

SOUTH CAROLINA SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT Council News

"Assisting Schools Statewide"



Fall 2003

SICs Get To Work, SC-SIC Provides Assistance

By Cassie Barber

From the mountains in the Upstate to the Lowcountry beaches, School Improvement Councils are getting down to serious business now that fall is nearing an end. Officers have been elected and committees have been formed. Plans are being reviewed, bylaws are receiving updates, programs are undergoing evaluation, and school report cards are receiving careful study. SICs are carrying out their mission and the South Carolina School Improvement Council office in Columbia is providing support and training for each step they take.

Three regional mini-conferences were held this fall, focusing on the "basics" of convening an effective SIC. Training sessions in Greenville, North Charleston and Columbia featured workshops on the school report card, developing bylaws, leadership and meeting skills, and using the SIC Handbook as a foundation for becoming a Riley Award winning SIC. An elected official was in attendance at each location and each session featured a different keynote speaker hailing from that region.

Conference evaluations indicate that participants found the information relevant to their work and that they would recommend others attend future SC-SIC sponsored events. Several SIC members remarked that next time they will bring enough council members to ensure they have someone in each workshop session so they won't miss anything. *Pine Grove Elementary School* in *Richland District One* brought seven members, the most of any SIC at all three mini-conferences.

If you were unable to attend the fall

mini-conferences, don't worry. Three more regional mini-conferences will be offered this spring. Be sure to review the dates and locations listed in "Mark Your Calendar" (pg. 5) and make plans to attend.

The spring mini-conferences will feature workshop sessions on "How to Write the Report to the Parents," "Education Advocacy," special "forums" for SIC members to discuss current issues in public education, and other workshop topics yet to be announced. The Second Annual Dick and Tunky Riley School Improvement Award will be presented at the Columbia mini-conference in March. SIC members may attend the mini-conference of their choice at any location.

A registration mailer will be sent to everyone in the SIC database in January 2004. You will miss out on this and other important information if SC-SIC doesn't have your current mailing address. SIC chairs are encouraged to forward council names, addresses and designations to their District Contact. The District Contact is responsible for entering the information into a database that is forwarded to SC-SIC. The deadline for submitting this information is November 15th of each year.

Once the information is received, SC-SIC updates the database so that current SIC members will receive newsletters and other important information. Registration information along with the registration form will also be available on the SC-SIC Web site: www.ed.sc.edu/sic, and you may call toll-free (1-800-868-2232) if you need more information.

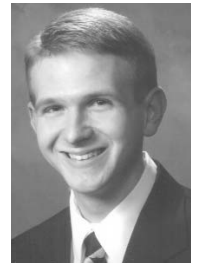


Rep. Ronald Townsend addresses SIC members during Greenville mini-conference.

Teacher Leaders Partner with SICs

By Jason Fulmer
SC Teacher of the Year 2003-2004

The 2003 district Teachers of the Year met this fall as the *SC Teacher Forum* under the auspices of the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA).



Jason Fulmer

The state Teacher of the Year has the honor of convening the Teacher Forum and the privilege of choosing a focus or theme for these professional educators. This year the theme is Leadership: teachers as leaders in their school, their district, their community, and their profession.

Working closely with teacher leaders such as the Teacher of the Year at their school, school improvement councils can tap the energy and enthusiasm of accomplished professionals. In fact, including the school's Teacher of the Year as an ex-officio member of the school improvement council would be a powerful addition to the council membership.

(Continued)

See *Teacher Leaders* page 5

In This Issue...

- Message from E.D. . . . pg. 2
- New Board Members . . . pg. 3
- Point of View pg. 4
- Mark Your Calendar . . . pg. 5
- SIC Action Timeline . . . pg. 5
- Tools You Can Use . . . pg. 5
- Legislative Update . . . pg. 6



Message from . . . the Executive Director

And . . . They're Off!

Deciding to accept the opportunity of the funding crisis, SC-SIC started the year determined to deliver new services and training opportunities to School Improvement Council members and do it with less money and staff. The challenge for the staff was to do a good job (high quality) and do it quickly.

We turned to the use of television technology to deliver information on topics SIC members needed now, and in a format that could be accommodated into a regular meeting. In collaboration with SC ETV, three half hour Council Updates have been broadcast and two more will air in December. Now school improvement councils can learn first-hand how to interpret the new School Report Card, how to organize to advocate for their school, and to learn what the federal NCLB requirements mean for their school.

Another form of technology available is the SIC Handbook in two PowerPoint presentations easily downloaded from the SC-SIC web site for use in groups or individually. One is a short overview of the main points in the Handbook about SIC responsibilities, membership, and organization designed for quick reference. The second is a fully developed review of the information in the Handbook including questions to be discussed, and documents to locate and use. Both versions are scripted.

The final use of technology is the creation of a Video Handbook showing real councils in operation in real schools conducting the business of improvement. Tips and suggestions for actions and discussion questions to pursue are included. Soon to be available to all schools via the DELCs, a VHS copy will also be distributed to every SIC District Contact.

All of that technology is good, but there's always the highly valued teaching method of human interaction needed for effective adult learning. So we tried another new approach to get information to SIC members quickly. Nearly 200 council members attended three regional mini-conferences held on Saturdays this fall with the theme: "Get Ready, Get Set, Go!" Participants learned how to conduct effective meetings, how to organize themselves into efficient committees to share the work, and how to create bylaws that would provide a foundation for their operation over time. They're Off! to a good start.

This is the first leg of the race for the school year. More topics and issues will be discussed on future Council Updates and three more regional conferences are planned for February and March. We're Off! for the second leg. See you in the home stretch.

Jean M. Norman

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SC-SIC Board of Trustees Welcomes New Members

Four new members have been elected to the SC-SIC Board of Trustees and a fifth was appointed to fulfill an unexpired term. Board members hail from all parts of South Carolina and each brings experience, expertise, and commitment to SICs and public education. SICs are encouraged to access Board members as a special resource; contact information can be found on the SC-SIC Web site.



***Wilbur Cave** is a former state legislator from Allendale and Director of Constituent Services in the Hodges Administration. Mr. Cave is currently the executive director for Allendale County ALIVE.*



***Gigi Dawson** is the Pediatric Oral Health Coordinator for Communi-Care. A former middle and high school teacher, Ms. Dawson has also worked for the SC Department of Education's Healthy Schools Initiative. She lives in Columbia.*



***Rev. Dr. Wilmot T. Merchant II** is the rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in North Myrtle Beach. Originally from Liberia, West Africa, Rev. Merchant also served as a priest in Cambridge, MA, Paterson, NJ, and The Bronx, NY before coming to SC.*



***Angela Page** is a retired county extension agent who earned her BS in Family and Child Development from Winthrop University. Ms. Page served on the SIC at her son's school, North Mullins Primary, in Mullins, SC.*



***Maria Gregory Taylor** holds a Master's degree in early childhood education and has been a teacher for 29 years. Ms. Taylor lives in Simpsonville and is the Program Manager for Parents as Teachers at the Golden Strip Family and Child Development Center for the Greenville County School District.*

POINT OF VIEW

SC-SIC Board of Trustees Comments and Commentary

School Improvement Councils and the Preparation of New Teachers

By Bruce E. Field, Ph.D.



Anyone who has spent even a short amount of time around P-12 schools, and particularly around universities which prepare people to work in those schools, has undoubtedly heard the old adage that *"Nothing teacher preparation programs do can adequately prepare prospective educators for the reality of teaching."* I've heard this statement repeated many times in my own twenty-five years of teaching and learning, and I have to admit that there is a certain grain of truth in this old dead horse.

New teachers do encounter a wide range of experiences in their first few years of teaching. Short of designing the all-knowing crystal ball, universities that train teachers are hard-pressed to predict exactly what surprises will come their way. On the other hand, I also believe that most reputable teacher preparation programs have done a better job in recent years of preparing prospective teachers for the day-to-day realities of the classroom by ensuring that individuals considering teaching careers have frequent opportunities to actually observe and participate in real-life settings. This more thoughtful approach stands in stark contrast to the experience many of us encountered in years gone by, when the final student teaching semester was our first and only opportunity to sit on the proverbial other side of the desk.

As much as teacher preparation has improved in this regard, I don't believe many university programs have added an element which would further enhance new teachers' understanding of the multifaceted world of education. That is, few programs provide teacher candidates with an in-depth, or even a cursory, knowledge of the teaching world outside of the classroom. In the one profession which comes under public scrutiny perhaps more so than any other, few novices in the field are adequately aware of issues the beyond-the-classroom which guide both legislatures and the community when planning educational policy.

New teachers come into the schools well versed in lesson planning, assessment techniques, providing content for learners, and monitoring and enhancing learning for their students. But they are less conversant on such topics as school funding, the role of school boards and other stakeholders in the educational process, report cards, and the critical elements of such legislation as *No Child Left Behind*. In short, they arrive in the schools well prepared to teach but with a limited understanding of how teaching and learning fits into the larger context of the

educational community.

I have thought about this shortcoming on many occasions in my two-plus years as a member of the SC-SIC Board of Trustees. At our Board meetings, I have marveled at the insightful conversations and well-developed action plans focused on expanded community involvement in the schools. But I also have wondered if School Improvement Councils, like teacher preparation programs, are not somehow missing the boat in terms of educating new teachers about their roles beyond the classroom walls.

At one recent meeting, where the conversation somehow turned to families abandoning public schools in favor of private institutions, my reaction was a decided disappointment that people too often take that leap without fully considering what can be done to improve public education. In the same vein, I've been a bit disappointed that SIC plans for expanded community involvement in schools rarely take into account the issue of teacher quality. Progress in our educational system, it seems to me, requires not only expanded parent and community engagement but also a simultaneous strategy to involve prospective teachers in those conversations.

School Improvement Councils and the University of South Carolina have a golden opportunity to expand this conversation by combining resources to produce a greater awareness of beyond-the-classroom issues for individuals considering careers in teaching. As an initial step in this direction, Jean Norman and I will be making a January presentation at the annual meeting of the Holmes Partnership, one of the nation's leading advocates of collaboration between schools and universities. We hope to come away from that dialogue with a picture of how other institutions are dealing with this issue so that we can move the initiative forward in South Carolina. In the meantime, I challenge everyone involved with School Improvement Councils to think of ways that they, too, can link community involvement and teacher quality as we strive for what surely is our mutually shared goal - enhanced student learning.

Dr. Field is the Executive Director of the Office of School-University Partnerships and Clinical Experiences in USC's College of Education. He can be reached at 803-777-3029 or at fieldb@gwm.sc.edu.

Tools You Can Use!

Council Updates*

Thirty minute videotapes focused on current topics

1. Understanding Your School Report Card
2. Your Voice Matters! (Advocacy)
3. Applying for the Riley Award
4. Understanding AYP and Accountability
5. Your Voice in Action! (Advocacy)

SIC Video Handbook*

A 35 minute videotape to be used in conjunction with the SIC Handbook "The Basics."

SIC Handbook PowerPoint Presentations

1. Full length version contains 117 slides taken from the Video Handbook.
2. Mini-Handbook Workshop contains 39 slides and presents a brief overview of SICs.

Each presentation is fully scripted and can be used for group trainings or viewed individually. See the SC-SIC Web site** to download.

Printed Handbooks

1. "The Basics" is the primary resource for SICs - ask your District Contact for a copy, contact the SC-SIC office*** or download a copy from the SC-SIC Web site.**
2. A Spanish translation of "The Basics" is available on the SC-SIC Web site.**
3. "Creating an Education Foundation for Your School" is also available on the Web site.**

"No Child Left Behind" Brochure for Parents and Community Members will be available soon! Watch for it on the Web site and in your mailbox!**

*Check with your SIC District Contact or your local DELC (Distance Education Learning Center) for your copy.

**Visit www.ed.sc.edu/sic

***Contact SC-SIC at 800-868-2232 for information and assistance.

Teacher Leaders

(Continued from page 1)

About half of the teachers attending the recent meeting of the Teacher Forum indicated they were currently serving on a school improvement council or had served on one previously. Dr. Norman, executive director of SC-SIC, challenged the Forum members to work in their district to encourage local Teachers of the Year to participate on their school's council. They also learned that councils could name the Teacher of the Year as one of the ex-officio positions on the council ensuring that special leadership on the council every year.

School Improvement Councils and Teachers of the Year working as partners will help foster a spirit of collaboration for improvement among the professional educators, parents and the community to achieve common goals such as recruitment and retention of quality teachers. All school improvement councils are encouraged to include the Teacher of the Year as a member. All Teachers of the Year are encouraged to demonstrate leadership as a member of the school improvement council.

Mark Your Calendar!

December 3, 2003

Council Updates*

- 1) *Understanding AYP and Accountability.* Guest: Ellen Still, Special Assistant to the State Superintendent of Education.
 - 2) *Your Voice in Action.* Guests: Rep. Ronald Townsend, SC House of Representatives; Al Leonard, Principal, Saluda Trail M.S.; Jeff Nicholson, Chair, Saluda Trail SIC.
- 10-11 a.m. via SC ETV satellite channel 309; Rebroadcast 2 p.m.

December 5, 2003

- December Council Updates Rebroadcast
9-10:00 a.m. via SC ETV satellite channel 318
- October Council Updates Rebroadcast
- 1) *Understanding the School Report Card*
 - 2) *Your Voice Matters!*
 - 3) *Applying for the Riley Award*
- Noon -1:30 p.m. via SC ETV satellite channel 318

February 21, 2004

SIC Mini-conference - Mt. Pleasant

February 28, 2004

SIC Mini-conference - Greenville/Spartanburg

March 13, 2004

SIC Mini-conference - Columbia (Riley Award Presentation)

* Check with your SIC District Contact or your local DELC <http://www.sctv.org/nts/documents/delcs.html> for your copy.

SIC Action Timeline

Review the activities and deadlines below and check the progress of the SIC.



December

- Plans underway with school to help parents understand the information on the new School Report Card
- Council Updates taped from broadcast on Dec. 3 & 5 through the DELC
- Continue to review data contained in the School Report Card

January

- Register to attend regional SIC mini-conference
- Put plans into action for reviewing School Report Card information with parents
- Strategy committees continue to report progress of the plan
- Prepare to revise school renewal or improvement plan if visited by ERT
- Riley Award semifinalists notified to prepare for final round of judging

February

- Attend regional SIC mini-conference
- Tape Council Update



Legislative Update

The South Carolina General Assembly will return to work on Tuesday, January 13, 2004. Most of the focus of this year's session in the General Assembly is likely to be on budget concerns, especially education and health care funding issues. The state education budget situation is so serious that many districts have been forced to eliminate teaching positions and increase class size; there are simply no other places in district budgets left to cut, and no district has been left unaffected.

These difficult times make it is more important than ever for citizens to be active supporters of public education. To be effective advocates, it is vitally important that all citizens, and

especially SIC members, stay informed about education legislation moving through the General Assembly. The SC School Boards Association (SCSBA) and the SC Association of School Administrators (SCASA) have issued invitations to SIC members to join their grassroots advocacy networks. Signing up with one or both of these grassroots networks will keep you fully informed about education issues in the SC General Assembly and give you the opportunity to make your voice heard on the issues that are important to you and your school community.

To sign up for the SCSBA's daily legislative updates via e-mail, send your name and company/organization/school from your preferred e-mail address to Sandy Poole, sandyp@scsba.state.sc.us. Check out the advocacy section on their website www.scsba.org.

You can learn more about the SCASA when you visit their website at www.scasa.org. To join their email network list, send your name, address and telephone numbers to Betsy@scasa.org from your preferred email address.

You can also see a list of all the education, school and school district related bills by visiting the SC Department of Education website at www.myschools.com and click on legislation.

If you do not have access to the internet in your home or workplace, visit your public librarian and ask for help to set up a free internet address, then stop by periodically to check your email. Ask your school media specialist if this is a service that could be provided at the school for parents and community members. Stay informed and make a difference!

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