Riley Institute’s Diversity Leadership Initiative Midlands Class Team Takes Marlboro County Schools Districts’ #345 Initiative Statewide

On March 27th our Diversity Leadership Initiative team, along with a coalition of 30 statewide organizations, supported International SEL (Social Emotional Learning) Day by expanding Marlboro County School District’s #345 Initiative. Social Emotional Learning or SEL “is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

Each year the Riley Institute at Furman selects established leaders from all sectors of South Carolina society to take part in the Riley Institute at Furman’s Diversity Leaders Initiative (DLI), a unique, highly interactive, multi-award-winning program where participants learn to understand their diversity and inclusion “blind spots” and how to
suspend assumptions. As part of the program, participants work in small groups to identify and develop real solutions for real issues facing their communities.

Today’s youth will not only be impacted by the Coronavirus-19 pandemic but will also deal with other issues and temptations. Statistically significant associations exist between measured social-emotional skills in kindergarten and young adult outcomes across multiple domains: fewer conduct problems, less emotional stress, lower drug use, improved attitudes about self, others and school, and positive classroom behavior.

Our DLI group decided to focus on expanding the awareness and implementation of best practices of Social and Emotional Learning within South Carolina’s schools and communities. Marlboro County School District Superintendent and Riley Institute DLI Spring 2020 Midlands Class member, Dr. Gregory McCord’s #345 initiative has created a spark of warm-hearted phrases of affirmations that has ignited a sense of security and comfort for its students.

Dr. McCord explains that the purpose of #345 initiative is to provide an effective way to show students they are loved, cared for and that there is always someone there for them. #345 represents phrases of positive affirmations: (3 words) I love you, (4 words) I care about you, and (5 words) I am here for you. Or if in a hurry you simply say #345. The impact of hearing one of these 3 phrases each day could help change the trajectory of one's outlook on life. The commitment and the beliefs of positive affirmations for students can deter depression, anxiety as well as other symptoms of mental health conditions. Our goal is to take #345 statewide with communities, schools, parents, students displaying #345 phrases of affirmations and acts of empathy, inclusion and kindness to all.

What can you do? Use #345 on social posts, make posters to put in your windows, uses these phrases daily, get creative! We need to show one another that we are all in this together and that we are here for each other.

The Riley Institute Midlands Class XIII DLI #345 Project Team members are: Chris Hardy President/CEO Sumter Chamber, Karen Buffalo Director of Early Childhood Education Sumter Schools, Debbie Jones Executive Director SC Future Minds, Dr. Gregory McCord Superintendent of Marlboro School District, Sheila Quinn Superintendent of Clover Schools (York 2), Kelvin Washington Police Chief City of Darlington, Mike Young Co-Interim Director SC PASOS and Sharon Ray of Moore Beauston Woodham.

Submitted to Soda City Biz Wire

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