

Candidate Forums - Do You Know Who You're Electing?

by Cassie Barber

Have you ever stood in the voting booth looking at all the candidates' names and the offices they are seeking - and realized you had no idea who they were or what they stood for? Have you ever voted for someone simply because you generally support the party they are affiliated with? Or maybe you saw a bunch of yard signs for a certain candidate and you never heard of the other person on the ballot, so you voted for the name you recognized - even though you had no idea what their plans for your government are. Perhaps you feel so uncomfortable with the whole idea of trying



The forum was convened by SC Teacher of the Year Buffy Murphy

to figure out who to vote for that you just stay away from the voting booth altogether!

SIC members can work together to help themselves and others become more involved in the election process and increase the number of people who get out and vote. One way to increase voting participation is to host a candidate forum. SICs in some districts work with district staff to host school board candidate forums and invite the public to listen as the candidates answer questions about public education in general and address issues specific to your district and school.

SC-SIC recently joined with the University of South Carolina's School-University Partnership Network and ten other organizations to host a forum on public education featuring the men and women who are running for governor and state superintendent of education in primary races. The forum was held in the Richland School District Two auditorium in Columbia and South Carolina's Teacher of the Year, Buffy Murphy, convened the event. Ms. Murphy explained that state law does not require voters to register by party, so *any* registered voter can participate in the Republican OR the Democratic primary, not just people who identify themselves as party members.

Local television news anchor Craig Melvin moderated the forum. Each candidate answered the same series of questions and Mr. Melvin asked follow-up questions of some candidates as needed. All candi-



Columbia news anchor Craig Melvin acted as forum moderator

dates gave a two-minute opening statement and a one-minute closing. Tables were provided for each campaign to display information about their candidate along with promotional materials such as bumper stickers and yard signs.

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SC Students Lead Nation in NAEP Science Improvement

The US Department of Education has announced that South Carolina students made dramatic improvements on national standardized science tests in 2005. The state's fourth-graders had the best gains in the nation, while eighth-graders had the third-best gains.

SC was also named as one of only five states to show improvement in both grades tested in the 2005 science administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as "The Nation's Report Card." The other states were Virginia, Kentucky, California, and Hawaii.

In addition to leading the nation in NAEP science improvement, SC's fourth-graders closed the gap between the state and national averages from five points in 2000 to only one point in 2005. Eighth-graders closed the gap from eight points in 2000 to two points in 2005.

NAEP is the nation's only ongoing survey of what students know and can do in core academic subjects. It also is the only assessment that allows states to compare their results with other states, or with results for the rest of the nation. States are required by the No Child Left Behind Act to participate in fourth- and eighth-grade NAEP math and English language arts testing

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Message from . . . the Executive Director

Every year we ask SIC training participants if they found the training content to be valuable, useful and worthwhile. We also ask when it is most convenient to attend training, what topics they are most interested in learning more about, and how much time they would be willing to spend exploring that topic. In other words, we evaluate the practices and programs sponsored by SC-SIC by asking those most involved if what we are doing meets their needs.

Here's what you told us: most of you prefer to attend SIC training close to your home district and spend about 90 minutes on a single topic during a week-day evening. We received numerous requests for sessions on the basics of being an SIC member and learning how to operate as an effective council, but by far the most requested topic was for a discussion built around involving parents more effectively in the academic lives of their children.

In order to meet those needs, this fall we will schedule 6 – 8 regional trainings in several locations around the state. The meetings will be conducted in late afternoon and early evening, with timing to be determined by local requirements. The topics, designed for newly elected members and those needing a refresher course, will focus on the basic skills needed to maintain an effective SIC. The schedule will be posted on our website and in the Council News with dates and times in your area. More details about other topics to be offered will be announced as plans become complete.

In addition to increased training opportunities, SC-SIC plans to offer SIC members enhanced tools to gain useful information. The website continues to be a rich resource, accessible from home, school or the workplace. We encourage you to visit the SIC Technology Toolkit page, where online programming, useful for viewing at meetings, as well as other tools are at your fingertips. The newsletter will be mailed to every SIC member and Handbooks will be available beginning in July.

We hope you will be inspired to take advantage of these new opportunities this fall as well as use the website this summer to prepare for next year. And remember, a quick email or toll free phone call to our office is all it takes to find the assistance you require... we look forward to hearing from you!

Jean M. Norman

SC Teachers Honored with Presidential Mathematics and Science Awards

Judith Snyder from Eastside High School in Taylors and Melissa Timmons from Johnsonville High School in Florence County are recipients of the 2005 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science teaching, the highest honor for teaching in these fields. The pair is among 100 educators honored recently by President Bush Washington DC.

The annual presidential award identifies outstanding mathematics and science teachers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Territories and the U.S. Department of Defense Schools. This year's recipients – chosen by a panel of leading mathematicians, scientists and educators in conjunction with the White House – teach in the seventh through twelfth grades. In addition to the all expenses-paid trip to the nation's capitol, awardees received a \$10,000 gift from the National Science Foundation and gifts from corporate sponsors.

-adapted from SC Dept. of Education website, www.myschools.com



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COUNCIL NEWS . . . is an award winning publication of South Carolina School Improvement Council. Circulation 17,000. Your comments and articles are welcome. Contact Cassie Barber, Editor at:

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Plight of Rural Schools Unveiled in Student Photography Project

To dramatize the need for comprehensive, long term equitable funding of South Carolina's rural public schools, Ferillo and Associates, Inc. has coordinated "BUT WHAT ABOUT US? Student Photographs from the *Corridor of Shame*," a student driven photography exhibit supported by several of the state's leading philanthropies and community leaders.

During March and April of this year, some 250 students in middle and high schools in seven of South Carolina's rural school districts photographed images in their schools and wrote brief descriptions as their personal testimony to needs in their local schools.

This exhibit powerfully represents the deficiencies of the state's rural schools and the unmet needs of the over 132,000 students in these 36 districts.

The student photography exhibit was unveiled at a news conference in the entrance hall of the State House on Tuesday, May 9, 2006. The student photographers, their teachers and superintendents were on hand to unveil the exhibit. Several students spoke at the news conference expressing a plea for acknowledgement of the needs in their schools.

This photography exhibit seeks to identify malingering conditions in elementary, middle and high schools in the state's rural communities through the eyes and words of students themselves," said Bud Ferillo, producer and director of *Corridor of Shame*. "Piecemeal, short-term judicial and legislative remedies will remain woefully insufficient to address the obvious needs of South Carolina's rural schools. Until these deficiencies, are comprehensively addressed, this state's rural school

children, will continue to languish and South Carolina's educational rankings will remain among the lowest in the nation."

The exhibit consists of four portable 8' x 10' collapsible display units presenting 60 photographs, captions and the students' names, grades and schools. The exhibit has begun a year long tour of the state. For more information about hosting the exhibit, or to view it at a location near you, log on to www.corridorofshame.com.

-Ferillo & Associates has provided public relations support to Nelson Mullins Riley and Scarborough, the plaintiff's legal team for the Abbeville vs. SC case, as well as Education First, a coalition of more than 85 organizations



"Blocks used to create a table."
Shaquavia Springer, Grade 6,
Allendale-Fairfax Middle School



"I'm not supposed to get sick today."
Tierra Henderson, Grade 5,
West Hardeville School



"When you don't have enough desks you have to improvise."
Dawn Whittle, Grade 12,
Swansea High School



"Damaged books that students aren't allowed to take home because of their condition."
Jalissa Newton, Grade 11,
Estill High School



What Can I Do?

- Contact your state legislators. Each of us has one Senate and one House Member. Tell them you want the General Assembly to enact comprehensive legislation that will remedy the problems responsible for the appalling conditions described in Corridor of Shame. (Identify your legislators by going to <http://www.scstatehouse.net>.)
- Tell your legislators you want them to stop spending millions of dollars defending the State of South Carolina against a lawsuit brought by school districts whose educators, parents and students are featured in Corridor of Shame. (Read actual trial testimony and school district/school data at <http://www.scschoolcase.com/education-trial-presentations.cfm>.)
- Purchase your own copy of Corridor of Shame. Arrange for your civic or social club or book group to view and discuss it. Loan it to your work colleagues and members of your extended family. (Visit <http://www.corridorofshame.com/buyit.php>.)
- Ask a member of the legislature to speak to your civic or community group, focusing on what the General Assembly should do to improve educational opportunities in the state's rural, low-wealth school districts.
- Take a drive to a community featured in Corridor of Shame, or to one similar. Make your own informal, observational assessment of the community's economic, educational, and cultural infrastructure. What do you think South Carolina can and should do to strengthen these communities?
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper calling for the Governor and General Assembly to address the critical financial needs of our state's rural schools.
- Support the efforts of Education First, the statewide coalition that is advocating on behalf of equity funding for South Carolina's rural schools, by sending a financial contribution to P.O. Box 5975, Columbia, SC 29250.



Gubernatorial candidates Dennis Aughtry, Oscar Lovelace, Tommy Moore, and Frank Willis offered thoughtful answers to insightful questions



Superintendent candidates Karen Floyd, Elizabeth Moffly, Mike Ryan, Bob Staton, and Kerry Wood share a smile onstage

“Who Are You Electing?”

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So what is the advantage of a forum when you can read the newspaper, watch TV news, or read mailings from the candidates and never leave home? There is no substitute for meeting candidates for public office in person and having the chance to watch their body language, observe as they talk to people, and answer questions in the sort of detail that you can't get in a media sound bite. It is also informative to watch how a group of candidates running for the same office respond to the same questions and to each other. The candidates also have time to mingle casually with the audience members, answering their personal questions informally.

Candidates and attendees alike agreed that the Columbia forum was a huge success and everyone learned a lot. The candidates had a chance to hear from voters about public education issues that concerned them and audience members had a rare opportunity to really get to know the people who are asking for their votes; votes that could make them the education leaders of our state. Visit www.ed.sc.edu/sic to read the candidates' responses at the Columbia forum.

*-Ms. Barber, Associate Director of SC-SIC, coordinated the candidate forum
-Forum photos courtesy of USC Museum of Education*

Visit

www.scvotes.org

Sponsored by the South Carolina Election Commission for information on SC races and elections, and extensive information on voting in SC.

“Every Vote Matters. Every Vote Counts.”

Council News - Summer 2006

Tips for Hosting a Candidate Forum

- **Follow the Guidelines for SIC Advocacy posted on the Legislation/Advocacy page of the SC-SIC website www.ed.sc.edu/sic.**
- **Invite ALL the candidates for the election/offices you are focusing on.**
- **Provide each candidate with a formal invitation and clearly explain the format/rules for the forum.**
- **Decide if questions will be developed by a committee and/or be taken from the audience. It is a good idea to ask each group of candidates the same questions.**
- **Enlist multiple methods of public awareness for your event: newspapers, school marquees, newsletters, phone trees, email lists, etc.**
- **Decide on a good moderator and timekeeper to keep the forum on track.**
- **Rotate questions; give each candidate a chance to be first and last.**

“Leading the Nation”

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every two years. SC and other states also participate voluntarily in science testing every four or five years.

NAEP science scores range from 0 to 300, with results reported as Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. NAEP's scoring system is similar to that used in South Carolina's Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests, and PACT performance levels are linked with NAEP. Improvements were dramatic across the board, including students whose family incomes qualified them for free or reduced-price lunches, African-American students, and students in special education.

Palmetto State fourth-graders' average science score increased eight points to 148 (2005 national average was 149). Eighth-graders' average science score increased five points to 145 (2005 national average was 147). The percentage of students scoring Below Basic decreased from 2000 to 2005. Grade 4 saw a reduction from 46% to 36% (national, 34%), and Grade 8 from 52% to 46% (national, 43%). Overall in

NAEP science, South Carolina fourth-graders scored higher than eight participating states and were not statistically different from 13 states. South Carolina eighth-graders scored higher than nine other states and were not statistically different from 10 states.

State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum renewed her call for Congress to set a national benchmark for “proficiency” under NCLB, which allows individual states to set their own proficiency standards to determine whether their schools meet AYP. South Carolina's academic proficiency standards are linked to NAEP's and have been ranked among the nation's toughest by six independent reviews. As a result, South Carolina's NAEP scores correspond closely with state PACT scores in science, math and English Language Arts. Many other states have set their standards lower, however, and students in those states tend to fare better on their state tests than on the national NAEP tests.

-adapted from SC Dept. of Education website, www.myscschools.com



Curtailing Soft Drink Sales Good News for Public Schools

by Inez Tenenbaum

Advocates of better nutrition for children scored a major victory this week when the nation's top beverage distributors announced that they are curtailing sales of most soft drinks to America's public schools.

South Carolina has been a leader in the movement to reduce consumption of the high calorie soft drinks that contribute significantly to the nation's growing childhood obesity problem. In 2004, my statewide task force on student nutrition and fitness listed reducing consumption of soft drinks among its top priorities. The task force report became the foundation for the Student Health and Fitness Act approved by the General Assembly in 2005, which has generated a pending State Board of Education regulation limiting the sale and service of non-nutritious beverages in South Carolina's K-5 schools.

Childhood obesity is a significant and growing concern across America. According to the National Center for Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control, the number of overweight children doubled in the U.S. between 1980 and 2000 among children aged six to 11. For children aged 12 to 19, the number tripled over that same period.

Today, an estimated 15 percent of all children are overweight, another 10 percent are

at risk of becoming overweight, and 15 percent are considered borderline. As a result of these weight problems, many children are being diagnosed and treated for conditions previously seen mostly in adults, including Type II diabetes, hypertension, sleep and orthopedic problems, and psychological disorders.

Under the new agreement, a collaborative effort between the beverage industry and child health organizations, beverage distributors will sell only water, unsweetened juice, and low-fat milk to elementary and middle schools. High schools will be sold beverages that contain less than 10 calories per serving, as well as drinks that are considered nutritious, such as juice, sports drinks, and low-fat milk.

Improving student health has been one of my priorities as State Superintendent of Education, and I believe this agreement is an important step in that direction. Working together, we can ensure that all of our children come to school healthy and ready to learn, and that good health habits follow them not only through their school careers, but throughout their lives.

-Ms. Tenenbaum is the SC State Superintendent of Education

School Health Index: a Tool for Improving Student Health and Wellness Policies

The *School Health Index (SHI) Self-Assessment & Planning Guide* was developed by Centers for Disease Control in partnership with school administrators and staff, school health experts, parents, and national nongovernmental health and education agencies to help enable schools to identify strengths and weaknesses of health and safety policies and programs, develop an action plan for improving student health, and engage teachers, parents, students, and the community in promoting healthy lifestyles.

The SHI can help you include health promotion activities in your overall School Improvement Plan. It has two activities that can be completed by teams from your school: the eight self-assessment modules and a planning for improvement process. The self-assessment process involves members of your school community coming together to discuss what your school is already doing to promote good health and to identify your strengths and weaknesses. You can then select recommended actions your school can take to improve its performance in areas that received low scores. A simple process for prioritizing the various recommendations will help you to decide on actions to be implemented this year. Complete the School Health Improvement Plan with a list of steps to take to carry out your recommended actions.

SIC Chairs will receive information about the SHI from the SC Department of Education this summer. See the School Health Index online at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/shi/default.asp>. Contact The SC Healthy Schools program staff at the SC Department of Education at 803-734-9344 or <http://www.myschools.com/offices/ace/healthyschools/>.

-Lynn Hammond, Director of SC Healthy Schools

SIC Action Timeline



June & July

- Complete the School Report Card narrative in conjunction with the principal by June 15.
- Review and draft revisions of the bylaws.
- Recruit parents to stand for (fall) election to the SIC.
- Identify non-parent community members to serve on the SIC.
- Analyze results of the surveys completed by parents, teachers and students in grades 5, 8 and 11 and make plans to address areas needing improvement.

August

- Coordinate preparations for fall SIC elections of parents and teachers and students in grades 9 - 12.
- Prepare a notebook for each new SIC member including SIC Handbook, last year's minutes, Report to the Parents, bylaws, membership roster, and strategic plan goals for 2005 - 2006.
- Recommend bylaws revisions for approval.
- Review criteria for the Dick and Tunky Riley School Improvement Award in preparation for applying.
- Order lapel pins for all SIC members from SC-SIC (not required but nice to have!).



And the Winner Is...



2006 Flagship Schools of Promise Award Winners Announced

The South Carolina Association of School Administrators has selected seven schools as 2006 Flagship Schools of Promise Award recipients. This year's winners are Creek Bridge High School, Marion 7; Ronald E. McNair Middle School, Florence 3; Batesburg-Leesville Elementary School, Lexington 3; The Children's School at Sylvania Circle, Rock Hill 3; Grassy Pond Elementary School, Cherokee County; Brennan Elementary School, Richland 1; and Pauline-Glenn Springs Elementary School, Spartanburg 6. Two schools receiving renewal status are Pomaria-Garmany Elementary School, Newberry County, and Nevitt Forest Elementary School, Anderson 5. Schools of Promise winners recognize the importance of fundamental resources such family, culture, and good health as they become the center and leader of their community. Each school has made a promise to mentor, protect, nurture, prepare, and serve their students and communities in order to reach higher expectations for academic success and community involvement.

Ninety-eight SC Schools Earn Red Carpet Awards

Ninety-eight schools have been honored with Red Carpet awards to recognize their success at creating family-friendly school environments and providing excellent customer service. State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum announced the winners of the highly prized awards. "These schools provide a welcoming climate for

parents and community members alike," she said. "They have a positive attitude, an inviting appearance and the friendly touches that make each visitor feel like part of the school family." Applicants provide written details about family-friendly philosophies and environments and methods used to self-evaluate those efforts. Schools that passed the written application phase were then screened by independent, anonymous judges. Over the past four years, 387 schools have been recognized in the program. Winning schools receive actual red carpets with the state seal to display in their lobbies and maintain their recognition status for a three-year period. To learn more about the award and view the list of winners, visit www.myscschools.com.

SC Teacher of the Year Named

Jennifer "Buffy" Murphy, a fifth-grade teacher at Irmo Elementary School, has been named SC Teacher of the Year. State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum presented Ms. Murphy with the award at a banquet at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center honoring the state's 83 district teachers of the year. "Buffy's greatest accomplishment in education is having a personal impact on young lives," Tenenbaum said. "She knows her students, not only as learners, but also as individuals. Because she wants them to feel valued in the community, she validates each of them from the moment they enter her classroom. And they leave her room knowing that they can accomplish great things and make a difference." Visit www.myscschools.com to learn more about the Teacher of the Year Award.

-adapted from SC Dept. of Education website, www.myscschools.com