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Study ties public ideas to education

By Vicki Grooms
vgrooms@thesunnews.com

Linking what the public wants with ways to achieve improvement in K-12 public education is the goal of a second study by the Richard W. Riley Institute of Government, Politics and Public Leadership at Furman University.

"WhatWorksSC" launched today on the institute's Web site, riley.furman.edu/education. The institute offers programs in politics, policy and leadership.

According to institute officials, the research will link best practices to research data to help legislators shape policy and to help educators see successes in their districts.

"We want to graduate a work force for the 21st century to compete in a global economy," said Don Gordon, director of the Riley Institute.

The first phase of the research was an 18-month study, funded by a \$600,000 grant, which found that South Carolinians want schools at the center of communities, early childhood education and the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers.

This second phase, funded by a \$400,000 grant, illustrates strategies with an expert series, a clearinghouse of initiatives and case studies that illustrate successful education models.

Horry County Schools has programs that will be included in the clearinghouse, including Early College High School and rural distance learning, said Courtenay Williams, institute project director.

Gordon said the topic of public education in South Carolina is often seen as a negative. He said they recognize this is a low-resource state that's in a financial crisis, but we "don't have time to mess around."

So why sink so much money into a study that in many ways results in common-sense answers?

Horry County Schools Superintendent Cindy Elsberry said the research is a valuable tool when trying to change the status quo. She said children are learning differently from the way their parents did, and "the delivery system has to be different."

"That's frightening to a lot of people. Convincing a parent is hard to do," Elsberry said. "It's a paradigm shift. ... You've got to change the way we think and learn."

Gordon said the research will help people "get outside the box" and become educational entrepreneurs.

"It allows people in policy management a way to prioritize," he said, "and quit looking at education as a tax rather than an investment."

Contact VICKI GROOMS at 443-2401.