Study gives look at best ideas in SC schools

Riley Institute's WhatWorksSC gives details about education initiatives

By DIETTE COURREGE
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CHARLESTON - Until now, South Carolina has lacked a comprehensive resource that detailed the state's best K-12 education initiatives.

The Riley Institute at Furman University has researched and compiled this information for the past 2 1/2 years, and WhatWorksSC is available to the public as part of the second phase of the institute's public education project.

Riley Institute officials hope this will give decision-makers access to critical information to improving education. They would like to see it used by lawmakers to shape public policy, by businesses and nonprofits to help schools, and by educators to replicate the most successful practices statewide.

"We don't know of anything like this out there," said Donald Gordon, director of the Riley Institute.

WhatWorksSC is an outgrowth of the institute's 2007 study on what educators, parents, school board members, business leaders and students felt the state needed to improve its quality of public education. Researchers found considerable consensus around certain ideas, and WhatWorksSC takes those initiatives and describes how to put them into action.

For the next eight months, the institute will release a series of policy papers and case studies and provide a clearinghouse of information on seven key areas:

- Transforming public schools into community learning centers
- 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
- Helping students overcome academic challenges