

SC-SIC Council News



"Civic Engagement at Work for Public Education"

Volume 40, Issue 4, 2020

SIC Basics Virtual Training Now Available for Districts

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it necessary for schools and the SC School Improvement Council to adopt new ways to operate and carry out their responsibilities.

Beginning this fall, SC-SIC has been conducting its "SIC Basics" training sessions virtually rather than through its traditional face-to-face offerings at the district level. While in-person sessions provide more opportunity for relationship

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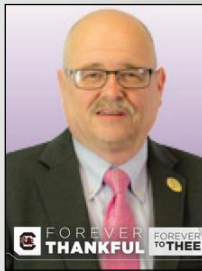
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Three Join SC-SIC Board of Trustees

Michael Guarino of Mauldin, Clara Heinsohn of Charleston, and King Laurence of Aiken have joined the SC School Improvement Council Board of Trustees, Board Chair Robert Grant has announced.



Michael Guarino

Mr. Laurence was appointed to fill the remainder of an unexpired term as a representative of the state's CSRA region. Mr. Guarino and Ms. Heinsohn were elected to full three-year terms representing the Upstate and Low-country regions, respectively.

"We are fortunate to have these three dedicated individuals now serving on the SC-SIC Board," said Mr. Grant. "They each have demonstrated a special commitment to public education in our state, and more particularly to the important roles School Improvement Councils serve in the lives of school communities."

The SC-SIC Board of Trustees is composed of 17 members from all corners of South Carolina and acts in an advisory capacity to the SC School Improvement Council, which serves over 13,000 members of local SICs in the state's 1,100-plus K-12 public schools.



King Laurence



Clara Heinsohn

Mr. Guarino is a former public school parent and past chair of the Mauldin High SIC (Greenville County Schools). He previously served on the SC-SIC Board (2009-18), including two terms as board chair. A former long-time technical support supervisor with Verizon Wireless and small business owner, he has also served as a past board member of the Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina, and past board president of Odyssey Online

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Message from the Executive Director

Tom F. Hudson



At this time last year, if you were to ask what things in our nation, state, and communities, would look like in December 2020, I'd venture that very few people would have painted a picture such as what we see today. The 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years have been indelibly colored by the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on our society, institutions, and psyches.

Of course, it has also greatly impacted our schools. And by our schools, I mean our students, their families, and our educators. Seemingly overnight last spring, we had to redefine how to "do" school; to continually re-envision teaching and learning; to re-imagine school-home relations and communication.

Our state's School Improvement Councils, too, have had to make necessary adjustments. Whether it has been shifting to online meetings, holding virtual membership elections, or determining just what work to do for their schools within this new landscape in which we find ourselves, SICs have had to respond in ways which are new and far from routine.

So many of an SIC's functions revolve around relationships – identifying them, building them, nurturing them. This can be challenging under the best of circumstances when we're able to actually meet and share face-to-face. In today's world, when social distancing is so necessary and convenings are relegated to computer and cell phone screens, how do we convert those two-dimensional images to three-dimensional and more meaningful relationships?

It's not easy but it is necessary. Because the work goes on. Regardless of whether school and classroom doors are open, or whether the rooms for instruction are those of Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom, our students and schools need the vital impact that family/community engagement brings. We know from the research the positive and lasting effects such engagement fosters: increased student achievement; improved student behavior; stronger school-home relations; and heightened support of educators. Amid what we are facing today, our schools need these all the more. Our state's SICs are intended to be prime movers for the growth of such engagement. They have been for the past four decades. So they will continue to be, if our SICs are even more intentional in their outreach, collaboration, and communication.

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Has Your SIC Reported Its Membership for 2020-21?

All School Improvement Councils are reminded that the statutory deadline for reporting local SIC membership information to the SC-SIC office through the online SC-SIC *Member Network* is November 15 each year. If your SIC has yet to submit its information for the current school year, please do so as soon as possible.



If they have not already done so, *Member Network* account users – principals or their designees – will need to update their log-in and password information for the current school year. Directions for this can be found on the *Member Network* site accessible through the SC-SIC website or by contacting SC-SIC Digital and Web Director Claudia Parnell at cparnell@mailbox.sc.edu.

And principals, if your school is a new or re-organized school for 2020-21 not currently listed in the *SC-SIC Member Network*, please email Ms. Parnell to assist you in getting your SIC established in the database.

The *Member Network* is a user-friendly reporting mechanism which not only documents the members of local SICs as required by state law but helps account holders ensure that their SICs are compliant with laws regarding their composition. If the information entered is not compliant with composition requirements, the *Member Network* will provide a message stating why the SIC is not compliant and what can be done to remedy the situation.

Teacher Self-Care Strategies

by Laurann Gallitto Patel, MMFT, Lead Regional Liaison, Carolina Family Engagement Center

As a dedicated (and busy) educator, you may need a reminder that practicing self-care is essential to your well-being, especially during times of uncertainty or overwhelming transitional periods.

Here are three suggested ideas for practicing self-care while the usual routine of schools is disrupted:

1. Look for small ways to take care of yourself throughout the day. You may try deep breathing and/or meditation, taking a moment to listen to music or enjoy silence, exercising, or dedicating time in nature to sit or walk.
2. Reflect on your feelings and needs. By recognizing what is within your control and what is not, you may be able to think more clearly about what you need presently and in the future.
3. Acknowledge moments of joy and gratitude. You may want to write these down and post your list in a place that you see every day (or privately in a journal) for a positive daily boost or ask your students to share their own.



Incorporating these daily or weekly practices will not only help with managing responses to stressors, but also promote empathy, resiliency, and loving kindness within yourself, your students, and your classroom families.

New CFEC Resource Promotes Kindergarten Readiness

If you serve on a School Improvement Council at an elementary school in South Carolina, you have likely heard some discussion about kindergarten readiness and the impact that readiness levels can have on student success in kindergarten and beyond. As you may be aware, South Carolina requires schools to administer a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) to all incoming kindergarteners. The [results of the fall 2019 KRA](#)



indicate much work remains if we are to ensure that every child enters kindergarten prepared for success.

Families and caregivers can play an important role in ensuring children are ready for kindergarten, but they need to know what progress towards readiness looks like and what they can do to help at home. To meet this need, the Carolina Family Engagement Center (CFEC) – housed in the SC School Improvement Council – has created a series of six colorful, easy-to-read guides for families titled, *Ready, Set – Kindergarten!* Each guide addresses a specific area of growth and development that impacts kindergarten readiness such as language development, mathematical thinking, and children’s physical and social-emotional development.

The guides provide families and caregivers with samples of the experiences and range of skills that their child should be able to learn and do by the end of ages 3, 4, and 5. These samples are drawn from the SC Early Learning Standards and the SC College and Career Standards. The guides suggest ways that families and caregivers can make learning and development in each area fun by incorporating it into play and everyday activities. Additional resources are also provided for those families and caregivers who want to learn more.

You can download and print copies of the English language version of the *Ready, Set – Kindergarten!* guides from the [CFEC website](#); a Spanish language version of the series is expected to be available in early 2021. Upon request, CFEC will make a print-ready electronic file available at no charge for districts, schools, or community organizations who wish to print a larger volume of copies for distribution to families.

Kindergarten readiness and family engagement in kindergarten transition can be impactful areas of focus for elementary school SICs. SIC projects in this area could include an initiative to place the *Ready, Set – Kindergarten!* guides in locations throughout your community including public libraries, child development centers, churches, or distribution points for food and clothing.

Other SIC projects might include raising awareness within your community of resources like the [Palmetto Pre-K website](#), a one-stop shop for finding free educational pre-K programs in South Carolina; working with your county’s First Steps office to increase participation in the [Countdown to Kindergarten program](#); sponsoring opportunities for families of incoming kindergarteners to network and ask questions of parents at your school; or creating welcome packets for families of kindergarteners with all of the information they need to be engaged parents during the elementary school years.

Three Join SC-SIC Board

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Learning, a public charter high school (formerly known as Provost Academy South Carolina). Active in his community, he has also served as a PTA member and officer in both South Carolina and New York.

Ms. Heinsohn is public affairs officer for the Charleston County School District, where she previously served as the district's director of public affairs and volunteers, SIC district contact, and a member of the Ashley River Creative Arts Elementary SIC. In 2010, she was named state SIC Advocate of the Year by the SC-SIC Board of Trustees. A former K-12 research director for the SC Senate Education Committee, Ms. Heinsohn was an elementary school teacher for 25 years. A board member of the SC Arts Alliance, she also served as a mentor for the College of Charleston Teacher Leader Program, and was a gubernatorial appointee to the SC Commission on Women and the SC Education Oversight Committee. She holds BS and MA degrees in Education from Winthrop University.

Mr. Laurence is superintendent for Aiken County Public Schools, where he has also served in several district-level leadership positions as well as SIC district contact. He was previously a teacher and assistant principal for Edgefield County Public Schools for over a decade. In 1978, Mr. Laurence served as a high school student on what may have been one of the first SICs in the state, and subsequently served on SICs as a teacher and principal. A former president of the SC Association of Title I Administrators and member of the SC Reading Recovery Advisory Council, he most recently chaired the 2020 Innovative Ideas Institute Committee of the SC Association of School Administrators. Active in his community, he is a member of the Aiken County Commissions for Higher Education and Technical and Comprehensive Education, and was a charter member of the Aiken County First Steps Partnership Board. Mr. Laurence holds the BA degree in Education and the Master's degree in Educational Administration from the University of South Carolina.

Virtual Training Now Available

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building, virtual trainings provide the same information with the added benefit of scheduling flexibility and cost-savings in travel.

“SIC Basics” is primarily intended for new School Improvement Council members but is also a good refresher for longer-serving members. Participants receive an overview of state legislative mandates regarding SICs, membership requirements, elections/appointments, reporting, and SC-SIC support and resources. They also explore the primary roles and responsibilities of SICs and their members in working collaboratively to identify, set, and achieve goals to assist their local schools.

As local SICs change a portion of their membership each year, it's a good practice for SIC members to be exposed to training conducted by SC-SIC staff. While normally scheduled on a district-wide basis, individualized training for local SICs may be scheduled on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, [three 20-minute video segments on basic SIC responsibilities](#) can be viewed on the SC-SIC website, and can be incorporated as a part of local SIC meetings. SC-SIC's current training schedule can also be viewed [online](#).

To schedule a virtual “SIC Basics” training session, contact your [SIC District Contact](#) or reach out the SC-SIC office at 1-800-868-2232 or sic@mailbox.sc.edu. We look forward to hearing from you and being with you virtually for “SIC Basics” training!





“Food for Thought” shares information and ideas – reprinted with permission of the original sources – on topics which local School Improvement Council members may wish to consider and discuss. Publication here does not necessarily reflect the endorsement of SC-SIC.



Why Cursive?

Importance of Cursive

Some may wonder why students should learn to write in cursive in the age of tablets and iPhones. Won't everyone just be typing and dictating in the future? While electronic devices have added an element of convenience to the writing process, evidence is mounting that putting pen to paper has benefits that typing cannot replace. Researchers have found ties between writing by hand and everything from language skills to memory to critical thinking.

HANDWRITING VS. TYPING

In a recent study entitled “The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard,” researchers Pam Mueller and Daniel Oppenheimer found that students who take notes by hand perform better on conceptual questions than students who take notes on laptops. They concluded that students who type their notes tend to transcribe the lecture and to process the lecture only on a shallow level. Students who take notes by hand actually digest the content and reframe it in their own words - a process that increases both understanding and recall.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HANDWRITING TO WRITING QUALITY

By analyzing numerous studies, researchers Steve Graham and Tanya Santangelo found that teaching handwriting is strongly correlated to improvement in the quality of writing (not just the legibility of the handwriting, but the quality of the composition).

The writing process involves a number of “low-level” skills - such as handwriting, spelling, and grammar - along with a number of “high-level” skills - organization, strategy, considering the parameters of the topic and the needs of the reader, etc. When students aren't proficient at the low-level skills and have to work hard just to get words onto the paper, they don't have enough brain power left to execute the high-level skills. But when students have fluent handwriting, they are free to concentrate on the high-level skills we associate with good writing. As Graham and Santangelo point out, even with the presence of computers, much of the writing done in primary school will necessarily be done with pencil and paper, so students who fail to develop fluent handwriting will suffer.

While the benefits of handwriting can be observed in student performance, they can also be observed in the brain itself. A study using MRI technology showed that writing letters, as opposed to viewing them on a screen, is associated with more advanced brain function. Pre-literate children who actually wrote a letter showed brain activation in areas associated with reading and writing in adults, while children who viewed the letter on a screen did not.

BENEFITS OF CURSIVE

And, according to neurologist William Klemm, the neurological benefits of writing by hand are compounded with cursive writing. “Cursive writing, compared to printing, is even more beneficial because the movement tasks are more demanding, the letters are less stereotypical, and the visual recognition requirements create a broader repertoire of letter representation.” Researcher Diane

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From the Executive Director

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I am proud of the flexibility and dedication I've seen from SICs across the state these last eight months or so, and their determination to make a difference despite these nearly overwhelming times. While we don't know what lies ahead for us in the coming months, I know that South Carolina's School Improvement Councils – over 1,100 strong with their 13,000 local members – will help lead the way to a new normal and brighter days for the students and school communities they serve.

Here's wishing for you and yours a safe, healthy, and happy holiday season.



Why Cursive?

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Montgomery posits that the connected letters and fluid motion of cursive handwriting are especially beneficial to students with disorders such as dyslexia and dysgraphia.

Yet many fail to recognize the value of cursive. The authors of the Common Core, regarding old-fashioned writing as antiquated in the modern age, leave little time for handwriting instruction, filling students' and teachers' time with other substantive subjects.

This focus on academic content at the expense of form has the potential to do more harm than good. When students write confidently and legibly, their academics as a whole seem to improve. And cursive is an academic skill at which everyone can succeed. At Blackshear Elementary School, a Texas school that famously revived its failing academic condition by focusing on handwriting, the teachers noted that excellent handwriting was a goal to which all students could aspire. While certain gifted students may rise to the top again and again in the academic subjects, any student can aspire to have excellent handwriting and can achieve the goal with practice.

And, for students who are struggling, success in one area can be the key to unlocking greater academic potential. As Dr. Klemm observed, "As a child learns to master academic challenges, self-confidence emerges and provides a drive to learn more because the child knows that achievement is possible. Learning cursive is an easy way for a child to discover important tactics for learning as well as the emotional benefit of being able to master a task."

CURSIVE AND CREATIVITY

Cursive has the added benefit of being both artistic and highly personal. Children no less than adults long to express their individuality and creativity. Developing a cursive hand - epitomized in the signature and carried through in a unique form of writing that others can identify and associate with a particular individual - is an important step in developing a personal style and voice. Students are not automatons, and education should include tools that encourage the individual personality.

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Happy Holidays
from SC-SIC