



**FURMAN UNIVERSITY'S RILEY
INSTITUTE RELEASES RESULTS OF
TWO-YEAR PUBLIC EDUCATION STUDY**

*Expanded Learning Opportunities for Struggling
Students, Early Childhood Education, Teacher
Recruitment and Retention Among Top
Recommendations from South Carolina Stakeholders*

*** Embargoed For Publication Until
12:01 A.M. Friday, Sept. 21, 2007**

GREENVILLE, S.C.—After more than 3,000 hours of interviews with nearly 800 people representing every school district in South Carolina, the results are in for the largest and most comprehensive study ever done on public, K-12 education in the state.

The Riley Institute at Furman University conducted the non-partisan study between May 2005 and November 2006. The goal of the study was to learn what the primary stakeholders in the state's education system had to say about the strengths and weaknesses of South Carolina's public schools and to gather their recommendations for improving education at the early childhood/elementary, middle school and high school levels.

Those participating in the study included businessmen and women, parents, students, school board members, teachers of all levels, superintendents, and principals from every county and school district. In addition to answering a 160-item questionnaire, the stakeholders participated in lengthy focus group discussions.

The study found a great deal of consensus across stakeholder groups for a large number of initiatives, such as small class size, family literacy programs and parent involvement, dropout prevention programs beginning in 8th grade and a curriculum more reflective of the needs of the state's economy.

According to Riley Institute officials, the findings showed a very high level of agreement among three key strategies:

- Making available high-quality early childhood education programs in all public schools
- Increasing after-school, summer, and tutoring programs for struggling students and developing public schools as community learning centers to serve students and families

- Developing incentives to recruit and retain effective teachers in every South Carolina classroom and support them to be successful

“We believe it is highly important for policymakers and all of us to know what people at the grassroots level are thinking about public education in South Carolina, at the place where the work is being done,” said Don Gordon, director of the Riley Institute. “And to ensure we heard a geographically and intellectually diverse number of opinions, we talked to a broad sample of people in every school district in the state, from the smallest to the largest, the wealthiest to the poorest.

“We also didn’t want the participants to simply answer a few perfunctory questions and be on their way. We conducted lengthy discussions with each group and got into a great amount of detail. What we discovered is that folks are passionate about public education in South Carolina and they want to make our schools as strong and efficient as possible.”

Gordon said that Riley Institute officials are in the process of meeting with key South Carolina legislators and providing them with results of the study. “It was our goal to compile as much sound and useful information as possible and then provide that information to those who make policy decisions about public education in our state,” he said. “This is especially important for our students who in today’s global world are competing for jobs with those from other states and also from other countries, such as China and India.”

According to project director Brooke Culclasure, there was a broad consensus on a significant number of important educational strategies or opportunities and the vast majority of participants in all categories expressed intense interest in improving education in the state. “There appears to be a real hunger to be an active participant from the grassroots working up, addressing issues that they really see as important on the ground every day,” she said.

The study was conducted by the Riley Institute’s Center for Educational Policy and Leadership and funded by a \$600,000 grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which has been making grants since 1967 to help solve social and environmental problems at home and around the world. The California-based foundation concentrates its resources on activities in education, the environment, global development, performing arts, philanthropy and population.

For a detailed list of the research findings, visit the Riley Institute’s web site at www.rileyinstitute.org/cepl. For more information, contact Furman’s News and Media Relations office at 864-294-3107.

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