



Director's Message
We've Done It Before – We Can Do It Again!

News and social media are clogged with stories about the distressing state of education in South Carolina. Some of those stories are factual and others are way off base; it can be hard to separate fact from fairy tale. School Improvement Councils are convened by statute and by their very *name* are designed to work together to make our schools better. So how is public education in South Carolina doing?

In addition to serving as SC-SIC Executive Director I also coordinate a nationally affiliated professional development program, the SC Education Policy Fellowship Program. Last week SC-EPFP was fortunate to have Dr. Terry Peterson talk with its Fellows about his work as chief education advisor to former SC Governor Dick Riley both during his two-term administration and also for eight years when Governor Riley became US Secretary of Education. Last year Dr. Peterson was invited to give a presentation at Harvard University focused on the five states in this country and five countries around the world that had shown the greatest gains in education over a quarter of a century. South Carolina was included in that very elite group!

Dr. Peterson shared the momentum that was created around the campaign and passage of the state's 1984 Education Improvement Act (EIA). Widely recognized as the most effective piece of education legislation ever passed in the history of this nation, the success of the EIA is directly related to the fact that *all* stakeholder groups – educators, parents, elected officials, business, faith community, and just plain folks – were involved in its creation and implementation. These South Carolinians took *ownership* for the legislation's details and *responsibility* for its success. As the EIA began to take hold in the education community, South Carolina made historic gains that moved us from the bottom to the middle of all 50 states in terms of important measures such as curriculum standards, test scores, teacher quality, early childhood, education funding, and college attendance. (See the "Quality Counts Report" in *Education Week* <http://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/2012/16src.h31.html?intc=EW-QC12-CTR>) The EIA also engaged the business community in education improvement and this community continues as an important force in reform to this day. (Visit the SC Chamber of Commerce website for current facts about Education and Workforce Development in our state, <http://www.scmindsatwork.com/>.)

Dr. Peterson noted five broad factors that contributed to South Carolina's long term success in education: 1) Local Ownership; 2) Higher Expectations with Help; 3) Funding for Success; 4) Elevate Educators; and 5) Improvement. School Improvement Councils

can and do have an effect in all five of these areas, and Dr. Peterson specifically noted the role of local SICs and the SC School Improvement Council regarding both Local Ownership and Improvement in his presentation. There is no substitute for bringing together concerned, engaged representatives from *all* stakeholder groups to work toward a better education and improved life circumstances for all our young people. That was how the greatest education legislation the nation has ever seen – South Carolina’s EIA – was passed, implemented, and continues to provide sustained improvement nearly 30 years later.

But Dr. Peterson also mentioned something called “reform fatigue.” Three decades is a long time to keep the greater education community focused on improvement. Leadership has changed. The economy has changed. Times have changed. And the time has come to bring fresh ideas and energy to the table to meet very different circumstances.

But there is something that has not changed. As the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead observed, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” This is what School Improvement Councils are really about. This year marks the 35th Anniversary of School Improvement Councils in South Carolina. We are a mature organization that has met the test of time and remains a core infrastructure for bringing engaged citizens – with their experience, insight, and talents – into the lives of their local public schools. In her 2013 State of the State message Governor Nikki Haley called for conversations toward improving education in South Carolina. What better place to start than with your local SIC?

So let’s enjoy a piece of anniversary cake together (<http://sic.sc.gov/Documents/2013%20SIC%20Meeting%20RegistrationB.pdf>), then get to work and continue in the spirit of the EIA to make positive change in our school communities and help South Carolina become an even better place to live!