

Belvedere Elementary School

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Aiken County Public School District

2023 Riley Award

Case Statement

School Demographic Information

Belvedere Elementary School strives to embody the motto of "Live. Love. Learn. Leave a Legacy." The faculty supports all students for future goals by focusing on the World Class Skills of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate while creating a balanced environment of nurture and academic rigor.

Student enrollment shows an upward trajectory from 601 to 634 students over the last year. This feels magnified because of the dip in in-person enrollment to below 500 during the 2020-2021 school year. The student population is 28% African American, 12% Hispanic, 8% Multiracial, and 52% Caucasian. 9.5% of eligible students are identified as gifted and talented and 16% of the students receive accommodation and/or support through IDEA.

Belvedere, founded 68 years ago, is comprised of a variety of building additions and portables with the most recent addition opening in the 2022-2023 school year.

There are several initiatives that have been established to truly prepare students to meet the standards of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.

- There are currently four cohorts of Mandarin Chinese language learners, which is a Graduate characteristic in World-Class Knowledge: multiple languages. These students learned Mandarin Chinese during their math and science instructional periods. The students also learn about the Chinese culture. Research has indicated that students that learn another language have many positive outcomes, including higher-level of academic achievement, more critical thinkers, and increased opportunities in the business world. These students excelled not only in Mandarin but in their native language on the Fast Bridge and MAP assessments, as well.
- At Belvedere Elementary, various programs have been designed to focus on Life and Career Characteristics – work ethic, and interpersonal skills. The Student Council has planned several events to welcome new students and build student morale. Over 75 students applied and were selected to serve as Reader Leaders and read biweekly with younger students. A sock drive resulted in hundreds of socks being collected to be donated to those in need. Belvedere also built and established a "Blessings Box" to collect and distribute canned food.
- Teachers have developed intervention plans for grade levels, small groups and individual students to accelerate achievement and compensate for learning loss due to school closure and high absences over the previous years. These collegial conversations led to improved classroom instruction and intervention. Professional development was targeted from classroom observation and student achievement data. Classroom teachers engaged in instructional planning days in which academic conversations and planning focused on understanding the level of rigor within reading and math standards, planning units containing highly effective instructional strategies and the development of standards aligned assessments. These instructional initiatives increased opportunities for students to develop their World Class Skills – critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and teamwork, and knowing how to learn.

Issue

Looking at the achievement levels on the School Report Card, it was evident, even with these initiatives, that COVID absences and school closure had a dramatic impact on student achievement and school culture.

At Belvedere Elementary School, we believe a crucial component for success is that all stakeholders share in creating our future South Carolina Graduates. With that in mind, our School Improvement Council has truly been an integral part of taking the initiative of working diligently to interpret school data and take actionable steps to support school improvement. The Belvedere School Improvement Council collaborated with school faculty, the Title I team, and the Parent Teacher Organization to analyze an assortment of data: SCREADY and SCPASS data, School Report Card data, Parent, Student and Faculty Report Card Survey, discipline data, and the data related to students identified as State and Local in the Gifted and Talented class.

Based on the compilation of all this data and school level initiatives, the School Improvement Council chose to focus intentionally on the area of stakeholder involvement. Based on the School Report Card for 2021, 75.9% of parents were satisfied with school-home relations.

It became an objective that stakeholders be motivated, engaged in learning and feel a part of our school community. The five-year goal was established to increase percentage of parents satisfied with school-home relations from 75.9% to 85.9%

Action Taken

The School Improvement Council planned and implemented several actionable steps over 2021-2022 school year and continue their implementation, currently.

First, they conducted stakeholders' needs assessments for students, parents, employees, community members and partnerships. This assessment provided insight that parents wanted increased communication from the classroom teacher, such as needs assessments and more clarity for volunteer opportunities post-Covid.

Ongoing, the SIC has worked to establish a network of business partnerships to partner with Belvedere for additional community involvement. Some initial partnerships have been Groves Nursery, Bel-Ridge Baptist Church, Warren Baptist Church- Belvedere Campus, and Atomic City Smokers. Their generous donations and support have helped with some school beautification projects and prizes for student achievement. To maintain momentum, the SIC has worked hard to recognize partnerships in both school newsletters and social media posts.

Another ongoing initiative has been to increase volunteer opportunities for family and community members. This was done by establishing a mentoring program that includes individual and small group options to support students with both academic and emotional needs and opportunities for intervention tutoring. The first step in this process was to recruit volunteers. SIC set up tables at all events from registration, Meet the Teacher, Open House and Parent Conference Day to have interested parties fill out necessary paperwork and to sign up and receive volunteer training. From when there were no volunteers allowed and only the SIC and PTO members could be volunteer trained in 2020-2021 for a total of nine approved, Belvedere currently has over 140 approved volunteers. Further, we have five mentors who come weekly to work with over twenty different

students on a regularly scheduled basis. We have four who tutor four or more days a week in our kindergarten class. The SIC's intentional efforts to explain the need and recruit volunteers have opened so many doors for the Belvedere students and have strengthened the connection between school and home.

The SIC has advocated for clear communication between school and home for academic goals, school events and even information about how to support students. After collecting feedback on the parent survey, in collaboration with the school staff, created handouts have been created about supporting students at different reading levels, monthly family bulletins, and handouts about different services available to students. Also, they have helped revise information about goal setting for students into parent and home friendly language. All this information has been provided to families in a variety of modalities (Facebook, In Person, Flyers) with ongoing input from the SIC.

Results

In the Spring of 2022, on the Title I Parent Survey, 81.3% selected agree that they were satisfied with school-home relations. On the 2022 School Report Card, 88.7% of families were satisfied with school-home relations. This 12.8% increase in a single year truly exemplifies the hard work and dedication of the Belvedere Elementary School Improvement Council and the fruits of their labor.

Kemi Brown Retz
SIC Chair

Dear SC-SIC Awards Committee-

As the principal of Belvedere Elementary School, the strength of the partnership between our School Improvement Council and our school has been monumental in our success.

I was hired as the principal during the school closure through the pandemic. When we returned to in person instruction in 2020-2021, we started with a hybrid model and throughout that year, no volunteers or visitors were allowed in the building. By the end of that school year, data on the school report card showed there was a great break between school and home with almost a fourth of the families feeling this relationship was not in place.

When some of the regulations were lifted during the 2021-2022 school year, it was crucial to repair that broken school-home relationship. For our students, there must be a team united between the school, family and community to fully support them. This is where our School Improvement Council hit the ground running.

Immediately, they began reaching out to families to see what they needed to feel there was a strong relationship. They took that information back to our school leadership team and collaborated on the next steps.

First, the Meet the Teacher was restructured to allow more networking for families and volunteer training and sign ups were incorporated. This continued through Open House where presentations were tailored to what SIC helped to determine parents wanted: knowing how to support their student at home. This event incorporated volunteer training and sign ups as well. At parent conferences, parent friendly handouts were available about how to support students at home, specifically with math fluency and reading.

Based on a volunteer survey that SIC helped to incorporate in volunteer training, interests were determined, and volunteers could be plugged into mentoring, tutoring, helping in the cafeteria and carline and more. Instead of parents feeling like the only option was to chaperone field trips, they could see there were so much more!

I truly feel the partnership with SIC has provided Belvedere's leadership team with the "insider look" for how to involve parents and the community in a meaningful way. I credit this partnership and the intentional efforts of the SIC with the dramatic almost 13% increase to 88.7% of families being satisfied with school-home relations. I look forward to future growth with this phenomenal partnership.



Allyson Long

Principal, Belvedere Elementary School

Dear SC-SIC Awards Committee,

Belvedere Elementary School Improved Council has not only increased our volunteer opportunities but has dramatically improved the intentionality of plugging volunteers in based on needs, strengths and interests. As the early childhood reading interventionist, the new structure has allowed me to recruit volunteers from a larger pool of parents and community members.

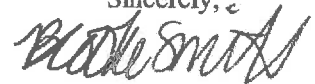
I was looking for volunteers who were able to commit to working with kindergarten students four days a week. I needed volunteers who were willing to work with students who were struggling with identifying their letters. Because the SIC recruited and trained so many volunteers at the beginning of the school year, I was able to acquire four consistent and helpful volunteers that could commit to four days a week. These volunteers served fifteen kindergarten students.

Based on the progress monitoring data collected, these students made significant progress in identifying their letters. These fifteen students could identify between one and fifteen letters in a minute before they started with the volunteers. After six weeks, they progressed to between eighteen and thirty-six letters in a minute.

Based on this initial success, volunteers have continued working with our students and have been able to incorporate groups focusing on letter sounds. This work done by these volunteers allows school interventionists to put a greater focus on students who aren't making progress and need more intense instruction.

I am very grateful for our SIC and the efforts they continue to make to increase volunteer opportunities for family and community members. The success of the SIC initiatives that were intended to focus on strengthening school-home relations have had an even greater impact as we are seeing student achievement growth and our teachers more supported by the additional volunteers.

Sincerely, ^c



Brooke Smith

K-2 Reading Interventionist

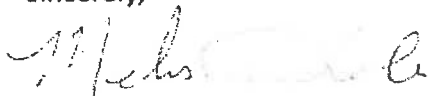
December 1, 2022

Dear SC-SIC Awards Committee:

It is easy for a school to write a clever slogan, to promise great things, and to boast of success. I am blessed that my daughter attends a school that actually delivers on their promises. Due in large part to the tireless efforts of our SIC, Belvedere Elementary School (BES) has been consistently successful in uniting the families and community in productive action. As parents, we receive regular communications, inviting us to participate in meetings or volunteer opportunities. Just recently, our SIC held a School Beautification Day. Staff, teachers, parents, students, and community members contributed both materials and time to enhance our grounds with improved landscaping. We are proud to have developed a campus that is a pleasure to spend time on and are grateful to the members of our SIC for all they have done to make this possible.

I would dearly love to see our wonderful SIC recognized for their hard work and dedication to our school. They truly help make Belvedere the BEST – and that's not just a slogan.

Sincerely,



Melissa Cole

Parent

Belvedere Elementary's School Improvement Council has historically demonstrated a commitment to align the work to the Strategic Plan which is composed every five years with annual revisions. The year 2021-2022 was year 5 of 5 of the Strategic Plan. There had been steady progress with the goal to focus on school-home relations. However, with school closure and modified calendars and visitor restrictions from March of 2020 through spring of 2021, parent survey responses demonstrated only 75.9% of parents were satisfied with school-home relations.

The School Improvement Council made an intentional focus on increasing home-school relations. The first step was holding a meeting open to all to review school data and specifically parent-survey feedback. From there, a focus group was formed to discuss school-home communication. Belvedere began a visually appealing monthly newsletter in addition to weekly calls, Facebook and Dojo posts, and parent email with all upcoming events and activities.

Then the next step was increasing parent volunteer opportunities and training. At every family event, parent volunteer applications and training were made available. Belvedere increased "cleared" volunteers from under twenty the previous year to over 150 currently.

The School Improvement council then revisited the Title I budget, and with the amendment window open, pursued requesting the addition of a Parent and Family Liaison. With this added position, a parent "library" was developed with resources for home play and practice was developed. Parents of intervention students also began receiving bi-weekly updates of progress and strategy suggestions at home.

During the spring of 2022, the School Improvement Council began developing suggestions for the new Strategic Plan. With this new 5 year plan, the focus continued for strengthening school-home relationships but also developing community partnerships to support these connections. Further, the School Improvement Council wanted more depth in communication where parents were more aware of student needs and school goals. The SIC worked to develop and prepare parent friendly handouts for conferences that explained reading levels, math skills and even different components for students with IEPs

To further increase school-home relationships, the School Improvement Council met with the Parent Teacher Organization and Title I Committee to really break down what each organization does, how they are truly an interdisciplinary group to support Belvedere Elementary. For this meeting, each classroom teacher personally contacted two parents from their classroom to grow membership in all organizations and involvement.

During Spring of 2022, parent survey results showed 88.7% of parents were satisfied with school-home relations. This was a 12.8% increase from the previous year.

Moving into the 2022-2023 school year, the School Improvement Council continued to focus on school-home relations but also school beautification. Partnering with a local landscaping company, Hargrove Nursery, the School Improvement Council began planning how to revitalize the school Butterfly Garden. Further partnerships have been developed with Lowe's Hardware to provide discounted plants and shrubbery, the local Cub Scouts who built an outdoor classroom and birdhouses, Atomic City Barbeque who provides snack for volunteers and the PTO who uses fundraising profits to assist with purchases.

In addition, the school counseling team and intervention team at Belvedere have partnered with the School Improvements Council to continue to develop meaningful volunteer opportunities. There are initiatives in place as well for guest readers in all classrooms. The School Improvement Council also continues to create more parent friendly resources and information to strengthen the relationship between school and home.

The future for Belvedere Elementary and maintaining the "community school" feels well on track thanks to the ambitious and diligent efforts of the School Improvement Council.