

FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE TO PREPARE TEACHERS OF CHILDREN OF POVERTY

Summary

The mission of the Francis Marion University Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty is to provide specialized outreach designed to have the greatest potential for breaking the generations-old cycle of school failure in high-poverty schools. Focused on the human capital—the teacher and school leader—the Center provides research-based training that increases the knowledge and skills of those persons who work with under-resourced students. To that end, the Center's goal is to increase achievement of children of poverty by improving the quality of undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation, providing relevant in-service teacher development opportunities, and equipping educators with knowledge and skills needed to work effectively with families and the community.

Demographics

- *Target Settings:* Urban, suburban, rural
- *Target Groups Served:* Teachers and teacher candidates, school and district leaders, community stakeholders and action agencies, and policymakers.
- *Districts Served:* All SC districts

Research and Evaluation

What national or other research was considered during the development of this program/initiative? Describe the evidence that shows the program/initiative works.

Project Development: More than 50% of all children in South Carolina live in low-income families, while 27% live in families in poverty and 13% live in extreme poverty. Children of poverty and low income often lack access to key resources that are important for success. They are more likely to fall behind, be assigned to lower 'tracks' in education, be retained, be labeled as 'problem' students, be absent or drop out, and earn lower scores on standardized tests of knowledge and achievement (Biddle, 2001). Even if children are equal on the generally predictive variables of ethnicity, family structure, and mothers' education, Marzano (2004) reported that children born in or near poverty are less than half as likely to be successful as their more affluent peers.

Poverty matters, but teachers and schools can matter more. Teacher effectiveness has been identified as the single most important variable in the school-success equation. Marzano's (1998) meta-analyses indicate that as much as 43% of student's academic performance can be traced to the quality of the teacher. The most effective teachers require just six months to accomplish the same amount of learning that the least effective teachers accomplish in two years (Hanushek and Rivken, 2006), and Hamre and Pianta (2005) found that, with effective teachers, disadvantaged children learn at the same rate as advantaged learners. In short, teachers matter.

Project Success: The Center's decade of research provides the theoretical and pedagogical foundation for six Center-identified Standards for Teachers of Children of Poverty based on these themes: Life in Poverty, Language and Literacy, Family/Community Partnerships, Classroom Management, Curriculum Design/Instruction/Assessment, and Teachers as Leaders/Learners/Advocates. Delivery of standards-aligned outreach activities focused on 25 specific high-yield and goal-based strategies has been the major focus of Center efforts.

A strong commitment to accountability is evidenced by the Center's aggressive research agenda that informs practice and monitors outcomes. Developed in keeping with Guskey's model for evaluating intensive professional development, 14 Center-developed measures, coupled with school-based data points, comprise the qualitative and quantitative agenda. Annual analyses of data indicate that the Center is continuously expanding its outreach while effecting a significant impact on teachers' attitudes and beliefs, school and district program development and implementation, and student success.

The Center's primary achievement is its reputation as the premier resource for teachers who work with under-resourced students. Through its outreach, intensive professional development, conferences and workshops, graduate courses, and research events, the Center directly impacts more than 16,000 teachers, schools leaders, and stakeholders annually.

The Center's leadership in the development and legislative approval of the Add-On Certification and Endorsement for Teachers of Children of Poverty may have the most significant longtime impact for children in South Carolina. Courses leading to this certification provide classroom teachers and school leaders with the knowledge, skills, and practical experience necessary to challenge the barriers of poverty. Center-sponsored courses are now widely available for teachers across the state via distance and hybrid platforms, and more than 230 students engaged in this professional learning in the last year.

Because sustained professional development yields most powerful outcomes, districts and schools partner with the Center in intensive professional learning outreach matched with aggressive, classroom-based action research. Participating schools consistently realize significant gains, as exemplified by Green Sea Floyds High School's ESEA waiver rating improvement from an "F" to an "A" after a single year of focus on the Center's high impact strategies. Richland School District Two partnered with the Center to facilitate a year-long study of poverty and diversity, and Lexington School District Two hosted poverty simulations and school-based course delivery. Additionally, Center staff facilitated more than 125 professional learning events in schools and districts in 6 states and at professional meetings within South Carolina and nationwide.

Google has identified the Center's website as one of the most relevant sites for information for teachers of children of poverty, ranking it as 7th worldwide for relevance for the single search term 'poverty' and in the top two of returned sites in Google searches for "poverty and education," "resources for teaching children of poverty," and "teaching teachers about poverty."

The Center has also achieved national recognition for its intensive work that focuses on the development of effective, goal-based family and community partnerships in high poverty schools and districts. The Johns Hopkins University-based National Network of Partnership Schools has honored the Center for six consecutive years with its prestigious "National Partnership Award," and three Center-trained school programs were honored with national school awards in the last year.

Resources

- *Annual Cost: 350,000*
- *Funding Sources: SC Proviso 1A.36 of the SC General Appropriations Act.*
- *Staffing Needs: Additional full time staff member; Stipends for expanded weekend outreach.*
- *Infrastructure/Equipment Needs: Printer for large-scale in-house printing.*
- *Partner Organizations: Invested districts (Berkeley, Clarendon 1, Clarendon 2, Clarendon 3, Darlington, Dillon 3, Dillon 4, Florence 1, Florence 3, Georgetown, Lexington 2, Marion, Richland 1, Richland 2, Williamsburg), Pee Dee Education Center, Richland School District Two Gear-Up Project, Clarendon School District Two Race to the Top, Johns Hopkins University National Network of Partnership Schools, USC College of Education Center for Educational Partnerships, SC ETV, Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement, Center of Excellence for College and Career Readiness, RETAIN Center of Excellence for Teacher Retention, Overcoming Obstacles, UNC Pembroke, East Carolina University, Penn (University of Pennsylvania) Center of Educational Leadership, South Carolina First Steps, South Carolina Department of Education.*

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Summer Institute



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Poverty Simulation