Teaching Fellows Program Wins WhatWorksSC Award

ROCK HILL, S.C.—The South Carolina Teaching Fellows Program became the first winner of The Dick and Tunky Riley WhatWorksSC Award Wednesday evening. The program, run by The Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (CERRA), was one of three finalists for the award that honors highly effective initiatives in the state. The award includes a $10,000 prize for program development courtesy of BB&T. The other finalists included The American Reading Company’s 100 Book Challenge at Clinton Elementary School and The Reading Recovery Training Center at Clemson University.

“We were honored to accept the award on behalf of The South Carolina Teaching Fellows Program. This award truly belongs to all 11 Teaching Fellows Institutions, their Campus Directors, current Teaching Fellows, and all Teaching Fellows graduates,” stated Program Director, Jenna Hallman.

The Teaching Fellows Program was established in 1999 by the General Assembly to address the need to recruit high quality teachers for South Carolina’s classrooms. Teaching Fellows receive up to $24,000 over four years to pursue a degree in education at one of 11 Teaching Fellows Institutions across the state. While participating in the Program, Teaching Fellows receive advanced professional development, partner with businesses and communities, and explore opportunities to refine their leadership skills. A Fellow agrees to teach one year in a South Carolina public school for each year he or she receives the Fellowship. Each Teaching Fellow has five years following graduation to satisfy the teaching requirement. If a Fellow does not meet this requirement, he or she is obligated to repay the appropriate portion of the award.

Kim Smoak, a Teaching Fellows Campus Director at The University of South Carolina, attended the award ceremony held at The South Carolina Archives and History Center. “I am very happy to see this program get the acknowledgement it deserves. The recognition this award brings gives the current Fellows a sense of pride in being part of a program that is innovative and effective in its approach to preparing teachers for classrooms in South Carolina,” she said.

There are currently Teaching Fellows serving in 75 different school districts across the state of South Carolina. Of the 261 Teaching Fellows who have satisfied their loan through service, 84.7% are still teaching. The program is funded through the South Carolina General Assembly, and as such the number of students admitted to each cohort is contingent upon the availability of funds appropriated by the General Assembly.

Robin Bracken, a former Teaching Fellow and current elementary school teacher at Calhoun Academy of the Arts in Anderson School District 5, was excited by the news. “I am proud to have been a Teaching Fellow. The Program provided many opportunities to participate in professional development and to experience the realities of the classroom. As a result, I felt well-prepared as a beginning teacher,” she said.

Teaching Fellows are identified through a rigorous selection process that includes an online application, an interview in front of three educators, and a written response to an education-related topic. To be eligible for the Program, students must be a U.S. citizen, a South Carolina resident, and a current high school senior. The application for the 2012 cohort is currently available online at www.cerra.org.