On The Move

Riley Institute at Furman Unveils Second Phase of Public Education Study

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GREENVILLE, SC - April 16, 2010 - After completing a comprehensive study to determine what South Carolina citizens want and expect in their K-12 public education system, the Riley Institute at Furman University is providing the state’s educators and policy makers with a variety of tools that can help translate those research findings into practice.

The second phase of the Riley Institute’s sweeping public education study, “WhatWorksSC,” will be officially unveiled Friday, April 16 when the Center for Education Policy and Leadership (CEPL) website is uploaded with a wealth of new information.

That includes data that can (1) help legislators shape public education policy, (2) inform businesses and non-profits about how best to help schools, and (3) show educators how to model the most successful educational practices in their districts, schools and classrooms.

“Our original study showed that the great majority of South Carolinians believe it is crucial to provide the state’s children with the best public education system possible,” said Don Gordon, director of the Riley Institute. “But how do you accomplish that? So we took the study a step further and provided a place where educators and legislators can take an in-depth look at the most successful policies and practices in public education.”

Gordon noted that many of those examples of educational excellence can be found in South Carolina. “The conversation surrounding public education in South Carolina is often negative,” he said, “when in fact there are many promising statewide practices that should be further studied and replicated.

“We also fully recognize that resources are thin and public education is experiencing a financial crisis. WhatWorksSC can help by providing an avenue for schools and
districts to share information about what is working and how to best utilize scarce resources.”

Another result of the second phase of the study is the realization that many of these promising initiatives are not undergoing a systematic evaluation process, most likely due to lack of time and resources.

According to Brooke Culclasure, director of research for the CEPL, “With the creation of the clearinghouse and the annual WhatWorksSC Award for Effectiveness in Education, which will be awarded to an exceptionally promising statewide initiative with measurable outcomes, we not only provide information about effective initiatives in South Carolina and beyond, but at the same time encourage and award innovation in our state.”

The Riley Institute’s original study, the largest ever done on about what people want and expect of public, K-12 education in South Carolina, centered around 3,000 hours of interviews with nearly 800 people representing every school district in the state. The participants included businesspersons, parents, students, school board members, teachers, superintendents, and principals from every county and school district.

Among the primary high consensus recommendations from the study participants was a need for early childhood education, schools as centers of communities, and teacher recruitment and retention.

“WhatWorksSC takes those key strategies from the original study and ties them to meaningful action through an expert series of policy reports, an evolving clearinghouse of education initiatives and case studies that highlight some of the best education models in South Carolina,” said Courtenay Williams, project director of the CEPL. “It will be an ongoing and collaborative effort to accumulate and share the most pertinent educational information available.”

Williams said information about each of the seven key action areas will be released separately through the CEPL website on a monthly basis, with “transforming public schools into community learning centers” being first. The other action areas are improving learning in the early years; incentives to recruit, retain and support effective teachers; successful dropout prevention strategies; building strong school leadership; individualizing education for students; and helping students overcome academic challenges.

“We invite anyone and everyone interested in public education to visit the website and submit information to be included in the clearinghouse,” Williams said.

The Riley Institute education study is funded by a multi-year grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

The Riley Institute is named for Furman graduate and former South Carolina governor and U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley. It offers a broad array of programs designed to engage students and citizens across South Carolina in the various arenas of politics, public policy and public leadership.
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