



University of South Carolina College of Education
Center for Educational Partnerships
820 Main Street, Suite 001, Columbia, SC 29208
803-777-7658 or 800-868-2232 (Toll-free)
sic@mailbox.sc.edu http://sic.sc.gov

"Civic Engagement at Work for Public Education"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Saturday, April 14, 2018

Contact: Tom F. Hudson, Executive Director, SC School Improvement Council
(w) 803-777-7658, (c) 803-603-9141 or HUDSONTF@mailbox.sc.edu

Walhalla High School Improvement Council named winner of 2018 Riley Award for SIC Excellence

COLUMBIA – The School Improvement Council (SIC) of Walhalla High School in the School District of Oconee County has been named the recipient of the 2018 Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence.

The award was presented Saturday afternoon during the SC School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) Annual Meeting at the South Carolina State Museum in Columbia.

The annual Riley Award for SIC Excellence was created in 2002 to highlight the significant contributions made to public education by the over 13,000 School Improvement Council members who volunteer in every public school in the state. The award is named in honor of the former SC Governor and US Secretary of Education and his late wife, recognizing the couple's longstanding commitment to quality public education.

"Walhalla High SIC has done outstanding work well-deserving of this statewide honor," said SC-SIC Board of Trustees Chair Amelia B. McKie. "Parents, educators, students, and community members working collaboratively on their School Improvement Councils are vital in making significant, positive, and lasting impact for our schools, our students, their families, and our communities."

Presented with Honorable Mentions for their work last school year were: Chapin Intermediate SIC (School District Five of Lexington and Richland Counties); Hilton Head Island High SIC (Beaufort County School District); Saluda High SIC (Saluda County Schools); and South Florence High SIC (Florence County School District One).

Brief descriptions of the work of this year's Riley Award winner and Honorable Mention SICs are included with this release.

Part of the Center for Education Partnerships within the University of South Carolina College of Education, the SC School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) was established in state law 40 years ago to provide the member training, technical assistance, statutory accountability, and other operational resources necessary for the continued success of the community-based SICs in each of the state's 1,110-plus K-12 public schools. More information on SC-SIC's programmatic efforts can be found online at <http://sic.sc.gov>.

---###---

2018 Finalists – SC-SIC Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence

WINNER – Walhalla High SIC – School District of Oconee County

This SIC worked to ensure that its membership represented all stakeholders, including students. It surveyed students on their school experience, changed its meeting time to encourage student participation, identified a teacher advisor who met twice monthly with SIC students, and reserved time on the SIC meeting agenda for student input. Student involvement increased from 2 to 15 students actively contributing to their SIC's initiatives. The SIC also welcomed families and teachers from a nearby high school that had recently closed and worked successfully to integrate them into leadership positions on the SIC. It collected data from parents and students to assess parent/student engagement levels, using tools such as an SIC-created parent survey and a focus group for Latino parents. The SIC organized and implemented a number of strategies to improve school/parent communication, including creating and utilizing social media sites. It hosted a family evening featuring a presentation on "How the Teenage Brain Works," an opportunity for parents to talk with faculty, and a Q&A session with the principal. The SIC also created new ways for parents with diverse interests and resources to volunteer. Additionally, it designed and hosted a professional development opportunity for faculty and staff at the school (and four other area schools) to build capacities to communicate effectively with Latino parents. The SIC also created/facilitated new opportunities for recognizing different types of accomplishments by underclassmen, such as hosting an "Underclassman Awards Night" and honoring student recipients of "Razor of the Month" and "Nurturing Oconee's Workforce" awards at monthly SIC meetings. An SIC community member also founded Grace's Closet, an in-school boutique that provides clothing, food, school supplies and hygiene products for students in need at no cost.

Finalist – Chapin Intermediate SIC – School District Five of Lexington and Richland Counties

This SIC addressed three goal areas: literacy, service to the community, and building parent knowledge about child learning and development. The Literacy Committee consulted with students, content area leaders, and the school's literacy leadership in expanding the number of texts in over 40 classroom libraries including core content and elective areas. The committee also led literacy discussions within the SIC and school, and one SIC teacher wrote a recurring column in the school newsletter on reading tips for parents. The SIC and school focus on literacy resulted in significant academic gains for students, including those identified as being in need of intervention, and students with disabilities. The SIC's Service Committee organized projects that gave students an opportunity to serve others such as a book drive that gathered more than 700 books for "The Hub," a non-profit aftercare program; an initiative in partnership with students in Visual Arts and Careers in Technology courses to create holiday greeting cards for servicemen and women; and a food drive led by students on the SIC and the student council that gathered 2,000 non-perishable items for the local community's "We Care Center." The SIC's Parent Education Committee began its work by surveying parents on their interests and needs, which it continues to do quarterly. Survey results indicated that parents were most interested in learning about bullying, online safety, and academic pathways, so the SIC organized three "Parent Nights" around these topics. These were planned to coincide with school-sponsored fun nights to ensure child care was available and to catch parents when they would already be at the school to drop their children off for an event.

Finalist – Hilton Head Island High SIC – Beaufort County School District

This SIC first worked to increase the level of engagement among community members. The SIC reinvented the school's "Community Day," into "Island Connections," a forum where business and community leaders learn what makes the school successful, hear directly from students, and share their own ideas on improving education. Attendance has grown significantly due to the SIC's efforts and the number of community volunteers in the school has increased. The SIC also worked to build better communication, trust, and interaction between HHHS and parents/guardians. It transformed the school's traditional "Parent University" into a series of free monthly workshops with topics and speakers chosen based on feedback from annual SIC parent/family surveys. Workshops are held immediately prior to SIC meetings, making it easier for parents to attend both, and attendance at the newly formatted events has improved. The SIC also strove to help improve communication and connections between the school and Hispanic families by forming a Hispanic Liaison Subcommittee that gathered data on the needs and concerns of these families. This process took several months and included a survey, interviews with Hispanic parents, and Q&A sessions during ESOL meetings and at community and church events. The results were conveyed to the school's Bilingual Liaison and the data was used to choose topics for the school's Hispanic parent meetings. This effort improved attendance at parent meetings, helped families feel more welcome, and has encouraged them to participate in other school events.

2018 Riley Award Finalists, continued

Finalist – Saluda High SIC – Saluda County Schools

After reviewing school data, this SIC developed a two-fold goal: reduce the number of student tardies and demonstrate the SIC's belief that every student who has good attendance, works hard, and does what is asked of him or her deserves recognition. To achieve this dual goal, beginning in the 2015-16 school year, the SIC developed "Tiger Pride Day," an event open only to those students who had no more than three tardies in a semester, no discipline referrals all year, and all passing grades. The SIC reached out to local businesses who provided food for the celebration. The SIC also procured a DJ and inflatable obstacle course, as well as other games and sports equipment so students could relax, dance, and play. The SIC followed up with a survey to get student feedback on what they liked and what they would like to see added in the future. The 2016-17 school year saw a nine percent increase in the number of students eligible to attend "Tiger Pride Day," and student tardies dropped by half. "Tiger Pride Day" was expanded and features were added such as freedom to use cell phones during the event. Tardies and disciplinary referrals have continued to drop in the 2017-18 school year, and the school is on track to see another increase in the number of students eligible for the SIC's third annual "Tiger Pride Day."

Finalist – South Florence High SIC – Florence School District One

This SIC worked first to address the high level of academic failure among overage students. The SIC successfully submitted a grant proposal to fund *Highway to Higher Education*, the school's initiative to give approximately 25 overage diploma-tracked ninth graders an opportunity to graduate in three years. SIC members organized and attended the induction dinner for these students and their families, and assisted two other district high schools in implementing the same program. The program met or exceeded all five of its first-year goals for students. The SIC also collaborated to write a successful grant proposal to fund the school's 1:1 technology initiative. It spearheaded the effort to collect data and designed a plan for distribution of over 1,200 Chromebooks between a Thursday evening kickoff event (which included baby-sitting, training, free food, and family entertainment), and the following Monday. All SFHS students had completed the necessary paperwork and had their Chromebook in hand within a week. The SIC also worked to improve the appearance of its 40-year-old school building, securing funding to purchase posters and frames, paint for the building, landscaping, and other improvements. It developed language for reinforcing positive behaviors to be displayed in bathrooms, hallways, and common areas throughout the school. The SIC also successfully advocated with their district for new cafeteria furniture with charging capacity for students' new 1:1 devices.

Created in 2002, the annual Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence was created to acknowledge the significant contributions made to public education by the over 13,000 School Improvement Council (SIC) members who volunteer on the more than 1,100 SICs across South Carolina. The Riley Award is named in honor of former SC Governor and US Education Secretary Richard Riley and his late wife, Tunky, and recognizes the couple's longstanding commitment to quality public education.

A core partner in the Center for Educational Partnerships at the University of South Carolina College of Education, the SC School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) was established in state law 40 years ago to provide members with the tools, training, and technical assistance vital to the success of School Improvement Councils serving South Carolina's K-12 public schools.



South Carolina School Improvement Council

"Civic Engagement at Work for Public Education"

USC College of Education, Suite 001, Columbia, SC 29208

803-777-7658

800-868-2232

<http://sic.sc.gov>