

# The Charter Lighthouse

*The Quarterly Newsletter of the South Carolina Public Charter School District*

## **Our Current Schools:**

- Calhoun Falls Charter School
- Spartanburg Charter School
- Provost Academy
- SC Calvert Academy
- SC Connections Academy
- SC Virtual Charter School
- Palmetto State E-cademy

## **Arriving in 2010:**

- York Preparatory Academy
- Lake City College Preparatory Academy
- Palmetto Scholars Academy
- Mary L. Dinkins Charter School

## **District Welcomes Four Additional Schools**

The South Carolina Public Charter School District is set to welcome four more schools into the district starting this August. "The further growth of public charter schools in South Carolina is a strong statement to the quality and creativity of our education offerings," says Superintendent Wayne Brazell, Ph. D.

York Preparatory Academy will be located in Rock Hill, SC for its initial school year. The school will serve students in K-8 and will add a grade each year for the next four years, eventually offering duel credit courses.

Mary L. Dinkins Charter School (MLD) is a current school that is transferring into the district from the Lee County school system. MLD is currently serving students in K-11 and will be adding a senior class starting this year. The school is located in Bishopville, SC.

Lake City College Preparatory Academy will be in Lake City, SC and will offer education for grades K-9 with a strong emphasis on the creative arts. The school will add a grade each year for the next four years, eventually offering duel credit courses.

Palmetto Scholars Academy will be in Charleston, SC and will offer education for grades 6-8 with a curriculum that is based on serving the needs of gifted and talented students.

The leadership of each school anticipates drawing students from several traditional districts to give parents a clear alternative to current local schools. The combined total students from these schools will add over 1,000 new pupils to the district, bringing the total number of schools in the district to 11 with a total of over 8,000 students.

## **Spartanburg Charter School Given Major Grants**

Spartanburg Charter School and the Challenge Foundation recently announced that the foundation will match dollar for dollar all money that the school raises toward completing its ongoing renovations up to \$45,000 and all money that the school raises for obtaining curriculum materials, up to \$13,000. Joan Lange, who is the National Schools Director for TeamCFA of the Challenge Foundation, visited the school in April.

"I am extremely impressed with the dedication and commitment of the principal, the school board, and the entire staff. What I saw and heard at that school is a powerful statement of what public charter schools can do for South Carolina," she said. The principal, Dr. John von Rohr, approached the Challenge Foundation with confidence that the foundation Trustees would recognize the importance of what is happening at Spartanburg Charter

School. "I am very proud of this school community," he stated.

The school also secured a grant of \$6,000 from the Spartanburg Regional Foundation to support and expand the free and reduced lunch program. The generous grant will enable the school to convert the current eating area into an operational cafeteria for serving healthy and nutritious lunches to all of its K-7 students starting in August 2010.




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## A Quarterly Message from the District Superintendent

The current financial crisis in public education in South Carolina is unprecedented in severity and repercussions. The issues are complex, but the first part of the answer is to improve the public school funding mechanisms that exist in the state. Unfortunately, the various problems in public school fiscal policy in South Carolina did not come about overnight, and they cannot be effectively addressed overnight. The second part of the answer centers on how we spend our education money. Research continues to reinforce the fact that simply throwing more money at public education does not, by itself, guarantee any improvements.

Regarding how the state spends education money, there are many options to select from with the least helpful being to spend all of the money just like we have before. This present crisis underlines the importance of investing every single public education dollar with an eye toward the maximum possible benefit for students. The best way to achieve the maximum benefit is to leverage three powerful constructive forces that are driving American education today: more choices for parents, more freedom for communities to implement local solutions, and more accountability to require school administrators to perform better. All of these are keys for building tailor-made solutions that are student-centered and results-oriented.

For some people in South Carolina, these are scary concepts because they

challenge monopolies and invite transformation. Yet, when we look at the past, we see that these same free enterprise principles have been applied in other parts of American society with great results. Public charter schools as a public school choice for parents reinforce a competitive spirit toward improving education with accountability. Charter schools are public school solutions that are authorized by a public school district to educate public school students through methods that are student-centered and of the highest quality.

Across the United States, public charter schools are increasing in number by offering communities the accountability and standards of public education but with innovation, creativity, and responsiveness. In South Carolina, thousands of parents have chosen for their children to attend a public charter school. By law, any student who applies must be accepted, and if a school is already full, a lottery is used.

After just two years of operation, the South Carolina Public Charter School District authorized seven of those public charter schools with thousands of public school students. Many of those students live in poverty, almost one-third are in a minority ethnic group, and over ten percent have special needs. Four more schools are coming this fall. Additional schools are on the way, as proposals for charters go through a long

authorization process before communities are given the approval to launch a school. Unlike the vast majority of schools in America, public charter schools that do not operate effectively are closed, and in South Carolina we have closed seventeen public charter schools in the past ten years. We demand excellence from our public charter schools, and we enforce accountability.

All of the students in these schools are measured through the same public school testing that is applied to all other public school students in the state, and all of the state graduation requirements apply to all of our students, yet the district operates through funding that is literally the absolute lowest in the entire nation. When a student attends a public charter school in our district, the local tax money for educating that student stays in the local district even though the student is not part of the local school district. We educate the child but a local district is paid for it instead.

This current crisis in South Carolina public education will likely be a catalyst for change and improvement. If so, public charter schools will be a proven part of the solution if the state will address the funding issues for the schools in our district. The alternative is for the state to expect us to continue to achieve with what amounts to a grossly underfunded mandate.

-- Dr. Wayne Brazell, Ph. D.

## South Carolina Public Charter School District Lowest Funded in US

The U. S. Department of Education houses the National Center for Education Statistics. That federal office maintains a comprehensive data base, which can be used for researching districts across the nation. The data base offers some interesting information. For example, there are about 15,000 public school districts in the United States plus a large number of special districts that consist of one school in a peculiar setting, such as a high school in a state prison or a school for individuals with severe disabilities. The 15,000 districts with more than one school range in size from a few hundred students to nearly one million students. The data base includes district financial information for many past years.

The National Center for Education Statistics also publishes dozens of reports and white papers each year on national trends and other topics.

A recent study conducted by Program Officer Frank Johnson of the Center shows conclusively that public charter schools have the highest family poverty rate per student in the nation, especially in urban centers and especially in the South. The report also states that for 2007-2008, the *lowest funded 5% of all non-charter public schools* in the nation averaged \$6,806 per student per year. The *lowest funded 5% of all public charter schools* in the nation averaged \$4,600 per student per year.

In contrast, most studies by various groups show

that the average district in America with more than one school spends about \$10,750 per student per year. The one-school districts (usually public charter schools) often run on less than half of that.

In 1996, the lowest funded school district in the nation with more than one school was in Mississippi. It operated on \$4,029 per student per year. In 2004, Utah had the lowest total average of funding per student per year with \$4,950. The funding variance between the Utah districts was small, so the poorest district in Utah operated on about \$4,300 or so per student in 2004. For 2005-2006, Western Placer Unified School District in Lincoln, CA operated by way of \$4,444 per student per year, which was the lowest in the nation at that time.

The lowest funded district in the nation in 2006-2007 with more than one school was Preston Joint District in Idaho, which operated two elementary schools on \$5,896 per student per year.

By comparison, the South Carolina Public Charter School District currently operates on less than an average of \$3,500 per student per year.

On average in the U. S., local funding amounts to 40% of all revenue for districts. State funding provides another 50% and federal funding about 10%. In South Carolina, the average is about 45%, 45%, and 10%. However, since the South Carolina Public Charter School District does not receive local funding, it is the lowest funded school district in the nation that has more than one school.

-- Clay Eaton, Editor

## District Parent Involvement Placing Strong Emphasis on Communication & Outreach

"There is something very special about parent involvement and a public charter school district," says Clay Eaton, who leads parent involvement activities for all 11 district schools. "The idea of parent involvement grew out of a fundamental recognition that our nation needs to do a better job of engaging parents with the education process," says Eaton. "When you review what the federal policies are concerning parent involvement, what you find are words like choice,

input, and achievement, which are all are part of the DNA of a public charter school," he adds.

For the 2010-2011 school year, the district parent involvement program will place a strong emphasis on expanding parent communication and input. This effort will include a new online space for communication, a wider distribution for this district newsletter, and more visits to schools and communities to meet parents where they are.

Given that there are over 10,000 parents with children in the district, Eaton is looking forward to an exciting year. He will be visiting with parents in Anderson, Spartanburg, Calhoun Falls, Greenville, Newberry, York, Florence, Bishopville, Lake City, Batesburg-Leesville, Aiken, Columbia, Orangeburg, Manning, Bucksport, Charleston, and Beaufort.

See the district web site ([www.sccharter.org](http://www.sccharter.org)) for parent involvement items.

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## First Annual District Dinner an Action-Filled Evening for All Those Present



*Jasmine Hadden, holding awards for the Calhoun Falls Student of the Year and for the District Student of the Year.*

The first South Carolina Public Charter School District Awards Dinner took place on May 21, 2010 at the Embassy Suites on Greystone in Columbia to a packed house of teachers, parents, students, family, friends, and supporters of public charter schools.

The main events centered on awards and deserved recognition. Director of School Development Paula Gray announced the Teacher of the Year from each school, and she announced each of the Outstanding Students of the Year from each school. (See related articles in this issue.) Jasmine Hadden of Calhoun Falls Charter School was selected as the district Outstanding Student of the Year. The district Teacher of the

Year will be selected from the school-level teachers of the year after a lengthy selection process.

Ted Petoskey, supporter of Spartanburg Charter School, received a special award for his remarkable volunteer work, and Dr. Brazell noted South Carolina State Rep. Phil Owens of Pickens, SC as the Outstanding Public Servant of the Year.

Throughout the evening, the crowd enjoyed student talent from vocalist Zoe Santiago (SC Connections Academy), Zandra McNair (Lake City College Preparatory Academy), and cello performer Jared Dennis (SC Connections Academy). Last year, Jared was selected as the first ever Outstanding Student of the Year for the district as a sophomore.

The marquee address for the evening was provided by Dr. Walter Edgar of the University of South Carolina. The renowned scholar and radio show host treated those present to an insightful talk regarding the role of South Carolina in the American Revolution.

The evening included the giving away of nearly 50 door prizes, such as nine certificates from Zesto's of Chapin. District office volunteer Maria Eaton had gathered all of the door prizes over a two month period from various generous businesses of the Midlands. Emcee Clay Eaton made reference to the many corporate sponsors who contributed funding or gifts for the event (see related article on the back page of this newsletter).

## Seven Outstanding Students of the Year Reflect High Personal Standards

The May 21 district awards dinner included recognition for some of the wonderful students in our schools.

Calhoun Falls Charter School selected Jasmine Hadden. Jasmine is the school valedictorian for this year and active in several organizations on campus. She recently earned first in the state in a writing contest and likewise placed sixth in the nation.

Palmetto State E-cademy chose Henry Sims. An extremely well-rounded student, Henry is a true

renaissance man with wide ranging talents and gifts.

Provost Academy SC put forward Katie Creamer. Katie is an active sophomore, an exceptional student, and a devoted friend to many.

SC Calvert Academy selected Richard "Tripp" Norton. Tripp, a fourth grader, has already distinguished himself as a star student with a strong desire to achieve and accomplish.

SC Connections Academy chose Aubrey Rebecca Lewis. Rebecca is a ninth grader

who excels in academics, visual arts, and in writing along with being an encouraging friend to many.

SC Virtual Charter School selected Kathryn Hall. Kathryn, who has earned considerable credit through Orangeburg Calhoun Technical College, balances studies with work and hands-on ministry.

Spartanburg Charter School chose William Mossbrook. Will is an exceptional elementary school student, a school leader, a promising athlete, and a helpful member of the school community.

All of the students earned respect and appreciation from everyone who learned of the accomplishments. Each of them secured a sound and firm endorsement from their school regarding their aptitude, character, talent, and emphasis on personal outreach to others. The district office selected Jasmine Hadden as the Outstanding Student of the Year for the district.

## Selected Teachers of the Year Demonstrate Professional Excellence

On Friday, May 21, 2010 at the Embassy Suites Greystone in Columbia, those present for the district awards dinner were introduced to the teachers of the year for the seven current schools in the district. A total of eight selected teachers represented some of the best education talents in the district. (Due to its size, SC Virtual Charter School provided a teacher of the year for K-8 and a teacher of the year for 9-12).

Calhoun Falls Charter School selected Sandra Gail Wilson. She is a high school English teacher, teacher cadet, and dual enrollment instructor.

Palmetto State E-cademy chose Brannon Carter. He teaches Biology and Physical Science courses and is the school's Lead Department Chairperson for science.

Provost Academy South Carolina named Charlotte Shepard as its teacher of the year. Charlotte is an academic advisor and is also a certified teacher.

SC Calvert Academy selected Tammy Wyatt as their teacher of the year. Tammy teaches math at different grade levels.

SC Connections Academy chose Melissa D'Annunzio for teacher of the year. Melissa teaches language arts and literature classes.

SC Virtual School named Henriette Lemon for grade levels K-8. Henriette is a curriculum coach, where she assists other teachers in various techniques.

SC Virtual School named Laura Howard for grade levels 9-12. Laura is a biology teacher and a mentor to a new science teacher in the school.

Spartanburg Charter School chose Tomikia G. Whitmire. Tomikia is a fourth and fifth grade math teacher.

"We have incredible talent in our school staffs, and if you read through the biographies of these extraordinary educators, you'll see accomplishment

in so many ways," says Superintendent Wayne Brazell, Ph. D. "Each one is striving for nothing short of excellence for their students and for their peers," says Dr. Brazell.

District Director of School Development, Paula Gray, adds, "When we look at these highly dedicated and wonderfully skilled people, we see the care and the creative energy that comes with being one of the best in the education field." She continues, "The only issue was that our school leaders had so many amazing folks to pick from. All of the schools in this district are extremely fortunate to have so many stellar educators."

## Chairman of District Board of Trustees Leads Dedicated Team for Success

As an entrepreneur and as a civic-minded person, District Board Chairman Don McLaurin knows a good idea when he sees it. That is why the South Carolina leader is supporting public charter education. The former information technology executive and published business expert heads the District Board. The Board members are strongly committed to the students of the District. "We have a talented Board made up of business people, educators, and others who are dedicated to quality education in South Carolina. We have developed a common vision, which we are single-mindedly pursuing. That vision is that this

district will become a primary driver in improving the educational outcomes not only in our schools but in schools across the state," says McLaurin.

The Chairman is an advocate for academic excellence. "As a member of the Board, I have become a true believer that public charter schools have the *potential* to have a dramatic effect on public education in the state. That potential will only be achieved if we deliver an excellent product. This means that we must hold ourselves as a district as well as each school to high standards of student achievement if we are to fulfill our potential," he adds.

McLaurin is also realistic about the issues facing the schools in the district. "My experience tells me that consumers always support those who provide great service – that will happen here also as long as we never settle for mediocrity. We must, however, fight hard in the near term for enough funding to keep us viable until we can clearly establish our credentials. We need everyone who is involved in the public charter experience to work with their state Senator and state House member to encourage equitable funding for the schools in our district. Our students deserve a high quality education. Our state leaders created the district to provide just that."



*Don McLaurin,  
Chairman of the  
SCPCSD Board of  
Trustees*

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A total of 400 copies of this newsletter was printed for a cost of \$2.03 per copy. A digital version was also distributed to parents.

Visit us on the web at:

[www.sccharter.org](http://www.sccharter.org)

## History Web Sites for Parents and Students Alike

Many people in America are not well versed in History. Sometimes Mom or Dad might need a little reminder about the past to help the kids with homework or to help make that social studies project just a little bit better. Here are some web sites to help.

The Smithsonian offers interesting resources on national topics:

<http://historyexplorer.americanhistory.si.edu/index.asp>

The U. S. Central Intelligence Agency offers a world review:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>

The American Historical Society has links for students and parents:

<http://www.historians.org/>

The University of South Carolina digital collection is incredible:

<http://sc.edu/library/digital/index.php>

## Bill Gates Kicked Off National Charter Schools Conference in Chicago

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools hosted their annual conference in Chicago this year. Bill Gates gave the initial keynote address to the crowd of 4,500, saying that he strongly supports public charter schools across the United States.

The conference included other addresses by major national figures in education, such as a live chat with US Sec. of Education Arne Duncan, who voiced federal support for public charter schools. Other speakers included Reed Hastings,

who is the CEO of NetFlix, and television host Joe Scarborough of MSNBC.

Attendees met in small groups on a variety of subjects related to public charter schools.

Next year, the conference will be in Atlanta in June.

## Public Notice Concerning District Policy Regarding Discrimination

The South Carolina Public Charter School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, disability, age, religion, immigrant status, or

national origin in its educational programs and employment practices. Questions pertaining to Section 504 and Title IX may be directed to the Director of Exceptional

Student Services at (803) 734-8322 at any time, or by writing to the district office at the Columbia, South Carolina address shown on this page of this newsletter.

## Superintendent Thanks District Dinner Sponsors for Generous Donations

The first annual district awards dinner could not have happened without the support of several very generous corporate sponsors. At the platinum level, BB&T Corporation, the law firm of Hall and Bowers, and Nu-Idea Furniture each donated \$500 for the event. Gold sponsors Pearson Publishers, Kelley-Moser Consulting, LLC, and Elliott Davis, LLC each donated between \$200

and \$300. Piggly Wiggly, Insurance People, and Dr. Marshall Fields, DMD, of Columbia provided Silver level sponsorship.

Bronze-level sponsors of door prizes were: First Choice Salon & Spa, Zesto's of Chapin, the White Rock Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Helping Hands Nursery of Irmo, Floral Elegance by Jourdain, Cutn Up In Style, Side Tracks Salon, King Nails & Spa, Capital Nails

& Spa, D'Martin Salon & Spa, Lovely Nails, Salon Sole, Charleston Crab House Restaurant, Fancy That Bistro & Catering, The Pizza Joint, Inc., Gold's Gym, Publix, and the European Skin & Hair Clinic.

Certificates for stays at hotels were provided as door prizes by: Columbia Marriott, Fairfield Inn by Marriott at Harbison, Hilton Columbia Center, Hampton Inn Northeast,

Sheraton Hotel Downtown Columbia, and Embassy Suites Columbia Greystone.

"We are extremely grateful to all of our sponsors for their fine support," says Superintendent Brazell. "In my opinion, BB&T, Butch Bowers, and Cary Coker of Nu-Idea Furniture all merit a special thanks for paving the way for the evening," Brazell adds. Nu-Idea Furniture is headquartered in Sumter and can be reached at 803-773-7389.