

## School of Inquiry wins state award for excellence

By Denyse Clark, Reporter

Wednesday, October 16, 2013 at 3:10 pm (*Updated: October 18, 10:36 am*)

p { margin-bottom: 0.08in; }

It's official, they won!

Chester Park Elementary School of Inquiry received the first place honor in the third annual Dick and Tunky Riley WhatWorksSC Award for Excellence.

The award luncheon was held on Wednesday in Columbia as part of the S.C. Conference of Public Education Partners. In September, the School of Inquiry was named one of 10 semifinalists in this competition. Of those 10 semifinalists, three finalists were chosen for Wednesday's ceremony.

The finalists were Parents As Teachers S.C., Teacher Cadet Program Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement and the Chester Park Elementary School of Inquiry (CPESI) that claimed the top honor – a \$5,000 grant.

Candidates for the 2013 Excellence Award were selected from more than 80 entries in the Riley Institute's WhatWorksSC clearinghouse. The award is presented each year by the Riley Institute at Furman University and S.C. Future Minds. It highlights outstanding educational initiatives throughout the state and is presented in conjunction with the S.C. Chamber of Commerce and the S.C. State Board of Education.

This was the second, consecutive year that CPESI had been selected as a semifinalist in the competition. Assistant Principal Brian Edmond said the school received "an honorable mention" during last year's competition. He also said the school was very proud to win the top award this year.

"We're extremely proud of our teachers and students," Edmond said.

Edmond acknowledged both former principal Dena Dunlap and Dr. Sue Spencer of Winthrop University for their efforts to improve education at the school. Chester Park School of Inquiry is a Professional Development School as part of Winthrop University's NetScope Project that prepares its students to become future teachers. Spencer, a Winthrop liaison, is based at CPESI one day a week and assists teachers and students.

CPESI Principal Robin Taylor said this year's excellence award was based on research which occurred under the leadership of former principal Dena Dunlap who expressed her excitement on Thursday.

"We have really had so much success with project-based learning with our math and science fairs," Dunlap said. "Last year, we received the honorable mention and this year when they called our name, we went wild!"

Dunlap said a contingent of officials from the district including Superintendent Dr. Agnes Slayman, went onto the stage to claim their prize and have their picture taken with former S.C. Gov. Dick Riley.

"He (Riley) said this was the first time he'd heard of project-based learning at the elementary level," she said. "I think that's what got us first place."

Dunlap expects more great things from CPESI under the leadership of the new principal, she said. Another excellence award is likely in the school's future.

"I think Robin Taylor will continue this," Dunlap said. "She's excellent!"

p { margin-bottom: 0.08in; }