



“Your Voice Matters!”

“Engage in the process,” challenged Anton J. Gunn, keynote speaker at the 17th Annual SIC Conference *“Your Voice Matters!”* Three hundred SIC members learned skills to help them become better advocates for education, their schools, and their students. The learning process began with a simulation activity that



Anton Gunn, R, “lobbies” Senators Bubba, Stump and Fluff, played by Orlando Gonzalez, Thessa Smith and Nell Stewart.

demonstrated just how important their voices are to the legislative process.

Rather than simply *telling* citizens how to participate in government, Gunn, executive director of SC Fair Share, *shows* them how to participate through entertaining role play activities. With the help of other SC Fair Share staffers and members of the SC-SIC Board of Trustees, Gunn created a story about how a proposed law to charge parents \$1,000 for each student to attend school was coming up for a vote in the General Assembly. The deciding votes would be cast by five “senators” who only seemed interested in legislation affecting ducks. Told that the vote could occur at any time, “citizens” (conference attendees) were given paper for letter writing, postcards to mail, and telephones for making calls to their legislators. When the vote was taken all five legislators voted in favor of the bill to charge \$1,000 per child to go to school.

What happened?

Outraged citizens were asked to analyze what happened. It turned out that a small group of “citizens” had been organized by “lobbyists” to talk to the legislators in

favor of the bill. Gunn explained what the larger group could have done to counter the influence of the much smaller group of active citizens. The small group accomplished their goal, even though it was not what the majority had wanted. He illustrated how lawmakers respond to the constituents they hear from normally, even when their desires are counter to those of the often silent majority. It was clear that the larger group of citizens needed to get organized and Gunn shared a variety of strategies to help their voices be heard.

Gunn says to start before the crisis occurs. SIC members were encouraged to establish a relationship and create a history with *their own representatives*. When attending church, civic organizations, community events and activities, citizens should take the opportunity to share their ideas, values, and positions about issues with their legislators.

Methods of Communicating with Legislators

Types of contacts with legislators by priority of effectiveness:

- 1 – face to face (at home in the community and at Statehouse)
- 2 – phone call (leave a message if the legislator is unavailable)
- 3 – letter (keep it personal and sincere, not threatening)
- 4 – post card/email/petition (sometimes not read)
- 5 – form letter (often thrown away)

Legislators can’t know everything about everything; there are over 4000 pieces of legislation to consider every session. There are many issues that compete for their attention so “your job is to focus them on your issue,” directed Gunn. “Provide information they need to do the right thing on your issue.”

See Your Voice page 5

Richland Northeast High Wins Riley Award

The air was thick with excitement as Secretary and Mrs. Richard Riley took the podium during a luncheon celebrating the 25th Anniversary of School Improvement Councils at the annual SIC Conference. SC-SIC Board Member and Master of Ceremonies, Patrick Cobb, had just



Secretary and Mrs. Riley, R, present the Riley Award to Richland Northeast High SIC

announced the five finalists for the first Dick and Tunky Riley School Improvement Award named for the legendary couple on the stage. Mrs. Riley opened the envelope. “And the winner is...” she paused and everyone in the packed room held their breath, “Richland Northeast High!”

The crowd rose to their feet as Richland Northeast High SIC co-chairs, Debbie Brett and Susan Lourie, along with principal Ralph Schmidt, bounded to the stage. Secretary and Mrs. Riley presented the award engraved with the words, “For exemplary civic engagement in public education.”

The winners of the Riley Award put together a public relations committee to improve the image of the school and at the same time took on the challenges of

See Riley Award page 2

In This Issue...

- Editor’s Notes pg. 2
- No Child Left Behind pg. 3
- SIC Timeline pg. 3
- Rural Ed Report pg. 4
- New Ways to Raise \$\$\$ pg. 5
- Legislative Update pg. 6



Editor's Notes... from Cassie Barber

One of the primary ways that SC-SIC does its job is by communicating through this newsletter, which has been mailed out five times a year to everyone in our database. The database of SIC members and friends now totals more than 17,500 people! Printing and mailing a six-page newsletter to so many people is expensive. On the other hand, having so many people who are interested in receiving this newsletter is a good problem to have.

In these days of difficult budget cuts, SC-SIC opted to try a bold new idea and for the first time we emailed the newsletter to everyone who had supplied us with an email address. Unfortunately, several hundred of the addresses turned out to be invalid and we were unable to correct them. The information contained in the newsletters is important to council members and we don't want to leave anyone out, so we have decided to reduce the number of issues to four per year and continue to mail them to everyone in the regular manner until we collect new data from the districts in the fall. We are upgrading our database system and hope to serve the majority of our members electronically next year. An email database will also allow us to communicate with you quickly and inexpensively on a variety of issues. We ask that each council submit as many email addresses as possible to their district office next school year. We all have to do our part to reduce costs and increase efficiency.

SC-SIC is constantly looking for better ways to serve council members. In addition to the newsletter, our website www.ed.sc.edu/sic offers a great deal of information for SICs. We are interested in your feedback. Please send your comments to barber2@gwm.sc.edu or call toll-free 800-868-2232. Thank you for working with SC-SIC to improve the services we provide you.

Riley Award from page 1

dealing with youth violence and gang issues. "They might have chosen to gloss over the problems for fear of affecting their image," said Cobb, "instead they pulled together not only their own diverse and economically challenged school community, but also other district high schools to collaborate on youth violence and gang issues." Brett and Lourie credit the leadership and integrity of RNHS principal Ralph Schmidt with their success in addressing both issues concurrently.

All SICs in the state were invited to apply for the Riley Award last fall with a simple one-page narrative and three letters of support. The SC-SIC Board of Trustees Awards Committee chose 14 semi-finalists out of the initial applications. The semi-finalists then had to submit documentation that their SICs are in compliance with state law. They were also given the opportunity to provide other materials such as newsletters, videotapes and t-shirts to tell their stories. The Awards Committee chose five finalists from this group. An independent panel of judges chose the winner of the Dick and Tunky Riley Award from the five finalists.

"I was delighted with the high quality of the applications submitted by the five finalists," said Candy Leggett, SC-SIC Awards Committee Chair. "It is really exciting to have an award process to recognize the important work SICs are doing in our schools. It's about time these volunteers got a pat on the back."

Four School Improvement Councils were recognized with Honorable Mentions for the Riley Award: Dutch Fork High, Lexington District Five; E.L. Wright Middle, Richland District Two; Oakview Elementary, Greenville School District; and Satchel Ford Elementary, Richland District One.

Also honored during the luncheon was Joan Grimmert, Coordinator of Community Engagement for the Horry County School District, who received the SIC Advocate Award. Part of Ms. Grimmert's job is to act as the District Contact for School Improvement Councils and in this role she has gone above and beyond her job description in her efforts to make sure the SICs in her district received excellent training and support to do their jobs. To find out more about the SIC Conference and 25th Anniversary Celebration visit www.ed.sc.edu/sic/highlights17.html.

SC-SIC Board of Trustees

Robert Zuercher, Chair - Myrtle Beach
Betty Gregory, Vice-Chair - Columbia
Patrick Cobb - Columbia
Gigi Dawson - Columbia
Dr. Bruce Field - Columbia
Orlando Gonzalez - Greenville
Candy Leggett - Sumter
Richard Mock - Charleston
Gail Phillips - Aiken
Tom Richardson - Moncks Corner
Imogene Steele - Lancaster
Nell Stewart - Greenville
Thessa Smith - Greenwood
W. Reed Swann - Barnwell

SC-SIC Staff

Jean M. Norman, Ed.D.
Executive Director

Cassie Barber
Associate Director

Weldon Horne
Administrative Coordinator

Jennifer Robinson
Lowcountry Regional Coordinator
(1-877-519-4765)

Beth Fincher
Upstate Regional Coordinator
(1-877-519-4764)

*COUNCIL NEWS... is an
award winning publication of SC
School Improvement Council.
Circulation 17,500. Your comments
and articles are welcome.
Contact Cassie Barber, Editor, at:*

**USC College of Education
Wardlaw Bldg., Room 001
Columbia SC 29208**

**800-868-2232
803-777-7658**

sic@gwm.sc.edu

www.ed.sc.edu/sic

The University of South Carolina system provides affirmative action and equal opportunity in education and employment for all qualified persons regardless of race, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability or veteran status.

Coming Your Way This Fall – NCLB and Its New, Demanding Performance Standards

By Ellen Still

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) touches nearly every aspect of public education. In South Carolina, the most immediate and visible impact relates to school performance rankings. Before the beginning of the next school year, every school in this state, and in the nation, will tell parents whether or not it has made adequate yearly progress (AYP) and whether it is designated as a “needs improvement” school. For some schools, this will also mean that parents will be informed about their choice options and/or the supplemental services available for their children. As a member of a School Improvement Council, you will be called upon to help other parents and the community understand what these new designations mean.

By now we are all familiar with the Education Accountability Act rankings of absolute and improvement based on performance on the Palmetto Academic Challenge Tests (PACT). NCLB adds a third measure—AYP. The law says that by 2013-14 all students will score proficient or above in reading and in math. To monitor how each school, district, and state is progressing to meet this goal, the NCLB directs every state to set AYP goals or targets. South Carolina’s targets are to be met, not only by the school and district as a whole, but by each subgroup of students within the school/district (see illustration). A student is to be counted in each subgroup that is applicable to him or her. So, a student receiving free- or reduced-price lunches, who is Hispanic and has limited English proficiency is counted in four subgroups (don’t forget the “all students” category). For a subgroup to be examined separately for AYP, there must be a minimum of forty students in the group.

In addition to the performance targets, each subgroup and the school as a whole must have at least 95 percent of the students tested. Should any subgroup or the school not meet this criteria, the school will not make AYP. Elementary and middle schools must also meet an AYP target for attendance, while high schools have a graduation target. For the attendance AYP, the target is a rate of

95.3 percent or better. The AYP for graduation is an increase in graduation rate over the previous year’s percentage.



The more subgroups a school/district has, the more targets there are that must be met in order to be declared as “meeting AYP.” Most of our schools have 17 to 21 targets that must be met. AYP will be announced before the new school year begins. It also will appear on the front of the November report card, along with absolute and improvement ratings. If a school did not make AYP, the percentage of targets not met will also be shown.

The NCLB proficiency requirement sets a very high standard for student performance in other ways.

- Only the movement of students into proficiency is measured. Improvement from “below basic” to “basic” or from “proficient” to “advanced” is not accounted for as in the EAA measures of performance.
- South Carolina’s proficiency standards in reading and math are among the most stringent in the nation.
- Performance is determined by the individual subgroups, not just the performance of the whole school.
- AYP is an “either/or” measure, while EAA recognizes levels of performance.

“Needs improvement” is the designation a school receives when it has not made AYP in the same subject for two years consecutively. NCLB prescribes specific consequences for Title I schools in needs improvement. When a Title I school has been in needs improvement for the second year, the parents must be offered the choice of sending their child to another school in the district that is not in needs improvement. A third

consecutive year in needs improvement requires that the school offer supplemental services from approved providers in addition to choice. Other consequences follow if the school continues in needs improvement.

The AYP measure of performance is a very daunting one, even more so as we struggle with the budget crisis in our state. States are estimating that as many as 80 percent of their schools will not make AYP this coming year.

South Carolina is no exception, even though our schools have made great progress in the last three years on every type of performance assessment.

NCLB helps all of us focus on what is most important – each and every student. It is important that we also keep AYP in the perspective of the wonderful gains education is making. Your school needs assistance as it works to inform parents and the public about the meaning of AYP and needs improvement. As an informed SIC member, you can help others to look not only at AYP but also at the absolute and improvement ratings and, most importantly, at your school as a whole.

Ellen Still is Special Assistant to the State Superintendent of Education.

SIC Action Timeline



Mark your calendar and plan for the important activities and deadlines below:

JUNE, JULY

- Complete Report Card narrative with the principal.
- Submit recommendations for update of school improvement plan.
- SIC bylaws reviewed and revised.
- Plan for fall SIC elections OR elect officers and assign committees if elections were held in the spring.
- Assist principal and faculty in planning for the opening of school.
- Establish study group or task force to analyze information from the Report Card, the survey results for parents, teachers, and students and or the ERT (External Review Team) recommendations.

Rural Citizens Working To Strengthen Their Schools

By Amanda Gibson Adler

South Carolina's education system, like those of other states, is faced with multiple challenges including growing diversity in the student population, accountability measures and the disturbing achievement gap revealed by those measures, a dearth of well-prepared new teachers to fill the ranks of those retiring and leaving the profession, and a significant state budget shortfall that has resulted in multiple mid-year budget cuts for school districts. The trial date for the re-hearing of the school finance lawsuit* looms this summer, even as education leadership acknowledges that non-legal actions should be taken in the meantime to restructure the inadequate method of funding our schools.

Rural districts, which comprise two-thirds of the eighty-five school districts in South Carolina, bear disproportionate burdens as they work to overcome these challenges while they cope with higher poverty incidence among their students, higher numbers of minority students and lower numbers of minority teachers, insufficient local tax bases to fill the gaps left by state funding sources, and, in many cases, an inability to even determine annual budgets due to a lack of fiscal authority of rural school boards.

Even in this difficult climate, hope exists in rural citizens including teachers, principals, and school board members. In December 2001, the South Carolina Rural Education Grassroots Committee convened with the goal of adding their voices to formal and informal education policymaking. Over the course of a year, they met to discuss the status of schools in our rural communities and how well they are thriving in this new environment of increased accountability and testing. The Committee also shared experiences and information on the perennial challenges to rural schools and spent time discussing strategies for addressing those needs, as well as best practices for rural districts. One of the most positive trends found by the Committee was the shared governance and significant parent and community involvement fostered in School Improvement Councils across the state.

The Committee's voices came together, supported by The Rural Trust and the South Carolina Applesseed Legal Justice Center, in the form of a policy assessment and accompanying recommendations entitled *Building Strong Rural Schools: The Foundations We Need*, released in January, 2003. The report addresses disparities in the health and well-being of rural communities, in disciplinary measures meted out to minority students, in achievement levels in rural schools, in the ability of rural schools to attract and retain good teachers, in strength and responsiveness of rural school leadership, and issues of both equity and adequacy in the financial resources available to rural districts. A copy of *Building Strong Rural Schools: The Foundations We Need* can be found on the South Carolina Applesseed Legal Justice Center website at: www.scjustice.org/pdfs/RuralReport.pdf.

Priority Recommendations of the Grassroots Committee:

- Economic development strategies must focus on attracting high-quality, high-paying jobs to rural areas that will improve the standard of living in these communities through higher wages and better benefits for families.
- Every district should reevaluate its current school discipline policies to reduce the disproportionately high number of minority student exclusions from school and report its progress to the community.
- The achievement gap on standardized tests must be eliminated, and special education and gifted and talented enrollment must more closely reflect the general student

The Grassroots Committee is now involved in efforts to gather and galvanize public support for the report's recommendations. Members are distributing copies to their state legislators, education policymakers and officials, as well as to other rural citizens in South Carolina. Already, this work has resulted in opportunities for wider engagement on these important topics, and the Committee has been invited to present its findings and discuss its advocacy efforts statewide. The Committee plans to continue its collaborative work across the state in 2003 and to develop media and public relations strategies related to the ever-

worsening budget deficit, school finance lawsuit, and other issues. These next steps are also being supported by the Fund for Rural Equity. For additional copies of the report, or more information on how you can participate in this work to strengthen rural schools, contact South Carolina Applesseed Legal Justice Center at (803) 779-1113. *Amanda Gibson Adler is the Staff Attorney/Equal Justice Fellow at the SC Applesseed Legal Justice Center.* * Editor's Note: More than ten years ago rural school districts brought suit against the state alleging inadequate funding for their schools. The lawsuit is scheduled to be heard this summer.

Check Out the SC-SIC Website!

Do you have questions about how to do the annual Report to the Parents? Do you want to know the name of the person in your district office who is responsible for SICs? Are you curious about education conferences and workshops taking place around the state?

You can find the answers to these and many other questions on the SC-SIC website. You can find archives of the newsletter filled with important information and samples Reports to the Parents written by actual SICs posted on the site. There are also sample by-laws for elementary, middle and high school SICs.

You can get to know the board and staff of SC-SIC with a visit to the website. Learn about some of our state level partners and link to helpful websites of other organizations from South Carolina and around the nation. Read the laws that created SICs and link to the statehouse website to learn about new laws being considered in the SC General Assembly and the US Congress.

The SC-SIC website is simple and easy to use. Visit www.ed.sc.edu/sic today and if you still have questions, you can always call the SC-SIC hotline at 800-868-2232.

New Ways to Raise \$\$\$ for K-12

By Chris Beckham

Soliciting the people who have an interest in your school (parents, grandparents, former parents, alumni, friends and businesses) for major and annual gifts, has proven to be an effective and efficient way to raise funds for schools. This is the same method that has worked so well at colleges and universities for decades. Schools can no longer rely on special events and selling alone to raise money. With the huge budget cuts in education, schools must be smarter and more aggressive in how they raise funds. Schools can solicit certain identified parents, grandparents, alumni, etc for major gifts they can pledge. Schools can also create an annual fund program, soliciting everyone for unrestricted smaller gifts by mail or telephone. Some companies will provide matching funds for school donations. Including a list of those companies in your solicitation letter can double your dollars.

These methods have already proven to be successful for The Center for Inquiry elementary school in Richland 2, which has eliminated the sales approach and now mails a letter to the parents and grandparents asking for a contribution with a matching gift brochure enclosed. In the annual fund's first year it became the biggest fundraiser in the school! Next school year they will be looking at a major gifts program.



Chris Beckham shares innovative fundraising strategies at the SIC Conference.

Some special events are fine to keep because they bring the families of the school closer together but you should not rely solely on them for financial support. A free benefit of soliciting your school's family directly for contributions is a renewed school spirit and

commitment. Parents and friends become more involved in the school. Selling candy and other things won't do that. It isn't necessary to sell something to get people to support your school. A school's own merits and attributes should be enough for someone to give it money. Don't hide behind products exclusively to get support. You already have people in your community who care about your school.

Think about the time and effort as well as the amount raised when considering special events. How much is it costing you to raise a dollar? At the Center for Inquiry it cost less than five cents to raise a dollar. How many elementary and middle schools have a grandparent on their SIC, foundation board or PTA/O? There may be wealthy parents and grandparents who have an interest in your school but have not been asked for their support. Fundraising professionals know that individuals give about seventy-six percent of all money to non-profits. Corporations give the least or about six percent!

You don't have to have a foundation* in your school to have this kind of fundraising program. As long as you have a principal and/or volunteers who are willing to "ask," then you will succeed. Your school's PTA/O can still run special event activities while the SIC convenes a committee or sets up a foundation board to focus on a major gifts and annual fund program.

This method of raising money is a paradigm shift for schools but has already proven to be very effective. By building relationships and cultivating your constituency a school can raise a significant amount of money and involvement. Ask for money directly from the people who care about your school. Identify your major gift donors, ask for the gift, and you will succeed.

Chris Beckham is Chair of the SIC for the Center for Inquiry elementary school in Richland Two, Director of Development for the College of Education at USC and is Vice President of Auctus Consulting, a fundraising consulting firm. He can be reached at 803-777-2335, 315-0563 or cbeckham@gwm.sc.edu.

* Editor's Note: For more information on education foundations, see the SC-SIC Handbook module, "Creating an Education Foundation for Your School" at www.ed.sc.edu/sic/webfoundation.pdf or call 800-868-2232.

Your Voice from page 1

Let them know what you think by inviting them to your school, to meet with other constituents (parents and teachers), and become knowledgeable about the effect of their vote on education issues in your community. A real life lobbyist, Dr. John Ruoff from the SC Fair Share staff, urged SIC members to "build a coalition with other persons by finding a shared common ground," and he cautioned, "Don't assume you know how Senator R or Representative D will vote on an issue. Go ask them."

On any issue, build community support and then meet people where they are on the issue. In other words, find out what they are interested in (such as ducks in the role play) and talk to them about that interest. Identify what organization or leader could do something about the problem, and then talk to people about joining together to take action on the issue. For example, if the sewer is a problem, find people having problems with their plumbing.

According to Gunn, the process is like taking a journey. He suggested that we take someone along – it's more fun that way. Engage others in the process and share the journey even if neither of you has been on the path together before. Here's how.

Organize: learn how the legislative process works, then translate it into action.

Actively engage: take the first step, gain confidence, then do it again.

Network: bring a friend to a meeting, or make phone calls or visits. Then share the information you have.

"It's too important not to do," said Ruoff. "Ignorance is not a problem because it can be cured. Your job: cure ignorance."

Conclusion

In a surprise move, the earlier bill that passed was re-called for another vote. SIC members had learned their lessons, and talked to their "senators" about what interested both of them – ducks and education. They formed groups to visit all five of the legislators and reminded them of the needs of their community and the effect the legislation would have. It was no surprise then that all five lawmakers, having talked personally with their constituents, voted against the bill.



**LEGISLATIVE
UPDATE**

It is important for SIC members to stay informed about education legislation moving through the state legislature. Most of the General Assembly's attention during this year's session has been focused on budget issues. The state budget situation is so serious that many districts are now being forced to eliminate teaching positions and increase class size – there is simply no fat left in school and district budgets to cut out.

As SIC members learned at the Annual SIC Conference, it is more important than ever that citizens participate in their government during these difficult times. SC-SIC doesn't have the ability to keep SIC members informed of legislative actions in a timely fashion, but a number of other agencies can do this through email alerts and website postings.

Both the SC School Boards Association (SCSBA) and the SC Association of School Administrators (SCASA) have issued invitations to SIC members to sign up for 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, company/organization/school and e-mail address to Sandy Poole, sandyp@scsba.state.sc.us. Check out the advocacy section on their website www.scsba.org.

To learn more about SCASA, check out their website at www.scasa.org. To join their email network list, just send your name, address and telephone numbers to Amanda@scasa.org.

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.myscschools.com and clicking on legislation.

Stay informed and make a difference!