

WhatWorksSC

case study

Choosing to Succeed: Partnerships Transform a Struggling School

About WhatWorksSC

In 2005 and 2006, with a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Riley Institute at Furman conducted the largest ever study of public education in South Carolina. The study yielded key strategies for creating world-class schools in South Carolina, derived from 3000 focus group hours with more than 800 stakeholders.

WhatWorksSC ties those strategies to a number of initiatives to serve as a resource for educators, students, the community and policy makers in South Carolina. Products include case studies, which drill down on innovative initiatives from across the state; a series of expert papers that further explore the findings of the study; and an evolving clearinghouse of programs and initiatives that exemplify the study's essential key strategies for improving public schools.



Baptist Hill High School in Hollywood, South Carolina

Before 2006, Baptist Hill High School, a public school located in rural Hollywood, South Carolina, was at a crossroads. The dropout rate was high, report card ratings poor, and test scores low. A new principal, James Winbush, began his tenure at Baptist Hill and a decision was made that things needed to change. "Success happens by choice, not by chance," became the battle cry of Winbush. Thus, the choice was made to succeed. Since then, with an unwavering focus on discipline, literacy promotion, teacher accountability, and strong community partnerships, Baptist Hill has made giant strides. Its 2008-2009 South Carolina School Report Card Improvement Rating moved from unsatisfactory to excellent and its Absolute Rating moved from below average to average. Graduation rates have increased, and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and End of Course (EOC) test scores have jumped.

How was this transformation at Baptist Hill made and how was a principal's battle cry heard and heeded? The answer points to a principal's commitment to implementing a school improvement plan and the support of organizations such as the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education (CPIE) at the College of Charleston. Winbush's school improvement plan began by addressing Baptist Hill's prevalent discipline issues, a situation illustrated by the fact that, instead of attending class, many students chose to "hang out" in the school hallway. In order to set the tone for the entire student body and send the message that poor discipline would not be tolerated, Winbush immediately expelled students with extreme discipline issues or sent them to the district's discipline school.

Baptist Hill's school improvement plan also focused on encouraging teacher accountability and buy-in through mandatory goal setting, incentives with money and a point system (described below), and increased professional development opportunities. In terms of incentives, teachers were rewarded based on factors such as attendance and improved test scores; rewards included a \$300 stipend for perfect attendance and \$500-\$800 stipends for improved test scores. Teachers also were rewarded with points for taking graduate classes, joining a professional organization, or submitting an article for the monthly parent newsletter.

Winbush made a commitment to increasing expectations for Baptist Hill and creating a culture of academic excellence on campus: an advisor/advisee program was created so teachers had the time to get to know students better and encourage them to stay in school; single-gender classes were instituted to help students focus more on their studies and less on the opposite sex; and an early-morning tutoring program was started to help students prepare for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the High School Assessment Program (HSAP).

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Working at the intersection of education research and practice in South Carolina



"Success happens by choice, not by chance."

— James Winbush,
Principal of Baptist Hill
High School,
2006-2010



Students participate in Baptist Hill's career fair

Community partnerships were a big part of the school's success. Soon after Winbush began in 2006, he solicited the assistance of the CPIE. With the input of College of Charleston professors Nicola Williams, Cass Runyon, and Martha Bireda, CPIE began to help the school establish external partnerships, partnerships that had not been cultivated due to the school's rural location and distance from the city of Charleston. Results from these partnerships included additional resources and supplies for classroom teachers and the school library; a greater number and wider variety of professional development opportunities offered to teachers; the availability of college prep enrichment opportunities for students, such as college fairs, college prep materials, and a summer camp; and the provision of other materials, such as science kits and on-line learning resources, for students.

In addition, the CPIE helped Baptist Hill form other partnerships that led to some fundamental changes at the school. Through a partnership with Trident Technical College, a dual credit program was established for students that allowed them to earn college and high school credits simultaneously. A partnership with the College of Charleston's Adlestone Library also was cultivated, resulting in tutoring programs for students and the availability of technology-based study. The Citadel,

another nearby institution of higher education, provided literacy professional development to teachers, instituted a tutoring program for students, and started a "Gear Up!" program for selected students preparing to go to college.

Even with all of the positive change that has occurred at Baptist Hill since 2006, the work is not yet done. During the 2010-2011 school year, in an effort to create a more seamless transition for students and a more cohesive school community, the middle school that feeds into Baptist Hill will be relocated to a new wing in the high school. Additionally, these and the school's many other initiatives will need to be moved forward by new leadership since Winbush was recently promoted to an assistant superintendent position in Charleston County.

With Baptist Hill's new leader, Adrian Busch, sharing a similar vision for the school, the changes implemented during the past five years will undoubtedly help Baptist Hill continue to serve as a model for refocusing a school, shifting the culture to academic excellence, and dramatically improving the dropout rate.

Baptist Hill High School	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10 (HS grades only)
Graduation Rate	58.1%	72.3%	69.4%	81.2%	72.5%	(Avbl 11/10)
Report Card Absolute Rating	At-Risk	At-Risk	Below Average	Average	Average	(Avbl 11/10)
Report Card Improvement Rating	At-Risk	Excellent	At-Risk	Excellent	Excellent	(Avbl 11/10)
MAP Reading (% Meeting/ Exceeding Virtual Comparison Group-VCG)	N/A	N/A	45.1%	57.9%	54.6%	74.5%
MAP Math (% Meeting/ Exceeding Virtual Comparison Group-VCG)	N/A	N/A	43.7%	63.2%	68.9%	81.9%
EOC Passage Rate – English	49.2%	50.0%	31.0%	53.2%	50.0%	65.7%
EOC Passage Rate – Biology	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	44.4%
EOC Passage Rate – Algebra I/ Math Tech 2	56.1%	54.5%	59.8%	72.7%	60.0%	85.2%
EOC Passage Rate – Physical Science	11.8%	18.1%	18.9%	0.0% (n=2)	39.8%	47.1%
EOC Passage Rate – U.S. History	N/A	N/A	6.4%	25.6%	29.1%	60.0%

Baptist Hill High School At a Glance

Baptist Hill is located in a rural, working class community located about 22 miles away from Charleston. Within the Charleston County School District, Baptist Hill serves approximately 450 students. 91% of the students receive free and reduced lunch and 100% of the students are African American.

Written by :

Brooke Culclasure, Ph.D.
Research Director,
Center for Education
Policy and Leadership
The Riley Institute

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permission of Baptist Hill
High School

For more information on Baptist Hill High School:

Dr. Paula Egelson
Director,
Center for Partnerships to
Improve Education
College of Charleston
843-953-7629
egelsonp@cofc.edu