: Due to the closure of TSHS in the spring of 2016, students were integrated into WHS in the fall of 2016. This school closing was unwelcome for many TSHS students and parents. We strove to fully integrate the TSHS SIC with the WHS SIC so TSHS students, parents and teachers felt welcome and had a voice at their new school..

Actions: The SIC Chair met with the TSHS Chair in the spring of 2016 to create a plan for actively recruiting TSHS students, teachers and parents to serve on the WHS SIC. The TSHS Chair reported that there was not strong community involvement in their SIC. In 2016, we actively reached out to TSHS teachers transferring to WHS to invite them to nominate themselves to serve on the WHS SIC in the 2016-2017 school year. We actively recruited TSHS student nominees to serve on the WHS SIC in the 2016-17 school year and invited all 2015-2016 TSHS SIC parents to automatically serve on the WHS SIC in the 2016-17 school year.

Results: TSHS was well represented on the WHS SIC in the 2016-2017 school year:

- TSHS Chair became Co-Chair of WHS SIC
- TSHS parent member became Secretary of WHS SIC
- TSHS parent member served on WHS SIC
- TSHS teacher was elected to serve on WHS SIC
- TSHS student was elected to serve on WHS SIC

3. SIC Data Collection

Issue: There was not a standard process of data collection to provide the SIC with information around goal development and to provide a measure of our progress toward previously set goals.

Actions: We developed a survey that assessed the degree of satisfaction with school climate, communication, student learning, parent engagement and student engagement. Because typical parent attendance at student IGP meetings is 95%, we took that opportunity to distribute our surveys in the lobby while parents were waiting to meet with their student's advisor.

We also asked a member of the data collection committee to informally survey students to gain awareness of their experiences at WHS.

We invited Dr. Myriam Torres to conduct a focus group with Latino families at WHS, and we worked with her to develop focus group questions that would be a good fit for our school. We asked our parent liaison to identify families who would be willing to participate in this event.

Results: The WHS SIC successfully obtained the following data to inform goal development and monitor progress toward SIC goals:

- One hundred thirteen surveys completed by parents during the 2016-2017 school year
- Six Latino Parents participated in the Focus Group led by Dr. Myriam Torres
- Ten SIC students participated in the Focus Group led by an SIC parent member

4. Communication and Outreach to WHS English speaking and non-English speaking parents

Issue: For a variety of reasons, many parents did not feel welcome to be involved at WHS and did not know how they could become involved.

Actions: We worked actively to increase communication with parents, provide opportunities for involvement, and increase parent awareness. We also were particularly conscious of making sure our message reached Latino parents.

We created SIC social media sites, including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, to advertise and promote SIC events and keep parents informed of opportunities to be involved at WHS and on SIC.

We hosted a family-focused event in January featuring nationally known speaker Kathy Whitmire who presented "How the Teenage Brain Works." This event also provided parents with an additional opportunity to meet with faculty midway through the school year. We asked our principal to host a question and answer session during the event to address a new and unexpected change in course scheduling for the following school year.

We also asked our principal and athletic director to allow parents to help sell tickets at spring sporting events. This gave parents an opportunity to volunteer at school and reduced the number of teachers needed to work after school.

We hosted a Walhalla United professional development event for all faculty and staff from five Walhalla area schools. We invited Dr. Myriam Torres to present on "Engaging Latino Families in Schools." We gathered donations from local businesses to provide breakfast to attendees, and an SIC parent catered the breakfast at no cost. All parents and students volunteered at this event.

We reached out to the participants in our Latino focus group and invited them to host our annual Teacher Appreciation Luncheon, as well as to serve on our SIC in a variety of ways.

Results: The WHS SIC successfully improved communication and outreach to parents from a diverse background in the following ways:

- Active sharing on SIC social media sites throughout the 2016-2017 school year
- Seventy-five attendees at our Family Focus Night on January 19, 2017
- Over 250 attendees at our Professional Development event on February 17, 2017
- Volunteers covered over 10 spring sporting events and relieved teachers from their after school duty
- Five Latino parents cooked a traditional Mexican feast for teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week
- Added three bilingual/Latino community members to the SIC, and retained one bilingual teacher and one Latino parent

5. Increasing opportunities for student success and recognition

Issue: Achievements of underclassmen were not being fully recognized, as the school traditionally only held a senior awards night. In addition to honoring top students and athletes, we wanted to recognize students with a variety of talents. We also wanted to help disadvantaged students have exposure to college experiences and access to necessary resources to be successful in school.

Actions: We obtained permission from administration to host the first annual Underclassman Awards Night to honor achievements by freshmen, sophomores and juniors. Parents were invited to attend this event and refreshments were served.

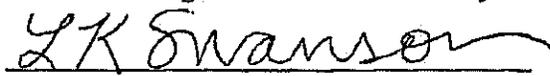
We supported Grace's Closet, an in-school boutique founded by an SIC community member, to provide clothing, food, school supplies and hygiene products for all students at no cost.

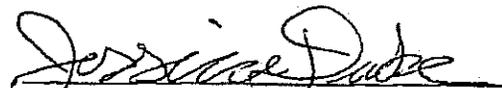
We supported and facilitated a mentoring program spearheaded by one of our community members who works at Southern Wesleyan University (SWU). SWU athletes and college students mentored Latino athletes and at-risk students at WHS. These mentoring programs promote school success and access to college for all.

We invited the student Razor of the Month and Nurturing Oconee's Workforce (NOW) recipients and their families to be recognized at our monthly SIC meetings. Razor of the month students are selected for their attitude of service and compassion at WHS; NOW students excel at working in industry and are in good academic, discipline and attendance standing within the district.

Results: The WHS SIC increased recognition for a diverse group of students with a variety of talents and enhanced opportunities for school success as evidenced by:

- Grace's Closet was open twice a week during the lunch hour for all students to access resources
- SWU athletes shared meals, practiced with WHS athletes, and shared their diverse backgrounds to promote pursuit of college for nontraditional students
- At-risk students visited and toured SWU to increase their awareness of college opportunities
- Over 75 students were recognized at the first annual Underclassman Awards Ceremony on May 18, 2017
- Three NOW participants and their families and one Razor of the Month and her family were honored at SIC meetings in the 2016-2017 school year


Lorlei Swanson – WHS SIC Co-Chair 2017-18


Jessica Duke – WHS SIC Co-Chair 2017-18