

WhatWorksSC

case study

South Carolina Leadership Executive Institute (SLEI)

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.

“The SLEI Program has allowed me to become a better leader and utilize the talents of the people around me in a more effective manner. This has provided others the opportunity to take ownership and create new and innovative methods of instruction.”

— SLEI Participant



Principals from around the state participating in a SLEI activity

It is easy to underestimate the importance of strong school leadership since a principal or superintendent often times appears to be just one person in a sea of many. Nevertheless, time and again, evidence reveals that schools with improving student achievement, satisfied teachers, and engaged parents and community members have a strong and committed school leader.

The South Carolina Leadership Executive Institute (SLEI) focuses on the nurturing and development of this essential component of school and student success. The goal of SLEI, which is run through the Office of School Leadership in the South Carolina Department of Education, is to provide principals from diverse districts across the state the insight, knowledge, and competencies necessary to lead their schools to success. Established in 2000, the Institute challenges principals to enhance their leadership and management skills while reviewing their schools' educational practices.

SLEI's rigorous curriculum was developed in partnership with the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). The two day monthly sessions rotate between the CCL's campus and the Office of School Leadership's classroom facility. Sessions are facilitated by CCL faculty, Office of School Leadership staff, and experts from across the state.

Each SLEI cohort consists of approximately 25 principals from diverse backgrounds and schools, and each year a new cohort begins the program. These cohorts develop a strong sense of camaraderie and a strong network of expertise and support. Generally, new cohorts start in June or July and graduate one year later. The Office of School Leadership provides follow-up activities for graduates in the form of topical seminars.

To be eligible to participate in SLEI, one must have completed the Principal Induction Program (PIP), a one-year mandatory program for new principals in South Carolina, and must be highly recommended by the district superintendent. Most participants have at least five years of administrative experience at the time they begin the program.

The cost per participant is approximately \$5000. This includes tuition, travel, lodging and materials. The State Department of Education pays the program costs and provides staff to administer the program.

How well is SLEI achieving its goals? In 2008, results of a large-scale evaluation of SLEI were released. This evaluation



SLEI gives participants the insights, knowledge, and competencies to lead their schools to success

included focus group interviews with alumni, a survey of alumni (107 respondents), school level feedback from teachers and administrators from 20 schools (796 respondents), and feedback from 14 superintendents. In addition, two case studies were conducted on schools with alumni principals whom achieved a significant turnaround, in order to examine if and how the program builds the skills necessary to improve student achievement.

Results of this evaluation show that participation in SLEI has had a large impact on principals, and in turn on their schools and students, as the chart below illustrates. It is clear from this evaluation that SLEI is both providing a significant leadership development experience for participants and producing principals with the skills necessary to positively impact student achievement.

Evaluation: SLEI Alumni Report Substantial Impact

96% report that there has been a change in their school's culture as a result of their participation in the SLEI program.

87% report that their SLEI experience will accelerate their attainment of desired improvement results in the school to a great or very great extent.

88% agreed or strongly agreed that the SLEI program taught them what they needed to know to positively impact student achievement.

94% report that the SLEI program prepared them to lead effective school change to a great or very great extent.



“I think that principal leadership which creates a learning environment where the energy is focused on student achievement is essential. Through SLEI I have learned how to manage change and involve stakeholders so that their energies can be spent on teaching and learning.”

— SLEI Participant

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