

FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE TO PREPARE TEACHERS OF CHILDREN OF POVERTY

Summary

The mission of the Francis Marion University Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty is to provide specialized outreach designed to have the greatest potential for breaking the generations-old cycle of school failure in high-poverty schools. While past efforts centered on packaged curricula or latest fads have been generally unsuccessful, the Center has focused on the important role of human capital—the teacher and school leader. Typically teachers of children of poverty receive no specialized training, graduating from the same schools of education that prepare teachers for work in schools that enroll middle income students. In contrast, the Center at FMU delivers research-based training designed to increase the effectiveness of those who work with under-resourced students. All Center activities are grounded by six Standards for Teachers of Children of Poverty, and an aggressive research agenda is in place to monitor both outputs and outcomes.

The goal of the Center is to increase achievement of children of poverty by:

- Improving the quality of undergraduate teacher preparation
- Improving the quality of graduate teacher preparation
- Providing relevant in-service teacher development opportunities
- Equipping educators with knowledge and skills needed to work effectively with families and community resource providers.

Demographics

- *Target Settings:* Urban, suburban, rural
- *Target Groups Served:* Teachers of children of poverty; school leaders in high poverty schools; policymakers; community action agencies
- *Districts Served:* Allendale, Barnwell, Beaufort, Berkeley, Chester, Chesterfield, Clarendon 1, Clarendon 2, Colleton, Darlington, Dillon 3, Dillon 4, Florence 1, Florence 2, Florence 3, Florence 4, Georgetown, Greenville, Horry, Kershaw, Lee, Lexington 2, Marion, Marlboro, Richland 1, Richland 2, Sumter, York 1, York 2, York 3, York 4, Williamsburg

Research and Evaluation

What national or other research was considered during the development of this program/initiative? Describe the evidence that shows the program/initiative works.

The Center's conduct of research over almost a decade has provided a theoretical and pedagogical foundation based upon six Center-identified Standards for Teachers of Children of Poverty. Delivery of outreach activities within the School of Education at Francis Marion and statewide to educators has been the major focus of Center efforts, and all outreach activities delivered by the Center are aligned with these standards. A strong commitment to accountability is evidenced by the Center's aggressive research agenda that monitors outputs and outcomes.

The Center's primary achievement is its reputation as the premier resource for teachers who work with under-resourced students. The Center offers professional learning opportunities throughout the academic year and in the summer months. Events attract approximately 500 registrants from across South Carolina for two days of learning. Representative feedback from these events includes:

- "Thank you again for a wonderful presentation with very practical help. I really enjoyed hearing you, I felt like I left rejuvenated."
- "'Thank you' seems totally inadequate! ... I can honestly say that I do not think that I have ever seen another present(ation) at our school receive a standing ovation."

Participants commonly relate that they did not know there were real and specific strategies that can work, and they express that they want more information about them. While the workshops elevate awareness, teachers know they need sustained staff development and training. They know that every instructional minute must be guided by research-based strategies, and they are desperate for what the Center can offer. They want more intensive opportunities to learn. To answer this need, the Center delivers professional development courses in addition to those that lead to Add-On Certification. The enrollment in a single course delivered in Summer 2012 represented 39 districts in 3 states, 4 higher education institutions, a number of social service agencies and the State Department of Education. Exit evaluations yielded this representative feedback:

- “This class transformed my way of thinking.”
- “My school year will be different, and I am so thankful for this class and what it taught me.”
- “I wish this class was a requirement for any area of certification.”

The Center has also achieved national recognition for its intensive work that focuses on the development of effective, goal-based family and community partnerships in high poverty schools and districts. Johns Hopkins University’s National Network of Partnership Schools has honored the Center with its prestigious “National Partnership Award” in each of the last five years.

The Center’s leadership in the development of the Add-On Certification and Endorsement for Teachers of Children of Poverty may have the most significant impact for children in South Carolina. Written into law in June 2012, the Center’s proposal for this certification is believed to be the first in the nation, as is the Mastery Assessment for Teachers of Children of Poverty developed by the Center and currently being standardized for wide use as a metric for assessment of the knowledge needed for effective work in high-poverty schools. Because of its exclusive and successful history of research and practice in this area and its existing infrastructure and reputation, the Center’s leadership in the development of the Add-On Certification and Endorsement for Teachers of Children of Poverty may have the broadest and most significant impact for children in South Carolina and the Southeast.

Resources

- *Annual Cost:* \$350,000
- *Funding Sources:* Proviso 1A.47. (SDE-EIA: Centers of Excellence) Of the funds appropriated for Centers of Excellence, \$350,000 must be allocated to the Francis Marion University Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty to expand statewide training for individuals who teach children of poverty through weekend college, non-traditional or alternative learning opportunities.
- *Staffing Needs:* The Center is currently staffed by one half-time Director, one full time Associate Director, and one half-time Administrative Assistant. FMU student workers and graduate assistants are used as available to support events and activities. The Center could benefit from: an additional full time staff member; stipends for current staff members to enable the Center to offer expanded Saturday events; additional funds that lead to the employment of additional student workers who gain valuable work experience while engaged in undergraduate or graduate study at FMU.
- *Infrastructure/Equipment Needs:* The Center could benefit from a new printer that can handle large-scale printing jobs.
- *Partner Organizations:* Johns Hopkins University’s National Network of Partnership Schools; Pee Dee Education Center; 14 South Carolina School Districts

Contact Information

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Student event at Francis Marion University



Professional Learning Conference for Students