

## “Civic Engagement” Theme for Spring Trainings

This spring, “Setting the Stage for Civic Engagement” is the theme for three regional School Improvement Council trainings. Civic engagement in public education, meaning the involvement of parents and the entire greater school community, is what SICs are really all about. “Involving the whole community in their local school is a key ingredient for raising student achievement and strengthening our public education system,” says Nell Stewart, chair of the SC-SIC Board of Trustees. The spring training agenda will feature four general sessions to increase SIC members’ understanding of current education issues, help them develop strategies for engaging the public, and define action steps.

Trainings will be held February 25 in Greenville, March 11 in Mt. Pleasant, and March 25 in Columbia. Details for each location can be found on page 3 and a registration form is on page 4. The \$15 registration fee includes lunch and all materials. A limited number of scholarships are available for some schools; see page 3 for additional information. On-site registrations cannot be accepted, so please register today to ensure your seat at the training of your choice.



JoAnne Anderson

In order to achieve true civic engagement in public education, SIC members need to understand current trends and policies in public education. Dr. JoAnne Anderson, executive director of the SC Education Oversight Committee, will provide the keynote address for all three trainings. She will share insights about where we are in public education and where we are expected to go. Dr. Anderson will discuss the effects of the SC Education Accountability Act and the federal No Child Left Behind Act, now that these groundbreaking accountability measures are several years into implementation. SIC members will learn how the state has embraced

accountability, how improvements have been made and also about some unintended consequences of the new policies, in addition to forecasting what lies ahead for public education in South Carolina.

Civic engagement of the greater school community requires collaboration. Easier said than done, strategies for working collaboratively will be presented by SC-SIC Associate Director, Cassie Barber. Ms. Barber will help SIC members determine who they need to invite to work with them – and how to keep people involved once they come to the table.

Politics and politicians have enormous effect on the direction of public education. Members of the SC General Assembly from each region will provide a legislative update and field questions from attendees. It is critical for local SIC members to have a good understanding of the discussions and actions taking place at the state house.

SICs take action for civic engagement in a variety of ways. Successful programs will share “how they did it,” involving SICs and other school groups, school districts, faith groups, and more. This concludes the day’s agenda with the exception of the Columbia training, which will feature a special awards ceremony announcing the winner of the 2006 Dick and Tunky Riley School Improvement Award. The Riley Award for “exemplary civic engagement” is presented each year to a single School Improvement Council, with four schools receiving Honorable Mention. Secretary and Mrs. Richard Riley will announce the winner in person, so this promises to be a very special event. Register today for the training of your choice and get engaged in your school, community, and state!



Dick and Tunky Riley

## Thank Your Local School Board

School board members are ordinary people who have an extraordinary dedication to our public schools. It is time we thanked them for their untiring efforts.

Too often we forget about the personal sacrifices school board members routinely make. Too often we forget about the important role school board members play in ensuring that local control over our public schools is in the hands of people we know – people who are our neighbors. Too often we forget that, in the tradition of a representative democracy, school board members are our connection to influencing how our public schools are governed. Too often we are quick to criticize school board members without really knowing all the details about any given decision. Too often the efforts of school board members go unrecognized.

We can begin to correct these oversights throughout January, which is “School Board Recognition Month.” This is a time to show our appreciation and to begin to better understand how school board members work together to provide leadership for our schools.

School board members are the leading voices for quality public schools. The school board works closely with parents, education professionals and other community members to create the educational vision we want for our students.

*(continued)*

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## Message from . . . the Executive Director

### What Is Civic Engagement?

We talk a lot about *civic engagement* here in the SC-SIC office. The Dick and Tunky Riley School Improvement Award created by the SC-SIC Board of Trustees recognizes school improvement councils for their “exemplary civic engagement.” This may be a term that you are not familiar with, but chances are you know exactly what civic engagement is and are engaged yourself, though you may not call it by that name.

According to the Pew Charitable Trusts ([www.pewtrusts.org](http://www.pewtrusts.org)), civic engagement can be defined as: “*Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual volunteerism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic Engagement encompasses a range of activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association, writing a letter to an elected official or voting.*”

Do you see yourself and your SIC in the above description? The regional trainings offered to SICs are focused on this theme, helping you to understand the issues and gain the strategies you need to be effectively engaged in your school community. Don’t miss this opportunity to learn why and how to engage in dialogue and decision-making about public education. See page 4 for a registration form and register your team today.

In addition to the regional trainings, SC-SIC has several resources council members can use to gain knowledge and learn skills to be an effective advocate. Bob Davis, who wrote our Point of View column on tax reform in this issue, was also featured in the Council Updates explaining education funding. Visit the SC-SIC website [www.ed.sc.edu/sic](http://www.ed.sc.edu/sic) and click on SIC Technology Toolkit to view these updates and others, including advocacy and how to make your voice heard. Also on the website are a set of advocacy guidelines to assist councils in taking action on legislation and policies in appropriate and ethical ways. There are countless large and small ways you can become civically engaged, make a contribution to your school community, and make your voice heard.

*Jean M. Norman*

“School Board”  
continued from page 1

The school board is accountable to the public. It is responsible for assuring the public the money allocated to the public schools provides a good return on the investment. Thus, the board oversees regular assessment of the district’s students, staff and programs. The school board is also a strong advocate for public schools and is responsible for communicating the needs of the school district to the public and the public’s expectations to the district. In January, join with others from throughout our district, state and nation to salute the men and women who provide grassroots governance of public schools. – *Debbie Elmore, SC School Boards Association*



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## SIC Action Timeline



### January/February

- Analyze School Report Card information
- Receive update information on improvement plan progress
- Prepare a plan to assist school to distribute parent surveys from the State Department of Education
- Attend school board budget meetings
- Monitor progress of education legislation in the General Assembly
- Register your team for one of three regional SIC trainings
- Regional training in Greenville, SC on February 25

### March/April

- Collect and summarize data about current year's progress
- Organize and write the report to the parents (due April 30)
- Attend regional SIC training in Mt. Pleasant, SC on March 11 or Columbia, SC on March 25
- Monitor progress of education legislation in the General Assembly
- Monitor school board budget preparation



## *"Setting the Stage for Civic Engagement"*

**Spring 2006**

### **Regional SIC Trainings**

#### *Locations and Dates*

**February 25 – Greenville Marriott**

***One Parkway East, I-85, Michelin Exit***

*Call 864-297-0300 for directions & accommodations*

*marriott.com/property/propertypage/GSPAP*

**March 11 – Holiday Inn - Patriot's Point, Mt. Pleasant**

***250 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. (off US 17)***

*Call 843-884-6000 for directions & accommodations*

*ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/hi/1/en/hd/chsmp*

**March 25 – Columbia Conference Center**

***169 Laurelhurst Ave. (off Fernandina Rd.)***

*Call 803-772-9811 for directions & accommodations*

*columbiameetings.com*

**Registration opens at 8:30 AM for all locations**

**Keynote Session begins at 9:00 AM**

Dr. JoAnne Anderson, executive director of the SC Education Oversight Committee, will deliver the keynote address, "Where Are We Now and Where Are We Going?"

Training will adjourn by 1:30 PM in Greenville and Mt. Pleasant.

The 2006 Dick and Tunky Riley School Improvement Award will be presented in Columbia during a special awards ceremony that will conclude at 2:00 PM.

\$15.00 registration fee\* includes lunch and all materials.

\*If your school received an "unsatisfactory" or "below average" rating on the school report card, SCHOLARSHIPS are available! Each eligible school may send two SIC members for training at no charge. Scholarship recipients must register using the form on page 4 and the form must be signed by the school's principal. Scholarships are courtesy of the Center for Truancy and Dropout Prevention.

*Thanks to Our Co-Sponsors:*

**Parentwise**

*a federally funded program of*

**Voices for South Carolina's Children**

**&**

**Center for Truancy and Dropout Prevention**

**Office of Safe Schools and Youth Services**

**SC Department of Education**

# ***“Setting the Stage for Civic Engagement”***

## **SIC Spring Regional Training**

**- REGISTRATION FORM -**

**(One form per person, please!)**

***(Check the Date and Location You Plan to Attend)***

\_\_\_ **February 25 - Greenville, SC** (*Registration/Cancellation Deadline: February 22, 5:00 PM*)

\_\_\_ **March 11 - Mt. Pleasant** (*Registration/Cancellation Deadline: March 8, 5:00 PM*)

\_\_\_ **March 25 - Columbia, SC** (*Registration/Cancellation Deadline: March 22, 5:00 PM*)

***(Please Print Legibly!)***

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ First Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Daytime Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name of District \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name of School \_\_\_\_\_

My primary relationship to a School Improvement Council is:

Parent  Teacher  Administrator  Student  Community Member  Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Registration fee of \$15.00** includes lunch and materials. (**Make checks payable to SC-SIC.**) No cash or credit cards accepted. Fee will be refunded only if cancellation date is met. If you send a substitute, please notify SC-SIC before the training if possible.

Payment Method (must check one)

Will pay by check or money order at the training

Check or money order enclosed

District office or school will pay fee. PURCHASE ORDER NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

Scholarship Recipient. AUTHORIZED BY \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that I am responsible for ensuring final payment of my registration fee. I also understand that I am responsible for making arrangements with my school or district office if I expect them to pay my registration fee.

Participant's Signature (*required*) \_\_\_\_\_

You may FAX or MAIL your completed registration form.

**FAX - 803-777-0023**

**ADDRESS - SC-SIC, USC College of Education, Suite 001, Columbia, SC, 29208**

No registrations accepted after deadlines. Confirmations will be either by email or phone. Contact SC-SIC if you do not receive a confirmation by the day before the conference. No on-site registrations.

**QUESTIONS? Call 800-868-2232 or 803-777-7658**



# POINT OF VIEW

## Opinion and Commentary

### Property Taxes for Education Funding

#### Good, Bad or Both?

by Bob Davis, Guest Columnist

Property taxes are extremely unpopular in South Carolina. Many property owners have recently experienced reassessments that significantly increased their tax burden; some to the point where they may be forced to sell their homes. These taxes are so unpopular that some members of the South Carolina General Assembly are looking for ways to reduce or eliminate them altogether.

The single largest portion of property tax bills goes to fund basic operating costs for schools. Even though they are unpopular, the fact remains that property taxes are very important for local school autonomy. Some tax reform proposals call for replacing property taxes with an increase in sales taxes and some very influential members of the legislature such as Speaker of the House Bobby Harrell and Glenn McConnell, President Pro Tempore of the Senate support this idea. There is a very, very good chance of some sort of tax reform passing in the upcoming legislative session, including a property for sales tax swap.

Such a tax swap raises concerns about funding for school operations. Historically, property taxes are more stable than sales taxes and therefore supply a more reliable source of funds. Districts would be totally reliant upon the state legislature to allocate adequate funding from sales tax collections to meet school operation needs. The legislature's recent track record on education funding has included three successive years of multiple mid-year state budget cuts from 2001-2003. If sufficient funds are not allocated, districts could be forced to make reductions in the teacher work force and gut programs. Total dependence upon the state legislature would leave local school districts with no place to turn in the case of future budget cuts. Maintaining a district's current level of operations would simply not be an option.

But if we put aside concerns about day to

day school operations and the question of local autonomy, is reducing or eliminating property taxes a good idea? Many experts say "no." Among those expressing concern are the Palmetto Institute, The State Chamber of Commerce, and Clemson University's Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and Public Affairs (see box). In fact, South Carolina's current tax structure, often referred to as the three-legged stool, garners praise from experts across the country. The three-legged stool is comprised of sales, income, and property taxes. The Palmetto Institute states that "...overall South Carolina ranks relatively low among the states on tax burden for the major state and local taxes."

Regarding reassessment, experts note that periodic reassessment at reasonable intervals is the fairest and most equitable way to redistribute the tax burden among all our citizens. "Circuit breakers" such as the following example could be added to address concerns about protecting elderly citizens beyond the \$100,000 exemption and the \$50,000 exemption at age 65 that is already provided:

*For citizens who were at least 65 years of age in the prior calendar year and had an adjusted gross income of \$100,000.00 or less and who had owned the property for at least the preceding 5 years, reassessment would take place, but any resulting increase in the tax liability would be suspended.*

Thus far, the most striking point in the debate is that no one has put forth a proposal as to how the funds would be distributed. While a tax swap is attractive to all home owners on the surface, it remains to be seen how funds raised through an increase in sales taxes to replace funds formerly generated by property taxes would be distributed.

There are two other points to consider. Eliminating property taxes also eliminates the income tax deduction that accompanies it.

The result of imposing an offsetting increase in sales tax could actually increase an individual's tax burden. Secondly, the national bond rating agencies would take a negative view of increasing reliance on sales taxes. This could significantly raise interest costs for state and local government.

A balanced tax structure of property, sales, and income taxes has served our state well. Abandoning it is ill-advised. Periodic reassessment remains the fairest and most equitable way to redistribute the tax burden. Flaws within reassessment can and should be addressed without dismantling the tax system. Exercise your right as a citizen by paying attention to proposed tax reform legislation and closely examine the manner in which funds are to be distributed. Contact your state legislators and express your opinion. Above all, let your voice be heard in the coming debate. - Bob Davis is Chief Financial Officer for Richland School District 2. SCASA selected him as the 2005-06 District-Level Administrator of the Year.

#### To Learn More...

about state government financing and education funding, link to two "Citizen's Guides" by Holley Hewitt Ulbrich and Ada Louise Steirer from the Strom Thurmond Institute when you visit the SC-SIC website [www.ed.sc.edu/sic](http://www.ed.sc.edu/sic). Click on Legislation/Advocacy to download *Paying for Government in South Carolina* and *Financing Education in South Carolina*.

The SC-SIC website also features two Council Updates, *Education Funding – the Basics* and *Education Funding – Beyond the Basics* with Bob Davis available on the SIC Technology Toolkit page.

You can read the Palmetto Institute's report *Evaluation of the South Carolina Revenue System* at [www.palmettoinstitute.org](http://www.palmettoinstitute.org).

## SC-SIC Welcomes New Trustee



Cindy Smith

SC-SIC welcomes **Cindy Smith** to the SC School Improvement Council Board of Trustees. We are enthusiastic about the experience and expertise she brings to our volunteer board. SICs are encouraged to access board members as a special resource; a complete list of board members, along with their contact information, can be found on the SC-SIC website [www.ed.sc.edu/sic](http://www.ed.sc.edu/sic).

Elected to the Lexington School District One Board in 2000, Cindy Smith is co-owner of Safeguard Business Systems and holds a bachelor of arts in political science from the University of South Carolina Honors College. She serves as the Lexington County Director of the South Carolina School Boards Association and has two daughters attending Lexington High School. Ms. Smith served on the School Improvement Council at Lexington Elementary for five years, two of which she served as Chairman, and was active in PTA for 10 years. She held many board positions including President during her tenure at Lexington Elementary School and Lexington Middle School.

## SIC Advocacy Guidelines Updated

Last year the SC-SIC Board of Trustees developed a set of guidelines to assist school improvement councils as they advocate for legislative and policy issues. Those guidelines have been updated for this school year with advice from counsel at the SC Ethics Commission. You can download a copy of the guidelines on the Legislation/Advocacy page at [www.ed.sc.edu/sic](http://www.ed.sc.edu/sic) or call 800-868-2232.

## SIC Members Invited to State Legislative Day

SC-SIC has joined with AAUW of SC and the League of Women Voters of SC to participate in a State Legislative Day at the Capitol on **Tuesday, February 21** at the Columbia Marriott (formerly the Adam's Mark), 1200 Hampton Street. Take this opportunity to join members of the SC-SIC Board of Trustees for a day of learning and taking action. Taxes, education and advocacy will be key topics on the agenda.

Registration opens at 9:00 AM and the day begins with Representative Bill Cotty (R) and Senator Joel Lourie (D) discussing **The Impact of Property Tax Reform on Public Education Funding**. The legislators will be available for your questions on this critical topic. Next, State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum will share her view of **The Future of Public Education in South Carolina**.

Following lunch, Anton Gunn, Executive Director of SC Fair Share will share advocacy strategies with his exciting and informative presentation **Your Voice Matters!** At 2:00 PM participants will conclude the day with a walk to the State House to observe meetings and visit with legislators.

The fee for the day's activities (including lunch) is only \$30 if registration is postmarked prior to February 14 and \$40 after that date. Visit [www.ed.sc.edu/sic](http://www.ed.sc.edu/sic) and click on Legislative/Advocacy for more information and to download a registration form OR call 800-868-2232 to have a form faxed to you.



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