Urban Education

Pulling Together:
Community Involvement Equals Student Success

Magical Moments in Science:
The Science Literacy Project at Burke High School

Closing the Achievement Gaps:
What’s Missing from the Current Education Debates

Angela Cozart:
English as a Second Language

Kay Toliver:
Engaging Students in Instruction

Anne Smith:
Arts in the Schools
Dean’s Message And Director’s Message

Goals of the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education

Pulling Together: Community Involvement Equals Student Success
Burke High School is a school community brimming with promise.

Magical Moments in Science: The Science Literacy Project at Burke High School
Inquiry-based science instruction results in learning magic.

Closing The Achievement Gaps
What’s missing from the current education debates.

Urban Education: Focus on Engaging Students in Instruction
An interview with English Language Learner professor Angela Cozart.

Urban Education: Focus on Engaging Students in Instruction
An interview with math educator Kay Toliver.

Urban Education: Focus On Arts In The Schools
An interview with arts educator Anne Smith.

Rural Science and Distance Education
The state of distance and science education in schools in rural, low-income South Carolina school districts.

A New Partnership for the Center for Partnerships To Improve Education

Teaching And Learning Activities Update

Kids In Space: Urban Middle School Students Tackle A Space Weather Project
How middle school students connect to “hands-on” learning.

Burke Community Partners
A MESSAGE FROM

THE COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON’S DEAN OF EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND HUMAN PERFORMANCE

Greetings from The College of Charleston’s School of Education, Health, and Human Performance. It is a pleasure to introduce the first issue of the Partnerships in Education magazine, a product of our new Center for Partnerships to Improve Education. The Center’s mission is to transform low-performing schools, involve faculty, students, and the community in that transformation, and document the results.

Research supports that the best education for future teachers occurs when teacher education faculty members connect with others across campus as well as public school administrators, teachers, and staff members. Because of these necessary and important connections, the Center is critical to our overall work in teacher education. It informs what we do as we make a positive impact in challenged schools while at the same time providing helpful learning experiences to teachers in training.

At the College of Charleston we offer initial certification programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels in a variety of areas. We also offer advanced degrees at the master’s level and are in the process of designing an educational specialist degree. We invite you to visit us in our new facilities on the corner of Wentworth and St. Philips Streets in downtown Charleston. This location provides easy access to the community. Our Center for Partnerships to Improve Education is also housed in this building. Our state-of-the-art classroom facilities, the Volpe Center for Teaching and Learning, are across the street.

If you should have questions or would like to offer input about the School of Education or the Center, please feel free to contact me at welchf@cofc.edu. We welcome your ideas. Please enjoy reading our magazine and learning about our work at the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education.

FRANCES C. WELCH

THE DIRECTOR’S LETTER

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Partnerships in Education, a magazine published by the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education. The Center for Partnerships, associated with the College of Charleston’s School of Education, Health, and Human Performance, is the vision of Dean Fran Welch and was created in 2005. The Center’s primary mission is to work collaboratively with selected South Carolina schools to improve student achievement.

The Center also coordinates a community outreach committee that advocates for Burke and volunteers their time at the school. The school has struggled with low student achievement and has experienced a turnover of principals. Today, however, Burke is on the upswing with a principal and faculty whom are committed to making the needed improvements to the school. The Center supports Burke with a principal coach whose job it is to support the principal, interpret policy, and assist with evaluation, curriculum, and instruction. In addition, College of Charleston English, mathematics, science, and social studies education professors provide Burke’s department heads with effective instructional approaches and resources. The Center also coordinates a community outreach board that advocates for Burke and volunteers their time at the school. The partnership is currently evaluating the impact of these efforts.

The theme of this issue of Partnerships in Education is urban education. In this issue, we highlight several urban educators: Charles Benton, the principal of Burke High School; Kay Toliver, a nationally acclaimed middle school mathematics instructor who taught in East Harlem; Angela Cozart, an associate professor at the College of Charleston whose areas of expertise include culture issues and English language learners; and Anne Smith, an arts management professor at Golden Gate University and a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the College of Charleston in 2006, who has initiated art projects in inner cities. Belinda Williams, a Distinguished Visiting Professor in 2007, describes her extensive research on closing the achievement gaps. We also feature College of Charleston professors who are conducting education research that focuses on interactive science classroom activities and student achievement.

We are excited about our new magazine and hope you will find it informative and thought-provoking. We welcome your comments and suggestions; please contact me at egelsonp@cofc.edu.

PAULA E. EGELSON
The Center for Partnerships to Improve Education is a consortium of educators, school districts, business and civic leaders, and communities collaborating to strengthen the educational outcomes of students in South Carolina. Located in the College of Charleston’s School of Education, Health, and Human Performance, it was established in 2005 to address improvement of PreK–12 education in South Carolina. There are three strands associated with the partnership—Teaching and Learning (staffed by College of Charleston professors), Research, and Community Outreach.

The Center for Partnerships’ goals are to:

• Improve performance and reduce the drop-out rates of students
• Increase enrollment of minority and low-income students in institutions of higher learning
• Prepare youth for employment in the 21st century workforce
• Re-engage disaffected students in education
• Educate teacher candidates to work effectively in low-performing schools and to seek employment in such schools
• Establish expectations, incentives, and professional development for teachers to make a long-term commitment to work in low-performing schools
• Improve understanding in higher education and businesses of the issues limiting urban and rural students’ futures and identify ways to address these issues

The Center for Partnerships’ model is being implemented in the Charleston County School District and will eventually be disseminated for use in low-performing rural and urban schools across South Carolina.

We welcome your inquiries. For more information on the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education, call us or visit our website.

General Inquiries: (843) 953-2742          Website: http://www.cofc.edu/~partnerships

Paula Egelson, Ed.D., Director        Andrew Lewis, Ph.D. Steven L. Thomas, Ph.D.
Center for Partnerships to Improve Education        Community Outreach Coordinator        Research and Policy Analyst
Phone: (843) 953-7629        Phone: (843) 953-8250 Phone: (843) 953-1987
egelsonp@cofc.edu         lewisa@cofc.edu thomassl@cofc.edu
Pulling Together
Community Involvement Equals Student Success
BY CHRISTY HEITGER & RUTH ORMAN

If it takes a village to raise a child, then it most certainly takes a community to educate one. At least that’s the way Charles Benton sees it. In the summer of 2006 Benton accepted the position as principal at Burke High School, a public school with a rich but often turbulent history. Founded in 1911 on the principles of industrial trade and craftsmanship espoused by Booker T. Washington, it was the first public school in Charleston serving the African-American community and the only one that remains on the Charleston, South Carolina, peninsula. The school’s cherished history and neighborhood support has buoyed it through segregation, public scrutiny, and chronic leadership turnover. Today, Burke High School, located on a state-of-the-art campus, provides a full curriculum with academics, career training in education technology, health occupations, hospitality and tourism, and information technology.

A SCHOOL COMMUNITY BRIMMING WITH PROMISE
Burke is the first institution to partner with the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education. Burke is where the center is piloting its program for student achievement through collaboration with the greater community. Burke High, though it has a wealth of potential, is an underachieving school community. In addition to low state achievement test scores, the school also has a free and reduced lunch rate of 94%. The threat of state intervention has only added to the stress placed on this school community’s members. It is a microcosm of a situation throughout South Carolina, whose high school graduation rate of 50% is the lowest in the nation.

None of this fazes Benton, however, who readily steps up to the challenge of transforming Burke into the best school that it can be. Indeed, Benton’s daily schedule proves his loyalty and dedication to his students. He has 950 charges, grades 7–12, under his care from 7–3, Monday through Friday, not including after-school and weekend programs. On any given 12- to 14-hour workday, he will intercede on behalf of students, their parents, teachers, and district staff. In addition, the media is a constant presence at Burke as they report regularly on the state of the school. But Benton takes it all in stride. In fact, he invites the media—as well as the greater community—to tour the school, and share with him both the problems and solutions that will help close the divide that makes the institution seem a world away to those outside its immediate vicinity. “People need to come see what Burke is really about rather than reading one incident in the news that will taint [their view of] the school,” said Benton.

STAYING PUT TO EFFECT CHANGE
An educator for more than 30 years (over 25 as a principal), Benton has a track record of turning around under-performing schools and opening up communication between the school and the community. Most recently, he was in his home state of North Carolina on special assignment as principal at Andrews High School, a school similar to Burke in its assets and liabilities.

Benton has pledged to work with Burke High for the duration, stabilizing what has come to symbolize its most conspicuous dilemma, inconsistent leadership. The school has had seven principals in 11 years, and four area district superintendents. Thirty-seven percent of Charleston County’s schools have had at least one change in the principal’s office, some more than one. (Seventy-six percent of those schools, including Burke, have rated below average or unsatisfactory on the state school report cards.) Benton, however, is unpacked and uninterested in leaving his position at Burke anytime soon. “When I get through with Burke in three to five years, I
SUCCESS STARTS EARLY ON
Benton understands the factors that affect a school’s success or failure, including the interdependence of the school with the greater community. “We need to take a good look at our feeder system,” he says. “Starting in kindergarten, we must make sure we’re doing everything we can—and I’m not saying that we’re not—to prepare the children for the next grade.”

want it to be at a place where another administrator can come in with foresight and take this school to whatever the next level will be,” he said. “I want this school to move in the right direction, with a firm infrastructure.”

Burke’s situation became particularly acute in 2005 with the merging of a local middle school with the high school, erratic implementation of middle and high school academic programs, and the start of yet another principal’s tenure, then departure, after only a year. By the time Benton started, the school was on the verge of a state takeover, a notoriety it narrowly avoided last August when a groundswell of community and political support spared it.

Benton, who came on board in June 2006, isn’t deterred by any of it. “I’m primarily working on three goals this year,” he said, clarifying the first phase of his plans. “I’m working 8. With its research base, the comprehensive school reform model has been a proven entity. Additionally, the school is including the state’s External Review Team (ERT), the prescribed program of reform mandated last August by the South Carolina State Department of Education. Benton does not see the two programs as mutually exclusive. “The ERT is actually a reform model within itself. If you do everything that’s in here, you probably will be doing everything that’s in High Schools That Work, so they’ll work together,” noted Benton.

“I really think most of it is just having a focus on what you’re trying to do and having your model to work with, so you have a blueprint to follow.”

Part of that blueprint, said Benton, is unifying community support for the endeavor. “The greater community really needs to embrace Burke so we can build the kind of program we need to help students achieve success so that when they leave here they can either further their education or have the skills necessary to go to work. We know that it’s becoming more difficult to leave high school and go to work and make a decent wage. But it’s possible. We would like to see all of our students be able to further their education, whether it’s a two- or four-year school, or to take a trade.”

CHANGING THE PERCEPTION OF BURKE
Most troubling to Benton is the skewed public perception that Burke school community has endured over time. “This is the sixth high school I’ve worked in. I’ve worked in affluent schools. I’ve worked in rural schools. Many of the situations at Burke you’ll find in any school, anywhere in the country. If you really lined everything up school for school, we’d have similar situations,” he said.

“I’ll be honest with you. When I came here I really didn’t know what to expect. But I’ve been amazed at how respectful so many of the children are. The students are so easy to work with. They will listen to you. Like any school, you have some who don’t do what you ask. But that’s everywhere.”

Benton credits his parents, his wife (a teacher), and several former teachers among those who positively influenced his outlook and emphasized the role of mentoring in students’ life achievement. “They’re not able to make decisions like we do at 40 or 50. What we’re trying to do is teach them to make the right decisions because if you make bad decisions, you get bad results,” said Benton. “Part of our job is to try to help them make good, informed decisions so that their lives will be easier.

“People need to come see what Burke is really about rather than reading one incident in the news that will taint [their view of] the school.”

to change the perception of Burke because it’s so negative in the community and that’s a travesty. The second thing is to increase parent involvement. And the third is to work on our curriculum and instruction piece to make sure we’re teaching subjects properly.”

DRAFTING A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS
Burke uses High Schools That Work as the reform model of choice for its ninth- through twelfth-graders and its middle school counterpart, the A-Plus Academy, for grades 7 and
HAVE YOU EVER WITNESSED A STUDENT’S FACE WHEN THE light bulb turns on inside her head? Her eyes grow wide, her mouth drops open, and suddenly everything clicks in her mind. It’s at this instant when learning becomes memorable, meaningful, even magical…and so often these magical moments are a direct result of inquiry-based instruction.

WHY INQUIRY INSTRUCTION?

When inquiry-based instruction is employed in the classroom, students become actively engaged in activities that help them develop knowledge and understanding of scientific phenomena. According to the National Science Education Standards (NSES), for students to develop knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, they must actively participate in scientific investigations, and they must actually use the cognitive and manipulative skills associated with the formulation of scientific explanations. It is this focused, hands-on participation and active engagement that strengthens the learning process.

Research has repeatedly shown that students who engage in scientific inquiry are able to attain a deeper foundational understanding of science content and processes (e.g., Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Layman, Ochoa, & Heikkinen, 1996; Metz, 1995; Renninger & Hidi, 2002; Schneider, Krajcik, Marx, & Soloway, 2002). Several recent, publicly funded, national initiatives propose a redirection of science education toward science literacy for all students (American Association for the Advancement of Science [AAAS], 1990, 1993; National Resource Council [NRC], 1996, 2000). This science education reform places more value on higher order thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and the ability to apply knowledge and skills to settings that transcend the classroom.

The scientific inquiry approach to science education does not involve memorization of facts and figures, nor does it include “recipe” experiments that provide students with the research question, the methods used to investigate the question, and the intended outcome of the experiment confirmation. Instead, students are given the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to find solutions to real-world problems. Scientific inquiry encourages students to ask and refine questions, it allows them to design and conduct investigations, it gives them the opportunity to gather and analyze data and information, it necessitates interpreting the findings and drawing conclusions about them, and it requires that the students report the findings so they may be shared (AAAS, 1990, 1993; Krajcik, Marx, Blumenfield, Soloway, & Fishman, 2000; Linn, Clark, & Slotta, 2003; NRC, 1996, 2000; Schneider et al., 2002; Songer, Lee, & McDonald, 2002).

An essential feature to effective inquiry is collaboration with classmates and adults outside the classroom which encourages discourse aimed at sharing insights and ideas, as well as building an understanding of the nature of science (Krajcik, Blumenfield, Marx, Soloway, 2000). This dialogue enables students to actively engage in what they investigate and how they explore it.

“You’re never going to improve at something without adequate practice. The same is true in the classroom. Teachers need practice to increase their level of comfort.”

HOW THE PROJECT WAS LAUNCHED

The Science Literacy Project originally stemmed from a discussion between Meta Van Sickle, a science educator at the College of...
Charleston, and Mona Albrechtsen, Science Department Chairperson at Burke High School. They were talking about end-of-course science tests and how the students seemed to understand the concepts but not the language that is so vital in comprehension. They also determined that students needed more words in their lexicon. So Van Sickle and Albrechtsen worked together to present “Language and Literacy in Science Education” (Wellington & Osborne, 1998) to the Burke High School Science Department.

The Lowcountry Partners for Inquiry, originally funded in 2003 by a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF), involves a two-pronged approach: (1) ongoing, in-service training for teachers, and (2) application in the classroom. In the fall of 2005, in an effort to increase student achievement in science vocabulary and literacy—as well as increase reading levels and improve writing skills—Van Sickle and Cassandra Runyon, Director of the Lowcountry Hall of Science and Math, began meeting regularly with Burke High teachers to train them in both technology and language literacy.

STEPPING OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONE

The teacher’s role in the scientific inquiry process is to provide support and guidance through questioning rather than giving information. In this way the teacher needs to feel comfortable with the role of facilitator rather than distributor of facts and information. This shift from teacher centeredness toward student-led activities presupposes self-regulative efforts on the behalf of students, yet at the same time can offer more space for individual activities (Hartley & Benedixen, 2001). Evidence shows this close and meaningful relationship with the learning process can help students increase their interest in science while also enhancing content knowledge and process skills (Renninger & Hidi, 2002).

Unfortunately, however, the inquiry-based approach to teaching is often counter-intuitive to the way in which most educators were taught. It feels “backwards” and unnatural to first introduce “hands-on” activities before delving into terms and definitions.

“Belief structures are remarkably durable so if a teacher feels a certain method of teaching is the way to go, it’s very difficult to get them to change their minds,” explained Van Sickle. Even teachers who are more open to trying new teaching styles can get frustrated easily. Van Sickle says that like anything in life, patience and persistence are crucial.

“Going out and taking one tennis lesson doesn’t make you a pro,” noted Van Sickle. “You’re never going to improve at something without adequate practice. The same is true in the classroom. Teachers need practice to increase their level of comfort.”

Scientific inquiry empowers both students and teachers. Through inquiry-based learning, teachers are better able to integrate science content and build understanding. Van Sickle has certainly noticed a marked difference in the teachers at Burke. Initially, many of them were skeptical about inquiry-based instruction. But by working side-by-side with scientists in their classrooms, they gained a great deal of knowledge and an enlightened view of science. In short, their eyes were opened.
TEACHERS WHO TRIED SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY AND LIVED TO BRAG ABOUT IT!

The following teachers share how incorporating scientific inquiry into their classrooms changed their students’ zeal for science:

“Students learn best when they are involved in what they are learning and have ownership in the process. It helps students learn if what they are learning has meaning for them.”

– Terrie L. Kielborn, sixth-grade science teacher

“In my classroom, I focus my attention on the learner. I empower my students to follow their interests, make connections, reformulate ideas, and sometimes reach unique conclusions…. Teachers can help students develop the roots of knowledge, but also empower them with wings.”

– Marcie L. Bosseler, elementary school teacher

“As a result of consolidating action experiments and collaborative learning groups, students’ vocabulary became more sophisticated; they spoke as young scientists, and they were more willing to take a risk in expressing their knowledge verbally and in writing.”

– Yvette F. Greenspan, fifth-grade teacher

“(The classroom) that involves mere lectures, excessive readings, and long periods of sitting [and] ‘busy seat work’ is boring. Immersing oneself—mentally and physically—is far more conducive to true learning.”

– Lori Livingston Hahn, middle school teacher


and their reluctance to try new teaching practices faded.

“Many of our teachers were surprised,” noted Van Sickle. “They had their ingrained belief structures in place which were not in line with inquiry-based instruction. But teachers who approached this project with an open mind and spirit have become real believers in scientific inquiry because they’ve witnessed first-hand the positive changes that can occur in their students.”

Still, some educators remain concerned that students may not link hands-on activities to written activities concerning the topic being studied (e.g., Atkinson, 1990; Hodson, 1996; Wellington, 1998). Others assume that classroom inquiry is too difficult and time-consuming. Research, however, shows that students greatly benefit from 60 to 140 minutes of inquiry-based learning per week and after only 30 minutes per week of inquiry-based instruction, students’ science test scores show statistically significant improvements (Holdzkom & Lutz, 1984).

INQUIRY-BASED SCIENCE RESULTS IN LEARNING MAGIC

Findings from the Science Literacy Project at Burke suggest that the inquiry method of instruction has had a positive effect on students’ scores on a standards-based, multiple choice, summative assessment. The results also indicate that the inquiry method is a strategy that
reaches all types of learners equally. In short, this type of instruction has prompted students to become more involved in learning, doing, and thinking about science because they are allowed to play an active role in their science instruction.

“Inquiry methodology appeals to many students,” said Albrechtsen. “That, in turn, increases student interest in all areas of science.” This is certainly the case at Burke, as evidenced by the heightened “hallway buzz.” Word had spread that science classes at Burke have become “cool” and “cutting-edge.”

It’s because of innovative and appealing learning experiences such as these that student interest in science has skyrocketed at Burke. In fact, last fall student interest had swelled so dramatically that Burke added AP biology classes to the schedule. Albrechtsen said she’d also like to see AP Physics and AP Environmental Studies added to the course offerings.

The Science Literacy Project has enabled students to open their eyes—and minds—to true and lasting learning. If ever one doubted whether an instructor’s teaching strategy really makes a difference for students, he need only to step into a Burke science class to suspend his skepticism. It’s here that one can clearly see that inquiry-based instruction, plus a student’s natural curiosity, equals pure learning magic. And magic can be rather addictive, as Albrechtsen knows all too well.

“No,” she said, “my students love science so much that I have to chase them out of my classroom!”

REFERENCES


LITTLE EVIDENCE EXISTS TO SUPPORT the notion that more than two decades of reform proposals introduced by A Nation at Risk (1983) and the billions of federal dollars allocated to support the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have significantly impacted the persistent gaps in academic achievement among culturally diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Bracey, 2006). Debates persist over the relative merits of site-based management, class size reduction, professional development, comprehensive school reform models, lengthened school days/school years, assessment standards, supplemental instruction, privatization, and vouchers.

As Distinguished Visiting Professor at the College of Charleston, my work addresses what is missing from the current education debates, the recognition that there is a distinction between education goals, objectives, and strategies formulated to improve achievement for all groups and those formulated to close achievement gaps among groups of students. Such a distinction has not been posed or centrally positioned by researchers, the education community, or current federal and state policies. The major outcomes of this failure and the limited assumptions that standards and new reading materials will close gaps have resulted in a disappointing lack of innovation and the creation of an $8.35 billion market for major publishers and enormous profit margins (Manzo, 2006).

The varied cultures in Charleston and the Lowcountry provide a rich opportunity to study the impact of varied environments on learning. My work here builds on my review of the literature that suggests that closing achievement gaps among the diverse populations identified as NCLB subgroups requires specific attention to the implications of human development in varied environments. This is the basis for the necessary missing distinction in policy and practice. Students come to formal education systems with varied cultural and daily experiences. These diverse experiences define subgroup achievement patterns and must be centrally positioned in reform efforts to minimize academic achievement gaps.

My research suggests that the education community must make a clear distinction between what is required to improve achievement for student subgroups, such as standards, new materials, and research-based reform models, and what is required to close achievement gaps—systems change, supported by an integrated knowledge base defining human development/learning in varied contexts. Without a major shift in the understanding of the nature of the achievement gaps that exist among socioeconomic, racial, and cultural groups, educators will continue to believe that isolated programs and strategies will work.

While only 32% of teachers surveyed indicate feeling competent to teach diverse populations of students, NCLB hold educators accountable for educating students categorized in subgroups (Parsad, Lewis, & Ferris, 2001). Cognitive science and current understandings of culture and learning offer...
educators the required knowledge and skills to engage these students cognitively and effectively in the teaching and learning process (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Bransford et al., 2000; Williams, 2003). Research reveals that teachers who focus on successfully engaging students from diverse backgrounds in learning academic content, i.e., standards:

- Help students from varied experiences make cognitive and affective connections between new knowledge and existing knowledge learned in the cultural/daily environment.
- Demonstrate sensitivity to what students know and care about, what they are interested in, where they go, and how they spend their time when they are not in school (e.g., going to parks, clubs, church functions, family activities, etc.).
- Know how to respond with sensitivity to how students are perceived.
- Look beyond assessment results and consider a student’s potential for learning. The practice of placing students in remedial or special education programs, when poor performance is only an indication of what hasn’t been learned so far results in limited instruction and low expectations.

Current federal policy (NCLB) mandates scheduled assessments that focus instruction on standards and require students to attain proficiency in reading and mathematics. In addition to assessment outcomes and determinations of adequate yearly progress (AYP), research suggests that federal policy must acknowledge the current understandings of learning available to inform the education community of the central importance of both

BELINDA WILLIAMS, Ph.D., teaches Human Growth and Development and the Educational Process. Her course highlights the impact of varied sociocultural and socioeconomic experiences on human growth and examines teachers’ attention to developing positive, caring interpersonal relationships in the teaching and learning process. While at the College of Charleston, Dr. Williams will design and implement a pilot study to explore the interaction between middle-age student learning in the classroom and teacher’s awareness of the opportunity to help student learning in the classroom and teachers’ awareness of the opportunity to help students make both cognitive and affective connections to curriculum content.
cognitive (content understanding) and affective (interest and interpersonal relationships) factors in teaching and learning. The current federal definition of “qualified teacher,” limited to certification in the content to be taught, must be expanded to require the knowledge and skills necessary to educate students from the varied cultures and experiences. Varied cultures and experiences impact students’ affective learning requirements and the conditions for teaching and learning.

State certification policy and planning must be reframed and expanded to include attention to the requirements for successfully engaging culturally and economically diverse student populations. In addition, monitoring, assessment standards, accountability, and allocation of resources should be revised to support new definitions and expansion into practice.

Closing achievement gaps requires a systemic focus at federal, state, and district levels to frame school policies that embed what we know about learning and child development in planning for change in teaching and learning practices, existing programs (supplemental instruction, after-school/summer programs, etc.), strategies (differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, reduced class size, etc.), staff development, and community and parental involvement.

REFERENCES


Urban Education: Focus on English as a Second Language

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANGELA COZART
College of Charleston, Department of Educational Foundations, Secondary, and Special Education

Angela Cozart moved with her family from Puerto Rico when she was three years old. Her family settled in a multi-cultural neighborhood hub in Passaic, New Jersey, where Yiddish and Sicilian were as likely to be first languages as English. Later she moved to Tennessee where she taught high school English to native speakers before pursuing her doctorate at the University of Tennessee in Foreign Language Methodology. She has lived in the Southeast for 22 years, the last eight as a professor in the College of Charleston’s School of Education, Health, and Human Performance, where she teaches courses in English and social studies strategies, literacy and assessment, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Methodology. One of Dr. Cozart’s goals is instilling in her students thoughtful consideration of the educational challenges faced by culturally marginalized children and families in the United States.

Why did you take this professional path?
My parents didn’t know how to speak English when we got here. In fact, none of my family spoke English. It was a lot easier for me than for my parents. When you’re small, all you’re interested in is making friends. I didn’t have to worry about academics at first and had time to pick up the schoolyard English.

I became an English teacher because I loved literature. I loved the language and loved learning about different cultures. So when I was studying for my doctorate degree I thought, “Why not use my love of language, literature, and culture and bring all of it together?” When you talk about ESOL issues, when you go into places like New Jersey or New York, they are our North Charleston. It is an urban issue.

What was it like growing up in your neighborhood?
Looking back, growing up in an urban setting was fabulous for me. We were financially poor, but we were rich in so many ways. I grew up with Italians, African-Americans, Poles...people from all over the world. It was like living within a mini U.N. When I was in Passaic, it was nothing for me to go to an Italian bakery, to hear someone speaking Russian and smelling Polish food. It was hard for me to imagine that people didn’t live like this everywhere, and it wasn’t until I came to Tennessee that I realized that a lot of people didn’t.

What keeps you motivated professionally?
Two things motivate me. One, the fact that I know what I’m doing is really helping people. Two, when I earned my Master’s degree, I thought I knew so much. I guess some people would call it being big-headed. It wasn’t until I started my doctoral program that I realized how much more there was to learn—and I’m still learning. Knowing that there is always something new to learn is a great motivator for me. Also, I’ve come to appreciate how much my colleagues can teach me.

How do you assist and support urban educators?
One of the ways I do that is through a culture class I teach and in every class I make sure we talk about cultures that are outside of the mainstream. One of the challenges is that the majority of my students are white, middle class, and we talk about that it’s almost a different culture. If you come from a middle class background, you don’t always realize you’re a product of the privileges you had and don’t realize that others don’t have those same advantages. Students here [at the College of Charleston] are the cream of the crop, even if they come from financially poor schools. They truly need to understand what it is like to be different—for example, to be a migrant, an immigrant, or a refugee and how that impacts stability at home. Migrant children move from state to state; they’re poor. Even if you go from one excellent school to another,
What is your perspective on the current state of education for English language learners?
It saddens me to think of how so many of our children are not receiving the education they so desperately need. Many areas of the country are starting to realize that English to Speakers of Other Languages is a special needs area. We need to make sure that the teachers who leave us are prepared to work in those situations. We need to make sure they’re prepared here [at the college] because once they graduate, a one-day seminar isn’t going to help them get through the year or the day-to-day problems they’ll encounter in the classroom.

Who is doing particularly innovative work in urban education?
The University of Tennessee at Knoxville has a program now for urban education at the Master’s level for inner city and poor rural schools. During their clinical practice, Masters students are actually living within the community in which they work. Another group, the Holmes Partnership, is a consortium of schools, businesses, civic organizations, and universities created approximately 20 years ago. Their goal is to reform teaching and learning. They have a strong commitment to diversity in the teaching profession—both K–12 and college level. They’ve developed professional partnerships because education should not be the sole responsibility of public schools. All aspects of society have a stake in making sure all children receive a solid, equitable education.

What advice do you have for urban educators?
The work that they’re doing is extremely important. They have to bring three things together. They have to know their content. They can’t teach what they don’t know. They also have to know their pedagogy; they have to know how to teach their content in ways that engage students of diverse backgrounds. They also have to be prepared to see these children as individuals and recognize their potential. It’s not easy being an urban educator, but the rewards are tremendous. I would also tell them that when they enter the profession, they should not go looking for those who think negatively. People hear so many negative things about urban education and working in urban schools. Look for those who are making a difference, who have a positive outlook. Find a mentor doing positive things. All of us have a stake in this. It’s not just teachers. If we want to graduate civic-minded individuals, those who will work with us socially and economically, we, as a society, have to support our teachers in order to make a difference.

What are the trends in urban education for English to Speakers of Other Languages?
I was very happy to see that the Charleston County School District set up a Newcomer program at a school in North Charleston. A Newcomer Program is one that takes newly arrived immigrant children, usually the ones that need the most help, and puts them together, giving them intensive English instruction. The students are put in small groups so they can work together and help one another. School personnel work with the parents, teaching them about the culture, not just American culture, but school culture, the expectations for homework, for example, which aren’t the same in every country. So these children get that instruction—the hidden curriculum—things that students need to know to get along in school that few teachers explicitly teach. These programs have proven to be very effective. Another colleague and I recently wrote a proposal and were funded for starting another Newcomer Program in North Charleston (in conjunction with the Charleston County School District). We are all very excited and look forward to establishing this program in the fall of 2007.

from Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, and up to the Northeast, it will not be an excellent education because of all the interruptions.
**Urban Education: Focus on Engaging Students in Instruction**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH KAY TOLIVER**  
Math Educator and Consultant

Kay Toliver enjoys telling people about her parents, who instilled in her the enduring belief that education is key in the quest for a better life. Toliver, the inspiration for the Peabody Award-winning documentary Good Morning Miss Toliver, took that philosophy to her classroom at PS 17 East Harlem Tech, proving that all students can achieve at high levels. Her focus on integrating math with other curriculum areas is documented in a series of educational videos, including The Eddie Files, The Kay Toliver Files, and Teacher Talk. After more than 34 years of “research in the classroom,” Ms. Toliver has taken her philosophy to a different audience, presenting to over 100,000 educators at workshops and conferences, giving testimony that teaching, in its truest form, is a shared experience.

**Why did you take this professional path?**
I knew it was always something I wanted to do in life. From the time I was a child, through high school and college, I knew I was going to be a teacher. I went to Hunter College at the City University of New York. At the time Hunter didn’t have a teacher education department. They had a wonderful program to train teachers called Triple C. In our sophomore year, we were taken out of the college setting and served as tutors in the classroom. So prior to student teaching I had been in the classroom for awhile. We did after-school tutoring as well as in-school tutoring. And then came a job and a career that began in 1967. So it was a natural progression. When you know what you want to do, you’re very focused. And that’s why I encouraged my students to think about what it was they wanted to do in life, even if they didn’t become what they thought they wanted to be. When you have a goal and you know the qualifications to obtain that goal, you work hard so that what you want to do in life is obtainable.

**How did your parents influence you?**
I came from a family with parents who said that learning is the key to success, knowledge is power, and it’s not something that can be taken away from you. And, therefore, with knowledge and education you can do anything you want in life. My parents taught me to value and appreciate and love learning, and it’s something I wanted to give to others and that’s why I teach. I want to be remembered by my students as the best teacher, not because they like me—it’s not a popularity contest—but because I opened up the world of knowledge and information to them. I want them to see what my parents got me to see—that with this knowledge you can do anything and without it, you’re just another illiterate person. We have such a high rate of illiteracy it’s ridiculous. How can a country with so much have so many people who can’t read, can’t write, can’t do basic math problems, can’t fill out applications? We have all of the resources here, and yet we have such a high illiteracy rate. It’s frightening and, unfortunately, a lot of it stems from what takes place in the school system.

**What keeps you motivated professionally?**
I hope my experience can really motivate or inspire someone to do their job better or just to know that there is someone who understands and can see that the profession can bring you joy. It is a noble and honorable profession that I’m so proud to be part of. I think we need more positive images out here because so much of what we hear about education, especially public education, is lack thereof—what’s not happening, what needs to happen, the negative. Yet there’s some very good public education going on, and I think we need to hear more about the positive rather than the negative.

“...it’s not just about numbers of computation; instead, it’s about problem solving, analyzing, evaluating the situation, and applying it, really laying the work so that students can go on to hopefully higher levels of mathematics.”
I’m in favor of the arts. I think music and art are so important in building children’s creativity. Kids need more of a well-rounded education, and I think that’s taken a step back instead of moving forward.

What is your perspective on the current state of education?

American public education has been in flux. I think even though we say we know why kids need education we’ve lost the sense of its real purpose. We forget that we are preparing kids for life, and we should be giving them skills they can use. A lot of times when we have this dialogue about public education, it seems like we’re talking about test scores. We are very much influenced by the politics of this country and what we are told children must know and be able to do, but I don’t always think it’s for the purpose of what will make them successful in life. It’s more about whether they score well on the tests at the time so that our districts will look good. But we’re not about test scores. We’re about giving children the skills they need so that they can deal successfully with life. When you can read, write, and communicate orally, you can make it in the world. You have to be able to study the information, and understand it, and be able to apply to the real world the things that you’re learning in school. It’s not just about passing tests and, unfortunately, that’s what has taken precedence. So to survive we have to go back to the basics of teaching and learning.

What advice do you have for urban educators?

The advice I can give an urban educator is the same I would give to a suburban educator or anyone else who’s in the teaching profession or working with kids—you have to really believe in what you’re doing. Don’t accept excuses. Challenge students. Utilize all of the facilities you have available, all of the resources, from the community, the business people, the politicians. But don’t forget the important role that families play in education. When we talk about partnerships, it has to be a true partnership, where everyone is an equal partner, so it’s a school working with the families, with the community. Because in the end, the product you work on in your school is what you send to your community. You want to utilize the wealth you have in the people who are there.

What are the trends in urban education?

In urban education we know our language arts is being stressed. Learning English is being stressed in early grades, and that is key, literacy, being able to read well, write well, and have a strong command of language. But we sometimes forget that math is a literacy, too, and our kids need the mathematical literacy, to have math which is a form of communication, too. I think in mathematics they’re beginning to realize that it’s not just about numbers of computation; instead, it’s about problem solving, analyzing, evaluating the situation, and applying it, really laying the work so that students can go on to hopefully higher levels of mathematics. You have to have a strong beginning in order to do that. And, of course, the science that goes hand-in-hand with mathematics.
Urban Education: Focus on Arts in the Schools

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANNE SMITH
Arts Manager and Arts Educator

Anne Smith, an arts management consultant and online arts professor at Golden Gate University in San Francisco, has had a fascinating and a varied career in the arts and education in urban locales. In 2006, she was a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the College of Charleston.

Tell us about your professional path.
I was born in Los Angeles and was raised in rural Vermont. I attended a one-room schoolhouse for early childhood education. My father was a writer and my mother was a teacher, so my two brothers and I had strong educational support at home. I majored in English, theatre, and secondary education and then taught high school humanities and theatre on Long Island for eight years. After receiving an MA in Curriculum and Teaching from Columbia Teachers College, I left New York and developed an arts management career in California. I managed touring dance companies, participated in arts residency programs in schools, and was a program manager for the California Arts Council. After traveling the state as a consultant for several years, I accepted a position as an arts management professor at Golden Gate University. I also taught management and conducted research in the arts while at Showa University of Music in Japan. Over the years I have been involved in a variety of arts organizations and educational institutions.

What keeps you motivated professionally?
It’s gratifying to see how involvement in the arts influences and affects the career choices that young people make.

What is your perspective on the current state of education?
I think that regularly integrating arts into the classroom is critical to a well-rounded education, but unfortunately arts are not an integral part of most daily school programs. However, from an international perspective, American schools have traditionally been superior in critical thinking and humanities, even though arts education, per se, is lacking. I believe that students—and their teachers—benefit from access to urban arts and culture.

Who is doing particularly innovative work in urban arts education?
An example of innovative work is the Youth Speaks project in the San Francisco Bay Area that includes after-school involvement of students in poetry and performing arts. For innovation I think that arts organizations that provide an interactive relationship between the artists and the school district are ideal. For example, Dallas Arts Partners is a partnership between the Dallas Independent School District, the City of Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs, and more than 60 local arts and cultural agencies (http://www.arts4learning.org/). And in connection with Los Angeles Music Center, Los Angeles educators learn to integrate the arts in the classroom through the Music Center’s Professional Development programs. Based on the California Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Standards, these programs empower educators to teach the arts as core subjects, as support for other academic areas, and as a tool for creative expression.

For the best examples around the nation, I like to refer to the Arts Education Partnership (AEP) (http://www.aep-arts.org/) which is a national coalition of arts, education, business, philanthropic, and government organizations that demonstrate and promote the essential role of the arts in the learning and development of every child and in the improvement of America’s schools.

What advice can you give educators?
I encourage them to get online and search for networks related to the arts in their cities. Then go out and get involved. I also encourage educators to develop and maintain arts in their communities and connect with arts specialists in their districts. Above all, I suggest involving the principal because the principal is the key to any given school’s support for an arts-related curriculum and activities.
For six months I lived in a rural community and watched my own children learn in a small school with dual-grade classrooms. My wife and I became active participants and volunteers in this PreK-6 school with only 43 students. Several questions sparked my curiosity as a result of teaching some science lessons in the small, rural school. For example, how can science be contextualized to the local surroundings of the rural community, thus increasing academic achievement? How can science instruction in rural schools reflect national science reform-based recommendations? In essence, “ruralness” is a unique quality in many communities due to the historical, cultural, and linguistic values shared by a few and expressed in a community location such as a school. Science instruction should be a logical extension of the local culture, economy, and environment, but it is too often dictated by standards and assessments which aren’t applied to the local context. As a result, the science instruction is didactic and lacks many reform-based methods espoused in national science education documents.

Science instruction should be a logical extension of the local culture, economy, and environment.

I am currently conducting research on the state of distance and science education in middle and high schools in rural, low-income South Carolina school districts. Based upon a national definition of districts that qualify for the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) in the 2004–2005 school year, 31 school districts in South Carolina are considered rural and low-income. My research in middle and high schools includes 15 of the 31 school districts.

During the first stage of the research, I interviewed instructional technology personnel at the district level about the extent and capability of distance education within their districts. I utilized a previously validated national survey from the National Research Center on Rural Education Support at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and applied to the South Carolina context. During the second stage, I interviewed and observed middle and high school science teachers in these school districts. I used a reliable and validated observation instrument (Reform in Teaching Observation Protocol) to gauge the extent of reform-based science teaching in the classroom by the teacher. I’ll use the results of both stages of the study to write a collaborative science and math grant through the National Science Foundation (NSF). Ann Wallace, a math education professor at the College of Charleston, will join me in designing a comprehensive plan that will weave science and math standards while applying them to the contextual, rural nature of the communities. The grant addresses the problems and needs of science and math teaching in these rural school districts. In addition, the grant will have a research component which will examine how and to what extent professional development, in terms of content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, influences teacher content knowledge and classroom teaching and student academic achievement.

Many rural schools do not have proper funding to hire quality teachers, integrate worthwhile professional development, or buy necessary school supplies. Rural districts also have problems attracting and retaining “highly qualified” teachers. No Child Left Behind legislation has forced states to test science content knowledge and hold schools accountable for their teachers. This has actually diminished the quality of science teaching for various reasons. In my research I hope to identify those reasons and how science education can be improved for the teachers and students in rural, low-income schools in South Carolina. Once teachers participate in professional development experiences, their students will reap the benefits of localized science lesson plans and field trips that will contextualize the science content.

The main method of content delivery and teacher communication will involve the Internet in which science teachers in these communities will share ideas, content knowledge, and experiences. Distance education will enhance teaching, communication, and learning since all of the schools are rural, and travel is often cost and time prohibitive. Summer, face-to-face courses, with online follow-up would enable the teachers to learn content and pedagogy within the context of localized science. As for students, follow-up field trips and camps will enable students in these rural schools to receive quality instruction in contextualized science.

“Once teachers participate in professional development experiences, their students will reap the benefits of localized science lesson plans and field trips that will contextualize the science content.”
Exciting Changes on the Horizon:  

A NEW PARTNERSHIP

Memminger Elementary School Partners with the Center for Partnerships at the College of Charleston

COORDINATED BY VIRGINIA BARTEL, College of Charleston, Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Grades Education

The Memminger Partnership, a collaborative relationship between the faculties of the College of Charleston and Memminger Elementary School, recently announced a new school wide project to improve the quality of education. Currently, the faculties at both institutions are in the early stages of creating a Professional Development School (PDS) where the faculty from both institutions will focus on relationship-building by sharing expertise and providing support services for teacher candidates and the children in the school.

“We had the opportunity to create a partnership, and establishing a partnership with Memminger made sense because they are right across the street from our university,” says Frances Welch, Dean of the School of Education, Health, and Human Performance. Memminger, located in downtown Charleston, South Carolina, is a PreK-6 school with 350 students and a 95% free and reduced lunch rate.

The partnership has implemented a school wide project that enables students to develop an understanding of their family and community histories. This process entails the College of Charleston faculty providing teachers with technical assistance and the teachers providing the faculty with perspectives gleaned from their recent experiences in the classroom. Over the course of the 2006–2007 year, the partnership has worked collaboratively to implement the project and evaluate the impact of this project on reading scores.

The school principal and the university faculty plan to use this information to build the foundation necessary to advance toward a partnership that allows elementary school teachers to instruct teacher candidates and university faculty to team-teach with Memminger faculty which will enable them to stay current with the classroom experience. Steven L. Thomas, Research and Policy Analyst at the College of Charleston commented, “The coming year will be exciting for us as we build the partnership and see the results of our labor.”

The partnership has implemented a school wide project that enables students to develop an understanding of their family and community histories.
Burke Civil Rights Project Brings History to Life
COORDINATED BY TOM MURRAY, College of Charleston, Educational Foundations, Secondary and Special Education

HISTORY CAME ALIVE FOR BURKE High School students as they toured the Avery Research Institute on the College of Charleston’s campus and the Medical University of South Carolina. Students also visited historic civil rights sites in cities such as Birmingham, Alabama. The culminating project was a student-published book entitled *His Story, Her Story—Our Story* in which students researched and wrote accounts of historical events such as the history of Jim Crow laws, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Brown vs. the Board of Education, The Watts Riot, and the Little Rock Crisis, among others.

The project involved rigorous academic work that required intensive reading and writing skills. Students were immersed into an active learning environment in which they were required to explore their communities. The redesigned curriculum included inviting local attorneys, college professors, and community activists to the class to speak about their perspectives on African-American history in the Lowcountry. Students followed up these presentations by researching commonly accepted historical perspectives. Both activities enabled students to gain valuable insight into the development of the civil rights movement.

Thomas Murray, project leader and College of Charleston visiting faculty member with the School of Education, stated that this experience afforded students the unique opportunity to see themselves not as students, but as published authors. Both students and teachers expressed a great sense of pride in seeing this book to fruition. Murray recalled the emotional reaction of one teacher when she first saw the publication in print. “These are my students!” she proclaimed as tears trickled down her cheek. “I’m so proud of them!”

This year Murray has expanded the program so that the ninth-grade academy language arts students get the chance to write about Burke’s history. Murray has found that this active learning approach has helped change students’ perspective on the value of education.

Summer Enrichment Program Receives POSITIVE REVIEWS

THE CENTER FOR PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION offered an enrichment program for eighth- and tenth-grade students, which took place in the summer of 2006. The theme of the program was “Exploring Charleston’s Past, Present, and Future.” Sixteen tenth-graders and 30 eighth-graders voluntarily participated in the program. Program activities, operated separately, were designed by eighth- and tenth-grade teachers hired to staff the program. The program activities addressed the following four program goals:

- To increase students’ knowledge of Charleston’s history and culture, using appropriate social studies standards
- To promote career awareness
- To support student engagement in school
- To encourage student participation in post-secondary education

Judging from the responses of the teachers and students who participated in the focus groups, the Summer Enrichment Program—the first the Center has sponsored—was a memorable, positive experience; field trips were especially a big hit. Teachers plan to follow up with student participants to investigate the extent to which this program impacts the academic success of its participants.

TUTORING PROGRAMS Initiated by the Center for Partnerships

DURING THE SPRING 2006 SEMESTER, TENTH-GRADE STUDENTS scheduled to take the High School Assessment Program (HSAP) test were invited to participate in HSAP after-school tutoring sessions conducted by College of Charleston students for three days a week. Subjects covered include reading, writing, and mathematics. Participation in the tutoring sessions was voluntary. The goal of the tutoring program was to improve student performance on the state HSAP test.

Evidence supports that the College of Charleston’s assistance with the tutoring program affected the HSAP scores. College of Charleston faculty helped prepare teachers to go beyond the curriculum with regard to HSAP testing and coordinated a rally for parents and students that focused on HSAP testing. One professor also believed that the tutoring sessions provided an opportunity to get to know the students.

Three tutoring programs are being coordinated by the Center for Partnerships during the 2006–2007 school year with College of Charleston students serving as tutors. They include an after-school enrichment program for college-bound Burke students, core content tutoring for all Burke seventh- and eighth-grade students, and HSAP tutoring.
**Burke Summer Reading Program**

Supports High School Readers

**COORDINATED BY FAYE HICKS-TOWNES, College of Charleston, Educational Foundations, Secondary, and Special Education**

**Burke Mathematics Efforts Retreat Encourages Students to REACH THEIR GOALS**

**COORDINATED BY MUTINDI NDUNDA, College of Charleston, Educational Foundations, Secondary, and Special Education**

**Kids In Space: Urban Middle School Students Tackle a Space Weather Project**

**IN AN EFFORT TO PROVIDE MORE INTERACTIVE SCIENCE ACTIVITIES TO middle school science students and increase instructional rigor, College of Charleston professor Dr. Cassandra Runyon recently arranged for scientists from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to train Burke seventh- and eighth-grade science teachers and other local science educators in how to design a Space Weather Action Center (SWAC) for students. Both teachers and students were instructed on the fundamentals of space weather monitoring, data use, journaling, and solar storms using various types of equipment. They also received instruction on how to use computer applications and iPods related to the project. The students and teachers are setting up SWACs in their own classrooms. In addition, a SWAC club now meets after school, and a SWAC summer program is also planned.**


**Burke Community Partners**

The Center for Partnerships to Improve Education helps coordinate support for school improvement by bringing together a network that includes civic, business, religious, government, and community organizations, as well as educational and district partners. More than 30 groups already support programs at Burke High School. Organizations interested in joining the Center for Partnerships’ endeavor at Burke High School should contact Dr. Paula Egelson, Director, at (843) 953-7629 or Mrs. Melanie Hofmann, at (843) 953-2742.

**Burke High School’s partners include:**

ABC News 4  
Boys and Girls Club  
Burke Alumni Coalition  
Burke Community Education  
Center for Partnerships to Improve Education, College of Charleston  
Chamber of Commerce Education Foundation  
Charleston Southern University  
Circular Congregational Church  
The Citadel  
City of Charleston, Mayor’s Office for Children, Youth, and Families  
COBRA Human Services Agency  
College of Charleston Relations and Media Communication  
Communities in Schools  
Community Outreach Committee  
Constituent District #20  
The Education Foundation  
Friends of Burke/Westside Neighborhood Association  
Fort Sumter NM and Charles Pinckney National Historic Site (NHS)  
High Schools That Work  
It’s Up to Me  
Karatan Services, LLC  
Lowcountry Earth Force  
Medical University of South Carolina  
MUSC College of Health Professions  
Morris Brown AME  
National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE)  
Pearlstine Distributing Scholarships  
Tri-County Black Nurses Association  
Trident Technical College  
Youth Entrepreneurship South Carolina  
YWCA of Greater Charleston

**Center for Partnerships to Improve Education COMMUNITY OUTREACH TEAM**

COORDINATED BY ANDREW LEWIS, College of Charleston, School of Education, Health, and Human Performance

The Community Outreach Team serves as an advocate to support the goals of the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education with the primary purpose of linking Burke High School with the greater Charleston community. The Community Outreach Team is but one of three teams in the Center, and all teams are working with the primary focus of improving student performance and reducing the drop-out rate. The team began its work in January 2006 with the development of its Operating Code and the establishment of community contacts. The Outreach Team is comprised of 12 members representing various segments of the community (parents, teachers, community leaders, city officials, faith-based leaders, business leaders, etc.); they all live within District 20. The team has been working with neighborhood associations to build trust and assist with student academic growth by facilitating cooperation among groups. The team plans to collaborate with more than 30 external community partners who have expressed an interest in working with Burke High School. Our goal is to help these groups develop and implement various programs at Burke. By working with the school and community partners, we hope to improve the community’s perceptions of Burke, create a forum for informed discussion, and open up effective lines of communication.

**Center for Partnerships to Improve Education RESEARCH TEAM**

COORDINATED BY STEVEN THOMAS, College of Charleston, Center for Partnerships to Improve Education

The Research Team has adopted an ambitious and rigorous research agenda related to the Center’s goals. The team’s primary objective is to establish baseline data related to student achievement, demographics, participant perception, and program data sets. This includes surveying teachers and families who choose to stay and leave the school, following up with recent graduates to ascertain perceptions of preparation for college and work, and conducting a statistical analysis of changes in student achievement as based on performance on high-stakes tests, graduation rates, college admissions, attendance, and behavior.

The second objective is to research the impact of several areas in-depth. The areas include creating a partnership model, preparing and supporting teacher ability to work effectively with high-poverty schools, and improving student learning. The Center’s staff members contracted an outside evaluator to design a study that details the Center’s impact on the school environment. In addition, several School of Education faculty members are currently developing research plans to be implemented in the spring and summer of 2007.

The Research Team has also been promoting research and activity that focuses on collaboration with schools. In December 2006, the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education awarded approximately $170,000 to College of Charleston faculty so that they may work in partnership with schools to improve schooling in various ways. Three of the funded projects focus on improving reading, writing, and mathematics. One of the projects focuses on building strong parental support in schools and another focuses on the specific needs of English language learners. The five projects that were awarded funding involve researching the impact of these activities on the school community, teachers, and students.