

## Have You Heard of South Carolina’s Summer Reading Camps?

By Candice Lowman

Last June, SC Governor Nikki Haley signed into law Act 284 – the Read to Succeed Act of 2014. The purpose of this piece of legislation is to improve literacy rates of student across the state.

One of the many components of Read to Succeed (also referred to as R2S) is the creation of third grade Summer Reading Camps. Each school district in South Carolina must identify third grade students who are not reading proficiently on grade level and then provide them with the opportunity to attend a Summer Reading Camp to help increase their level of literacy.

*(continued)*  
see “Summer Reading Camps”  
pg. 7

### In this Issue

- Executive Director’s Message.....pg. 2
- SC-SIC Board Nominations.....pg. 3
- SC-EPFP Accepting Applications.....pg. 3
- Social Media App Guide.....pg. 3
- Reaching out to Hispanic Families....pg. 3
- More Effective Communication.....pg. 4

## Blythewood High School SIC wins 2015 Riley Award



The SIC of Blythewood High School in Richland School District Two was named the recipient of the 2015 Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence on March 7 at the SC-SIC Annual Meeting at River Bluff High School in Lexington. Receiving Honorable Mentions for their work last school year were the SICs of J.L. Mann High (Greenville County Schools); Myrtle Beach Cluster (Horry County Schools); North Augusta High (Aiken County Public School District); and Rudolph Gordon Elementary (Greenville County Schools).

Pictured here are: (front row, left to right) Dr. Debbie Hamm, Richland Two Superintendent; Amelia B. McKie, Richland Two Board Member; Dr. Traci

Young Cooper, Chair, SC Board of Education; Charlie Riley, grandson of Dick and Tunky Riley; Dr. Brenda Hafner, Blythewood High Principal; Clarissa Bennett, Blythewood High SIC Chair; Chaundra White, Blythewood High SIC Member; (back row, left to right) Gary Alexander, Blythewood High SIC Member; Tom F. Hudson, SC-SIC Executive Director; Ted Riley, son of Dick and Tunky Riley; Chip Jackson, Richland Two Board Chair.

Also receiving awards from SC-SIC were Ms. Melanie Barton, Executive Director of the SC Education Oversight Committee (SIC Advocate of the Year Award); and State Representative Jerry N. Govan, Jr., District 95, Orangeburg (SIC Legislator of the Year).

## Message from the Executive Director

**Tom F. Hudson**



For those of you who are on Facebook, there's an internet meme going around (with over 36,000 "Shares" and nearly a million "Likes") which captures a list of 100 wise sayings a high school economics teacher gave his graduating seniors. As we are at the end of the school year, with graduation ceremonies and commencement speakers offering uplifting words to our young people, I thought I'd share several sayings on that list which I believe are especially relevant to School Improvement Councils.

These wise words cover all aspects of life. Some just strike me as common sense, such as: #15 – "Hold your heroes to a high standard;" or #24 – "Don't linger in the doorway. In or out;" or #47 – "When opening presents, no one likes a good guesser;" or perhaps #89 – "Buy the orange properties in Monopoly;" and even #2 – "Never cancel dinner plans by text message."

School Improvement Councils have vital roles to play in the life and health of our state's more than 1,100 public schools. SIC members are important participants in the visioning and reviewing of their school's Five-Year Plan. So, I believe #98 is particularly apropos – "Make goals." If your Council doesn't have goals in mind to direct its work, how can you tell what impact you're having? If you need some help or ideas on goal-setting, just let us know and we'd be glad to help.

#8 – "Just because you can doesn't mean you should." It must be understood that just having goals isn't enough. Are they the right goals for your school? Will they bring about the desired change? Goals aren't a one-size fits all thing; what works for one SIC might not work for another. So get to know your school's needs and not just its wants.

#81 – "You are what you do, not what you say." Indeed, actions do speak louder than words. We can come up with all sorts of wonderful ideas, but they remain only ideas if we don't take steps to put them into practice. Is your SIC recognized as one that works hard and is a tangible presence for good in your school community? Or is your SIC merely a bunch of names on a roster somewhere? If focused properly and duly motivated, your Council can be a significant change agent for the success of your school and your students.

#3 – "Don't knock it 'til you try it." During your SIC's planning and discussion of goals it's important that your members keep an open mind about new ideas and activities. That's one reason why elected terms on the SIC are staggered – so there's an infusion of new blood (and ideas) each year. Remember change and improvement can't come to fruition if we only stick to doing things the way we've always done them.

*(continued)*

*see "From the Executive Director"*

*pg. 8*

*Council News - Vol. 37, Issue 2, 2015*



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# SC-SIC Board of Trustees Seeks Nominations

The SC School Improvement Council Board of Trustees is composed of individuals from every region of South Carolina and serves in an advisory capacity to the SC-SIC office and staff. Board members are elected to three-year terms; vacancies for unexpired terms are appointed by the Board Chair. The Board will be conducting its annual elections in July for the Class of 2018, and it seeks individuals willing to serve and assist the work of SC-SIC statewide.

Members of the Board represent a variety of personal and professional backgrounds (parents, educators, current SIC members, school board members, former legislators, and more), and the Board strives to maintain its diversity. This year, the Board is seeking representatives from all regions of the state.

If you know someone who has a demonstrated commitment to public education, or if you yourself are interested in serving on the SC-SIC Board, nominate that person or self-nominate for consideration for Board membership. Just send a resume and letter of interest to SC-SIC Executive Director Tom F. Hudson at [hudsontf@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:hudsontf@mailbox.sc.edu), by July 10, 2015.

More information on the SC-SIC Board of Trustees can be found at <http://sic.sc.gov>.

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## SC-EPFP Now Accepting Applications for 2015-16

The SC Education Policy Fellowship Program (SC-EPFP) – a 10-month professional development program for established and emerging leaders in education and related fields designed to work toward the implementation of sound education policy and practice in South Carolina – is now accepting applications through August 14, 2015, for the 2015-16 academic year.

SC-EPFP operates under the auspices of the national Education Policy Fellowship Program (<http://epfp.iel.org>) of the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) in Washington, DC, which oversees Fellowship programs in over a dozen states and the District of Columbia. In South Carolina the program is coordinated by the SC School Improvement Council, located in the University of South Carolina's College of Education, with the assistance of the SC Department of Education's Office of School Leadership.

SC-EPFP meets monthly September through June (primarily in Columbia) for a full day of dialogues, interactive exercises, small group projects, book discussions, and more. An overnight Leadership Forum is scheduled in the Fall and a four-day Washington Policy Seminar hosted by the Institute for Educational Leadership is held in the nation's capital in April. Educators may qualify for recertification or certificate renewal credits, and graduate credits may also be available.

For more on the SC Education Policy Fellowship Program, including additional program information, application materials and tuition costs, visit <http://sic.sc.gov/sceducationpolicyfellowshipprogram/Pages/index.aspx>.

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## App Guide for Parents and Teachers

By Claudia Parnell

Some social media apps such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter, when used wisely by teens and tweens, are relatively safe for students and can help them shine as they create an online profile. Such a digital footprint can impress both colleges and future employers. However, not all apps are alike!

Below are several apps that the website [safesmartsocial.com](http://safesmartsocial.com) does not recommend for teens and tweens as the content is unmoderated, frequently inappropriate, and can lend itself to cyberbullying. Child predators are also known to use many of these apps. Students feel safe using them and often engage in risky behavior because the apps are advertised as anonymous. But screenshots (which can be taken, saved, and downloaded) bypass this feature. Some of the apps can also link to other social media accounts. "Anonymous" is never really anonymous.

(continued)  
see "App Guide for Parents and Teachers"  
pg. 5

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## Reach Out Effectively to Your Hispanic Parents and Families

By Karen Utter

The SC School Improvement Council has seen an increase in requests for information about engaging Hispanic parents. This is likely due to the fact that South Carolina's Hispanic population is growing at the fastest rate in the US.

Here are a few beginning Do's and Don'ts when reaching out to Hispanic parents:

### DON'T

- **Don't assume that Hispanic parents don't care just because you don't see them at school events.** Like all parents, Hispanic parents love their children and want them to succeed in school. In addition to common problems like work conflicts or child care needs, Hispanic parents often face unique barriers to engagement.

(continued)  
see "Reach Out Effectively to Hispanic Families"  
pg. 6

# Learn Your Parents' Priorities, and Make Your Communication More Effective

*By Nora Carr, APR*

Research is the cornerstone of effective public relations, at both the district and school levels. Smart strategy is impossible without it, and otherwise solid tactical approaches often misfire due to mistakes that some upfront research could have prevented. That's why a little research, whether done district-wide or for an individual school by the principal, is critical to determining parent attitudes and desires.

## **Parent priorities may be a surprise**

In my school district, Guilford County Schools (GCS) in North Carolina, some of our local trends mirror national results; some don't. If I based our communication approach solely on national data or trends, or what we administrators think parents want, I could easily lead us down an Alice in Wonderland rabbit hole of distortion.

For example, two years ago, it would have been easy to assume that our local community would be as obsessed with safety as the rest of the country, given the horrific school attack in Newtown, Connecticut. Yet when surveyed, our parents listed the quality of education as the top issue facing our schools. Last year, safety did rise to the top, but the biggest concern was bullying, not violence, while quality education ranked second, followed by home-school communication.

Interestingly, despite national studies showing that parents now rank charter schools as better than public schools, our parents and community indicated that GCS magnet and traditional schools rate higher than our local charter schools. We're also asking parents whether they believe their child's school supports the development of good character, has good academic programs, and other marketing-oriented questions. Again, our parents who know us best, rated us well on all measures.

This is good news for us, and something to build on. At the school level, principals can use this data to identify topics on which to focus communication and to promote success stories that will enhance their school's "brand." On the other hand, if results aren't so positive for an individual school, that principal knows communications efforts must be improved. Perhaps, they will need to address tactics and strategies they and their staff use to connect with parents and families. Or, they may need to take a more critical look at classroom instruction.

## **Newsletter surveys, questionnaires, and informal discussions**

If your district doesn't conduct annual research, it's not difficult to do it yourself. A simple survey of a few relevant questions can be included as a tear-off in a print newsletter to parents or part of an electronic newsletter for which parents can email their answers back to you.

You have many opportunities to do research with parents during the school year. Ask them to complete a short form at an open house program, parent-teacher conference or PTA/PTO meeting. And never miss a chance for informal research by talking with parents at school events.

If your parent responses are as positive as those for GCS families, take advantage of them and let everyone know, including all staff members, parents, and others in your school community.

## **Closing the 'perception gap'**

A challenge for GCS and many schools is the gap between parent and community perceptions. Similar to the local-national split seen on every PDK-Gallup Poll, our research shows that our community members don't rate us as highly as parents do.

Since most of our community members and voters don't have school-aged children, this is a significant issue. It's also a concern that just like the national data, our parents rely more heavily on school communication for news about GCS, but community members tend to get information from newspapers, national media, word-of-mouth.

It's clear that we have work to do to build more community awareness, understanding, and support for schools.

## **Shared experiences and connections**

As a principal, if you know through your own or district research how your community members rate your school, so much the better. But

*(continued)*  
*see "More Effective Communication"*  
*pg. 7*

# “App Guide for Parents and Teachers”

*continued from pg. 3*

While most are rated for older teens, younger kids usually have no problem bypassing age restrictions. For this reason, it is important that you begin a dialog with your child about the apps they are using and why some are considered unsafe or unsuitable for their age group. While it’s tempting to simply restrict usage, nothing can replace open conversation about social media activities. Keep yourself informed about the latest apps by visiting websites such as safesocial.com and reading about apps and websites that are considered unsafe. There are many, many popular social media apps and new ones pop up every day. Here are just a few of the most popular ones that parents should be aware of:



## **AfterSchool App**

After School is an anonymous app that encourages students to post confessions on their school’s private message board. It has been removed twice from the AppStore because of threats and arrests. Nonetheless, hundreds of thousands of people have already downloaded it on their phones and can continue using it. The “anonymous” platform lends itself to cyberbullying, sexting, and chatting about alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. Because of the perceived anonymity, some students have posted threats which have led to arrests.



## **Ask.fm**

Ask.fm is a social networking website set up in a question and answer format. It is quite popular with teens and tweens. The content is unmonitored and users must agree to use the site at their own risk. According to the social media advisory website [webwise.ie](http://webwise.ie), it “is increasingly being used as a means to communicate abusive, bullying and sexualized content” and is “associated with some of the worst forms of cyberbullying.” The site is integrated with Facebook and Twitter and can easily connect to accounts on these sites. What is posted on Ask.fm is easily shared and can appear on these other sites with little effort. When laws are broken or tragedies such a suicide have been linked to the site, authorities in the U.S. and Great Britain have had difficulty in gathering data because it is based in Riga, Latvia.



## **Burnbook**

Burnbook is a new, anonymous teen app causing problems on school campuses. It has also gotten a lot of attention from police and law enforcement. It requires location information to link to the students’ schools. Teens and tweens use the app to write comments and rumors about schoolmates, teachers, and others. The app encourages students to use real names when sharing rumors about others at their school and to take screenshots of rumors and save them to their phone. This leads to bullying issues.



## **Omegle chat**

Omegle is a text and video chatroom connecting strangers who then talk with each other. When someone uses Omegle chat it picks a random user and lets them have a one-on-one chat with each other. There is also a video chat feature. The content in video chatrooms is unmoderated. The app can search for similar interests on another user’s Facebook page and pair with that user for chatting. While the app encourages an 18+ age restriction, younger kids can easily circumvent it. Again, the content is unmonitored and users can choose from the “Adult” or “Unmoderated Section.” Omegle chat is anonymous, but as with other risky social media apps discussed in this article, screenshots are frequently posted online, the most popular being screenshots of video chats. Faces and conversations can easily be seen. Omegle chat has been used by predators and criminal cases have arisen in several states.



## **Yik Yak**

According to the Yik Yak website, “Yik Yak acts like a local bulletin board for your area by showing the most recent posts from other users around you. It allows anyone to connect and share information with others without having to know them.” However, some students have compared it to a virtual bathroom wall where hateful remarks and rumors are spread by other users. Like other apps with age restrictions, (the app is supposed to be 17+), younger students have no trouble bypassing them. The app seems to be primarily used by students for cyberbullying and to ravage the self-esteem of others, including school staff and faculty as well as other students. Teens and tweens feel safe posting anything they wish as they believe that they are posting anonymously and cannot be caught. School closings have occurred because of threats made on Yik Yak. But the company can and has shared location data that has resulted in students’ arrests.



## **StreetChat**

Streetchat is very similar to the Yik Yak app. The app allows a user to connect to school campus board to post on or browse photos on. Unlike the AfterSchool app, where the user is a student at a chosen school, StreetChat allows you to change schools every 24 hours. Concerns include cyberbullying (the app is tied to location and students often use real names of their classmates or teachers in their posts) and the private messaging option. StreetChat encourages users to post pictures captured by their cameras and pictures that are already in their phones. The images are awarded “karma points” (up or down votes contributed by other users). This technique makes the app exciting for students as it turns it into a gaming experience.

*(continued)*

*see “App Guide for Parents and Teachers”*

*pg. 6*

## “Reach Out Effectively to Hispanic Families”

*continued from pg. 3*

Some may not understand how the US education system works. They may not be familiar with traditional activities like PTA/PTO or they may believe that it is disrespectful to approach teachers with questions. These kinds of difficulties are compounded when parents do not speak English, find themselves living in poverty, or both.

- **Don’t assume that all Hispanic parents are alike because they all speak Spanish.** Cultures and customs differ among Spanish-speaking regions or countries.

- **Don’t assume that translating written school information into Spanish will meet the needs of all non-English speaking parents.** Some non-English speaking parents do not read Spanish well; they need school information delivered orally in Spanish.

### DO

- **Do take steps to find out about Hispanic parents: who they are, where they are from, what their goals are for their children, and what their needs and preferences are.** Seek out bilingual volunteers to help gather this information using surveys or small group discussions.

- **Do develop volunteer roles that match the needs of the school with the resources that Hispanic parents have to offer.** For example, Hispanic parents can prepare foods from their home countries to serve at the teacher appreciation luncheon. Or, they may have special skills to share with students in music, art, dance, theater, or sports.

- **Do create opportunities for honoring and sharing information about the culture(s) represented within your Hispanic community.** Not only will this help Hispanic families feel included, it will enrich the learning experiences of all students. Your SIC might co-sponsor a school-wide fair celebrating all different cultures within your school, or teachers might have students research and share their own family cultural heritage with the class.

- **Do provide multiple ways for Hispanic parents to build new knowledge and skills.** Offering access to school computers and language-learning software has been successful in building bridges between schools and Hispanic parents. So have programs that pair non-English speaking parents with bilingual parent “mentors.”

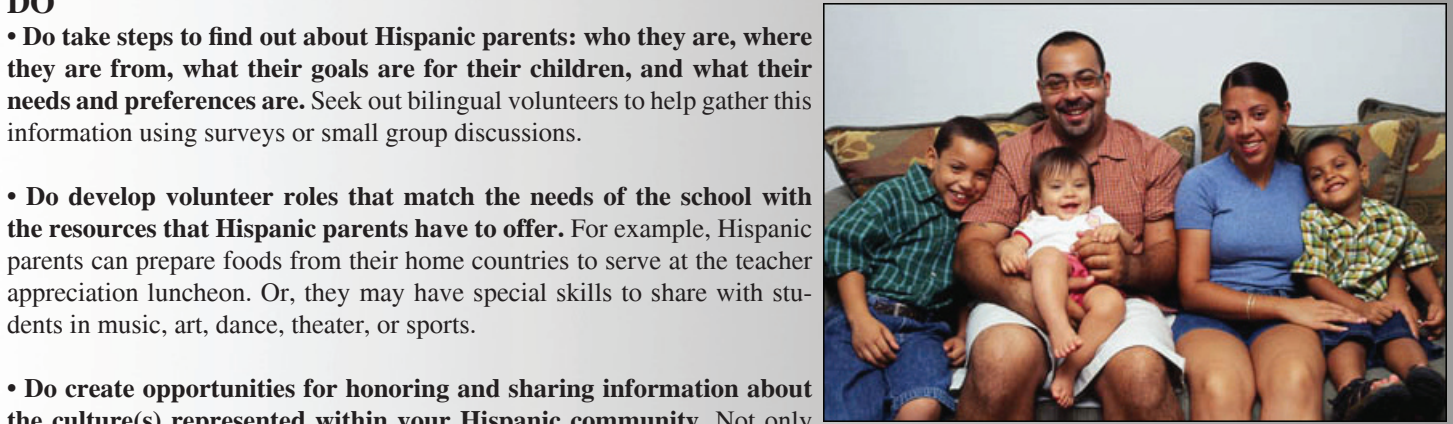
By focusing on these various points (as well as others than can be found in research), your school and SIC can begin taking active steps to not only build a better relationship between the school community and non-English speaking families, but you can lay the groundwork for more effective participation in the life of the school and your students.

### **More Resources:**

Hutchins, D., Greenfeld, M., Epstein, J., Sanders, M., Galindo, C. (2012). *Multicultural Partnerships: Involve All Families*. New York, NY: Routledge. (includes specific ideas for engaging elementary and middle school families)

Campos, D.; Delgado, R., Soto Huerta, M.E. (2011). *Reaching Out to Latino Families of English Language Learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD (includes multiple suggestions for reaching out to Hispanic parents, resource lists, and tools in Spanish and English).

*About the Author: Karen Utter is Coordinator of Council Services for SC-SIC*



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## “App Guide for Parents and Teachers”

*continued from pg. 5*

The apps discussed above are by no means the only dangerous ones currently used by students. Stay educated about social media by checking sites like *mashable.com*, *safesmartsocial.com*, *familyeducation.com*, and *commonsensemedia.org*. Have regular conversations with your children about the apps they and their friends are using. Check your child’s phone for the above icons and others you may learn about as you research potentially dangerous social media websites and apps. Students are using social media every day and SC-SIC encourages you to become and stay media-savvy. Happy and safe socializing!

*About the Author: Claudia Parnell is Digital and Web Director for SC-SIC*

# “Summer Reading Camps”

*continued from pg. 1*

In addition to passing R2S, the SC General Assembly provided additional funding to districts in order to hold these camps for their students. Those identified will attend a camp four hours each day, four days a week for six weeks (or the equivalent of 96 instructional hours). Local school districts will have flexibility as to how the days of Summer Reading Camps will be structured.

During the camps student will be taught by highly qualified teachers who have experience in working with struggling readers. Students will have the opportunity to receive small group and individual instruction to work on their reading, writing, listening, and research skills.

Summer Reading Camps are not mandatory for those students not reading proficiently – parents have the option to not have their children participate. However, families are encouraged to have their students take part in the literacy adventures that will be occurring during the camps. School districts are also encouraged to partner with local businesses and community groups to provide supplemental learning opportunities after the academic instruction has occurred.

The SC Department of Education (SCDE) has provided districts with guidance on how to implement an effective camp based on the lessons learned and best practices from districts that held reading camps last summer. SCDE will have information available for parents on ways they can support their children’s learning experiences in the near future on the Read to Succeed website, <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/ie/School-Transformation/ReadtoSucceed/>.

SCDE looks forward to collaborating with districts, parents, and business/community leaders to provide summer learning opportunities for our state’s students, and it welcomes any feedback on how it can strengthen these partnerships. Such feedback can be addressed to the general Read to Succeed email address, [ReadtoSucceed@ed.sc.gov](mailto:ReadtoSucceed@ed.sc.gov).

*About the Author: Candice Lowman is an Education Associate within the SC Department of Education’s Office of School Transformation.*

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# “More Effective Communication”

*continued from pg. 4*

if that’s not the case, consider the steps we’re taking in GCS to bridge the “experiential divide” between school families and residents with no connection to our schools. You’re in a perfect position to make a dent in that perception gap at the school level.

Convincing more people that their destinies are tied to children they don’t know, don’t see, and haven’t met, requires more engagement. We’re aiming for more shared experiences, and more ways to connect with retirees and other seniors. You can offer these shared experiences at the building level.

Invite your school neighbors, and people from local senior action groups or retirement centers into your building for events and activities. Use tactics such as pen pal letters, student visits to community centers, along with special programs just for neighbors or just for seniors.

When you start making community connection, you can ask those people to become “key communicators.” Share school news with them regularly, and ask them to pass along your success stories to their friends and neighbors.

## **‘Our challenge, honor, and privilege’**

All this may seem a bit overwhelming for a principal to complete, but the critical thing is making the commitment to learn more about your school through informal research tactics. Your communication efforts will be more effective.

We have wonderful and worthy children in our schools. It’s our challenge, honor, and privilege to help more people: 1) realize it; and, 2) do something about it.

*About the author: Nora Carr, APR, is Executive Chief of Staff for Guilford County Schools, Greensboro, NC, and is immediate past president of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)*

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# “From the Executive Director”

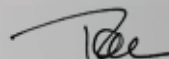
continued from pg. 2

#90 – “Make the little things count.” SICs are all about relationships. Their success is not built so much on what you know, but by who you know. What community member has the passion and resources to help us with (fill in the blank)? Isn’t Mary’s mom specially trained in (fill in the blank)? Get to know them. By building relationships, your SIC can strengthen its ability to tackle the goals it sets forth, and relationships are grounded on making what seem to be little things really count. Take care of the little things and it’s a whole lot easier to take on the big ones – with the buy-in of others.

#61 – “Forgive yourself for your mistakes.” Mistakes happen. They happen to everyone. Most likely, as hard as we’ve tried to eliminate them, there are several typos in this issue of *Council News*. SICs can make mistakes: a project didn’t turn out as the Council wished; an envisioned goal sounded good but wasn’t a good fit for the school community. These things happen. The only way to not make a mistake is to do nothing, and an SIC that doesn’t do anything benefits no one. A Council must forgive itself, learn from the experience, and move on. Sometimes we learn the best lessons that way. [Corollaries to this are #56 – “Admit it when you’re wrong” and #49 – “Give credit. Take blame.”]

As we head into the summer months and begin preparations for a new school year in August, I would ask each of our nearly 15,000 SIC members to think about the wise words offered by that (real or imagined) economics teacher of cyberspace. Take a look at all 100 if you can find the list on Facebook or the Internet. What other words of wisdom would benefit you as an SIC member dedicated to helping your school and students be their best? And while there might be merit in #7 – “Don’t underestimate free throws in a game of HORSE,” there is more value here in #55 – “When you’ve made your point, stop talking.”

So I’ll end with #42 – “When giving a thank you speech, short and sweet is best.” Thanks to all of you for what you do month in and month out on behalf of your SICs, schools, students, and communities. Your hard work and commitment is noted, greatly appreciated, and invaluable.



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## A Few Things to Remember....

### *SIC Report to the Parents*

The SC-SIC office requests that all SICs upload their 2014-15 *SIC Report to the Parents* to the SC-SIC Member Network by June 1. The *Report to the Parents*, a responsibility given to local SICs in state statute, should have been produced and provided to the public by April 30. For information on how to post your *Report*, visit the SC-SIC website, <http://sic.sc.gov> or call 1-800-868-2232.

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### **Schedule SIC Trainings**

Now is the time to think about scheduling trainings for your SIC members for 2015-16. SICs function more effectively if they know what their roles and responsibilities are. In the coming months, SC-SIC staff will be in touch with SIC District Contacts across the state to begin scheduling training sessions for their districts. Watch the SC-SIC website to find out when a session

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### **SC-SIC Member Network Reset July 1**

The online SC-SIC Member Network will reset on July 1 to enable local SICs to begin reporting their membership information for 2015-16 school year. While the annual deadline for reporting SIC membership information is not until November 15, designated Member Network users may begin entering their SIC’s information after that date if their SIC conducted spring elections and their membership information is already available. Account users will have to update their login and password information for the new school year. Directions for this are available on the SC-SIC website or by calling 1-800-868-2232.

will be held near you. Don’t see one listed for your district? You can contact your SIC District Contact directly to ask for one, or contact the SC-SIC office.