In August 2011, Dr. Courtney A. Howard took the helm as the new director of the College of Charleston’s Center for Partnerships to Improve Education (CPIE). In this position, she is charged with creating viable opportunities to connect the faculty and students in the School of Education, Health, and Human Performance with schools and communities. As a veteran teacher educator who instilled the value of learning the background of children in order to engage them effectively, Dr. Howard is committed to finding out as much as possible about the contextual backdrop of education and educational partnerships in the Charleston area. In her first several months, she voraciously read past and current news articles, met with many members of the community, and paid attention to the details of the spoken and unspoken. Apparently, her many years of being inspired by the likes of Perry Mason and Columbo have finally paid off! Her investigation, though still ongoing, has proven to be beneficial to her awareness of the decisions and points of view that have influenced the current educational landscape of the Charleston area.

Howard is impressed with past and current efforts to bridge the resource and achievement gaps that split along racial, socioeconomic, and English language proficiency lines. It is clear that the Charleston community has rallied behind its schools and students, and Howard seeks opportunities for CPIE to join forces to address the community’s priorities in ways that engage the primary resources of the College—its faculty and its students. Howard is excited about the partnerships and ideas that have emerged during the course of her first year and she is grateful to the Charleston community for welcoming her with open arms. She looks forward to making contributions that ultimately benefit the community’s students.

Prior to joining the College of Charleston, Howard was a tenured faculty member and the interim dean of education at Claflin University in Orangeburg, SC. She earned her undergraduate degree from Florida A&M University in biology. Her master’s and doctoral degrees were earned at the University of Florida where she studied curriculum and instruction with a special emphasis in science education. She and her husband are the proud parents of two children, ages 2 and 4.
Faculty as Partners

It has been said that a college is only as good as its faculty. In the same vein, college and community partnerships can only be as strong as the links between the professors and the local schools, agencies, and residents. To foster these links, CPIE launched its Faculty as Partners (FaP) mini-grants program in 2011-2012. The FaP program was designed to stimulate faculty involvement with CPIE while supporting faculty research and service-learning initiatives.

Grantees furthered the mission and vision of CPIE by working with community entities in ways that have the potential to result in lasting positive effects for all partners. They also pursued their own research interests. Eligibility for the mini-grants was limited to full time faculty in the College of Charleston’s School of Education, Health, and Human Performance, also the home of the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education.

In fall 2011, faculty members were invited to submit their project ideas and proposed budgets to a panel of reviewers consisting of faculty and staff within the School. Faculty had the option to choose from three mini-grant options: Service-Learning Challenge to support service-learning experiences involving a specified course; Faculty Research Support for new or existing community-based research efforts; and Course Release Opportunity to reduce the professor’s teaching load so that more time could be devoted to a specific project.

Three faculty members were awarded Spring 2012 Faculty as Partners mini-grants. All are housed in the Department of Teacher Education.

Revising and Extending Student Self-Concept Framework

Christine Finnan revised and refined a data collection instrument that measures students’ and adults’ perceptions of students’ sense of their accomplishment, belonging, and engagement. She and her research team then used the instrument to conduct an ethnographic study in a local elementary school. Dr. Finnan is a full professor with joint appointments in the Department of Teacher Education and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

Learning the Politics of Resistance in Segregated Schools; Student Activism and Protest in Charleston, 1960-1964

Jon Hale collected archival and interview data about high school student activism in Charleston during the Civil Rights Movement. He has formed positive relationships with community members and leaders. Additionally, he has presented his work at a major conference and has already submitted a manuscript to a statewide publication. Dr. Hale is a new faculty member in teacher education with a focus on the foundations of education.

Powerful Interactions: Improving Teacher-Child Relationship Quality through Reflection and Discussion in a Professional Book Club

Kelley Mayer-White took a three-fold approach to studying teacher-child relationship quality. She established a professional book club with Head Start teachers and studied its impact on the teachers’ relationships with their students. She also received advanced training in a classroom quality observation tool. Finally, Dr. Mayer-White explored the use of a new research methodology to study children’s expressions of their ideas of teacher-child relationship quality. Dr. Mayer-White is an assistant professor of education with expertise in early childhood education.
Algebra represents the transition from concrete arithmetic to the abstract and symbolic representations that typify higher level mathematics. The level of thinking required to master algebra integrates quantitative reasoning with problem solving and the formalization of patterns and functions. These skills are necessary for success in both college and many high paying professions. The U.S. has performed poorly on international math (and science) tests. This observation has contributed to the recent push to improve STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education. Collectively, the nation’s weaknesses in these areas have been called economic and national defense issues because of the negative impact on the nation’s ability to use and advance scientific knowledge. Access to quality algebra instruction is seen as a critical component to improving U.S. education.

Algebra is considered to be the gatekeeper to higher level mathematics courses in both high school and college. Algebra I is a prerequisite for math such as geometry, trigonometry, Algebra II, and calculus, and students who master Algebra I in 8th or 9th grade have more opportunity to take those advanced courses before graduating from high school. Also, they are more likely to do well in college math.

Recognizing that minority and low income students are less likely to take algebra as an eighth or ninth grader, Robert Moses—a Civil Rights activist and math educator—identified access to algebra as a civil rights issue. Hence, the birth of the Algebra Project in the 1980s. This math literacy effort is currently working to promote its unique curricular approach through its Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project, Inc. (SIAP).

The College of Charleston’s Department of Teacher Education and Center for Partnerships to Improve Education, in collaboration with SIAP are working to expose teacher education faculty to the philosophies and strategies that characterize this literacy-based, student-centered approach to learning math. So far, the faculty have participated in over 40 hours of workshops designed to help them understand the approach and implement it into their courses. Through sustained partnership, the ultimate plan is to embed the Algebra Project throughout the College of Charleston’s teacher education programs, wherever it is appropriate. This will ensure that a cadre of new teachers will enter the workforce already familiar with a proven approach for teaching mathematics in a culturally relevant manner.