

Richland School District Two
Office of Diversity and Multicultural Inclusion
Dr. Helen Grant

2016 Community Conversations Executive Summary

Background

The Office of Diversity and Multicultural Inclusion, as an outgrowth of the work of the Richland School District Two Diversity Task Force, held a series of Community Conversations to give all of the Richland School District Two stakeholders an opportunity to share strengths and any suggestions for improvements in the areas of diversity and inclusion. The Conversations were designed to foster greater understanding of the needs of our community and to help inform the district about what should be included in the comprehensive diversity and inclusion plan.

Six Community Conversations were held across the school district where parents, students, district staff, business persons and other community members had the opportunity to learn about the diverse demographics of the district and then break out into small groups to talk about diversity and inclusion within the framework of the district's four squares: Learning, Character, Community, and Joy. The small groups then reconvened to share with the whole group a summary of the information discussed. Additionally, smaller mini-community conversations were held with a small group of Hispanic parents and with the district's Business and Education Alliance.

The schedule for the conversations was designed to provide venues across the Richland Two school zone that would allow many opportunities for participation by all of our stakeholders. Over 200 participants shared in a lively exchange of ideas and experiences. (Appendix 1)

This summary was compiled from notes taken by volunteer facilitators from the four breakout small groups; flip chart sheets used by recorders to preserve the small group summaries; and supplemental notes taken by administrative staff from general group discussions. Data was evaluated and compiled based on records of individual sessions that were then consolidated by strengths and areas that need improvement and/or suggestions. Consolidated information was then analyzed for recurring themes/categories. (Appendix 2)

Summary of Information Discussed

Based on the information received, the district's **strengths** are divided into the following categories:

- Outreach
- Diversity
- Staff/Teachers
- Leadership,
- Programming - Students
- Programming - Parents
- Communications
- Technology

Based on the information received, **suggestions for improvement** in the district are divided into the following categories:

- Outreach
- Staff/Teachers
- Inclusion
- Diversity
- Access to Programs
- Communication
- Discipline

Some of the categories can be found in both strengths and suggestions for improvements indicating we are making progress in areas identified as ones that need additional improvement.

Sample Conversation Responses

Outreach

Some of the specific strengths listed in the area of outreach are:

- Development and use of student translators;
- Community partnerships like the one with the Richland County Public Library
- Celebration of cultural holidays and festivals
- Work of the parent liaisons
- Bi-lingual communication from the district (written and oral)
- Parent Portal
- Programs to educate parents
- Recognition of student's accomplishments
- Openness and willingness of district officials to listen

Some of the specific improvement areas in outreach are:

- More and different avenues for communications between the district and parents and follow up by district staff
- Be culture specific in determining the best way to reach parents

- Use parents to introduce students to higher level academic courses
- Have more parent/teacher conferences
- Inform public of school and district resources such as social workers who can provide physical, emotional and psychological assistance
- More information on how parents can help their children at home including classes in Spanish about the use of Parent Portal and district services
- In person communications
- Programs for children with special needs

Diversity

Some of the specific strengths listed in the area of diversity are:

- Diverse administrative team
- Different resources available for families such as interpreters and the ESOL program
- Celebration and respect for cultural holidays
- Recognition that diversity makes district better
- Openness and willingness to listen
- Spanish speaking school and district personnel
- Teachers always try to help
- Good variety of innovative programs and activities
- Parent liaisons who build bridges between the community and the district

Some of the specific areas of improvement for diversity are:

- Training on religious sensitivity
- Make sure character programs reflect the cultures of the students and that they expose children to diversity
- Intentional recruitment of diverse staff and diversification of school leadership teams
- Promotion of cultural diversity
- Diversity training for teachers including how to learn about the cultures of students
- Involve churches in cultural events
- Have more translators in the district
- Use data to address equity issues
- Find solutions to transportation obstacle that excludes some students from magnet and choice programs
- Equal access to programs for students with special needs
- Establish a clear pipeline for growing our own teachers

Staff/Teachers

Some of the specific strengths listed in the area of staff/teachers are:

- Strong leadership promoted through programs such as Lead Up; Teacher of Promise and free professional development programs
- Social workers at each school
- Communications between school and home
- Positive attitudes in the classroom
- Performing jobs with passion
- Always trying to help students

- Recognition of students and staff
- District pushes teachers to grow
- Staff has pride in the district
- Discipline Task Force work

Some of the specific areas of improvement for Staff/Teachers are:

- Include teachers' voices
- Handling of discipline problems that disrupt the learning of others
- Diversity training (including how to address various learning styles and children in poverty)
- Build cultural competence
- Improved parent/teacher relationships
- Understand the culture of students
- More emphasis on programs for special needs students; less isolation
- More guidance counselors in the schools and more support for the role of counselors to deal with social and emotional issues
- More community conversations
- More frequent parent conferences
- Honest and clear communications with parents; not just through the students
- Support for teachers working with the difficult students

Leadership

Some of the specific areas of strengths in leadership are:

- Diverse administrative staff
- Strong connection to teachers
- Openness and willingness to listen by executive leadership and board of trustees
- Working to be inclusive
- Promoting leadership in staff and teachers
- Introduction of programs and activities to help staff gain leadership skills

Programming for Students and Parents

Some of the specific areas of strengths in programming for students and parents are:

- Parent Advisory Council, PTO and SIC programs for parents
- Parent liaisons who build bridges between the community and the district
- Programs that educate parents
- Partnerships with the community such as with the Richland County Public Library
- Interpreters, including the student interpreter program
- Students feel free to organize events
- Back pack program
- Varied and many opportunities for clubs, sports, after school activities
- Student councils
- Department of Defense grant to work with military families
- Choice and magnet programs
- Technology

Some of the specific areas of improvement for access to programs are:

- AP, gifted and magnet programs lack diversity

- Communication of magnet program information
- More emphasis on programs for special needs students
- More tutoring help
- Making sure students have the prerequisites needed for magnet programs
- More programs and assistance for kids at the bottom in achievement
- Removing transportation barrier for choice and magnet programs

Communication

Some of the specific areas of strengths in communication are:

- Community conversations
- Having interpreters, including student interpreters
- Social networking
- Parent portal
- Students know what is expected of them
- School blogs
- Hispanic parent liaisons

Some of the specific areas of improvement are:

- More of the all calls but keep them short and to the point
- More avenues for communications
- Include teacher voices
- More parent/teacher conferences
- More information to parents about learning opportunities for parents
- More information about resources such as social workers
- Stop erroneous information or misinterpretations
- More information about the good things kids are doing
- Provide more information about what the district office is doing
- Training for parents to learn how to help their children
- More contact with teachers
- More in person contacts
- Offer classes to Spanish speaking parents, in Spanish, on how to use parent portal and other district services
- More interpreters
- Outreach to the community by each school

Discipline

Some of the specific areas of improvement are:

- Parents called in for misbehavior but not for progress or positive work
- Discipline problems in specific classrooms
- One or a few disrupt the learning of most
- Students who have special accommodations disrupt class for other students
- The needs of one vs. the needs of many
- Diversity training to meet various learning styles
- The need for use of alternatives instead of punishment
- Teachers have all the responsibility but no authority
- High number of African American males being disciplined or expelled

In reviewing the data, we found that the areas of strength and suggestions for improvements closely mirror the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and obstacles that were identified in the work of the Diversity Task Force in 2015. (Appendix 3)

Reflections

Based on input from the Community Conversations, our community is generally pleased with the work of the district. In many of the areas where suggestions were received, the district has already implemented changes or improvements. Some of these initiatives and programs are outlined below:

The Richland Two Discipline Task Force

Formed in 2014 under the guidance of Cleveland Smith, Executive Director of Administrative Services, the team has developed a detailed plan with clear guidelines aimed at rethinking student discipline with the goal of reducing the number of student suspensions and expulsions. The team has developed a Discipline Matrix that is in the final stages of review and approval. With heightened awareness, collaborations and discussions on best practices, the district has already reported decreases in suspension and expulsion rates. With clear guidelines and consistent application across the district, this initiative will address both discipline and the disparity of disciplinary action for African American students.

Richland School District Two's Behavior Education Supports & Training (B.E.S.T.) Model

A Multi-tiered Behavioral Support System, that provides behavioral education, supports, and training, to students, teachers and parents. The B.E.S.T. uses restorative practices to repair harm and restore broken relationships. This process emphasizes the importance of restitution and resolution instead of solely relying on exclusionary practices, to address challenging behavior.

Communication

Communication is one of the categories that can be found in both the strengths and improvements analysis. One of the suggestions in this category was easier access of information on the website for parents and personnel. The Department of Communications & Strategic Partnerships is currently working to provide a new website that is scheduled to launch soon. The plan for this website is for it to be easier to use, more responsive, more intentional in outreach, and inclusive of all our families. In an attempt to include all of our stakeholders, the Communications Department has also been proactive in maintaining a presence in popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Pinterest, Blog, Instagram, and You Should Know website.

Additional efforts have also been undertaken to make sure that key messages from the district go out in both English and Spanish. Spanish is the second most spoken language in our district and attention has been focused on making sure that the information sent in Spanish is not just a translation of English words but that the correct message is translated.

The current website has been updated with information that explains how Richland Two is a pipeline to success and with videos of students and staff living the Four Squares of Learning, Character, Community and Joy.

Use of technology to help keep parents advised of students' academic status

In addition to Parent Portal, the Office of Teaching and Learning created a new website, registration package, Google Document, and with the use of Power School and Acorn software, students' registrations and fee payments (where required) are cross referenced for eligibility for graduation thereby diminishing possibilities of students not having required courses and increasing accountability and integrity in the registration process.

Standardization across district of acceptable forms of identification for parents without state issued identification

One area of concern expressed by Hispanic parents is that identification for sign in at schools and for participation with students on field studies was not consistent across the district. Of particular concern was what is required for parents who do not have state issued identification. Dr. Shawn Suber, Director of Special Projects, is addressing the issue of acceptable identification through the use of parent photographs to be taken and issued to parents as school identification.

Diversity

Diversity is a topic that appears in both strengths and needs improvement categories. Through the leadership of Superintendent Hamm, the district exhibited purposeful and deliberate attention to this issue when in June 2014 the Diversity Task Force was formed. Comprised of a cross section of staff, parents, and community stakeholders, the purpose was to develop a Comprehensive Diversity Plan to support the district's mission, and address the needs of our students as we prepare them for success. One of the recommendations of the Task Force was to hire a Diversity and Multicultural Inclusion Officer who would be responsible for supervision of the work of the Task Force, development of a diversity and multicultural inclusion plan and to provide insight, resources, tools and actions to advance the goals of diversity and multicultural inclusion. This recommendation was adopted, and the position was filled in August 2015.

As our community, as well as our workforce is enriched with increasing diversity, the Office of Diversity and Multicultural Inclusion has begun district wide diversity and inclusion training for all staff. Since August 2015, training has been conducted with the following groups: Executive Staff, Key Leaders, District Nurses, Elementary Social Studies Lead Teachers, the Teaching and Learning department, Induction teachers, New to Two, Summer Institute teachers, Administrative staff, Physical Education teachers, Bus drivers and supervisors and Sodexo employees.

Diversity and Multicultural training is scheduled for the Board of Trustees

Additionally, we are working with the Communications Department to update the Diversity and Multicultural Inclusion page on the district's website. These updates will include information on the 59 countries and 60 languages represented in our student body and will showcase and highlight achievements and accomplishments.

Richland Two Institute of Innovation - R2i2

R2i2 is a learning and innovation center for high school students; an innovation-oriented institute where entrepreneurship and leadership are themes that permeate all programs as well as a community center where portions of the building will be accessible to the public, including a branch of the Richland County Public Library and Adult Education programs. Beginning with the 2016-17 school year, courses will be available in: Mobile and Non-Traditional Food and Service Businesses; Apple App Development; Managerial Accounting and Finance; Supply Chain and Global Logistics Management; Computer Aided Design and Manufacturing and Next Energy Fuel Cell Engineering. Students will be provided transportation from their home high schools to R2i2 and back to their home schools.

Partnership with Comet

Richland District Two and Comet have entered into a community partnership agreement that will allow some of our Richland Two students to ride the Comet bus system for free. This will give students more flexibility for transportation to and from schools and events and will allow access to the greater Midlands area via a transit system.

Parent University

In addition to the seminars, activities and training offered at individual schools, the district has instituted a Parent University program designed to provide parents with information they need to assist their children. The first district wide program was held in the spring of 2016 at the Richland District Two Auditorium, and provided parents with information on programs for children with special needs including 504 plans and IEPs. Additionally, the district has established and hired a Director of Parent and Family Education.

Richland School District Two Student Advisory Council

To create a formal mechanism for communication between students and the Board of Trustees and to build positive and direct relationships between school board members and students in an organized setting, a Student Advisory Council was implemented in the spring 2016. The Council is comprised of students from each middle and high school in the district and will meet with members of the Board and with the Superintendent each school year to engage in dialogue and discussion about items of interest, inquiry and concern.

S C Midlands Summit

For five years the Technology Integration Team has sponsored the SC Midlands Summit. The 2016 summit was a two day technology integration professional development event that focused on being a Catalyst for Change. Sessions were held on the integration of technology into the school and classroom with a focus on using Google Apps for Education, learning environments, innovation, transformation, 21st century skills and mobile devices for student learning.

Richland District Two Mentoring Program

CATE Programs

Students in Richland Two's Career and Technical Education courses develop important skills that carry them through post-secondary education and into their careers. Some programs, like the Fire Academy at Westwood, allow students to step off the graduation stage and into a successful career. Other programs, like Project Lead the Way, offer engineering credits at area universities. Richland Two offers multiple options in Business, Computer Programming, Engineering, and Health Science at all five high schools.

ROTC Programs

Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps or JROTC is a proud tradition in Richland Two. All five high schools in the district have a full military-funded JROTC program, including Army units at Blythewood High, Ridge View High, and Westwood High; an Air Force unit at Spring Valley High; and a Navy unit at Richland Northeast High.

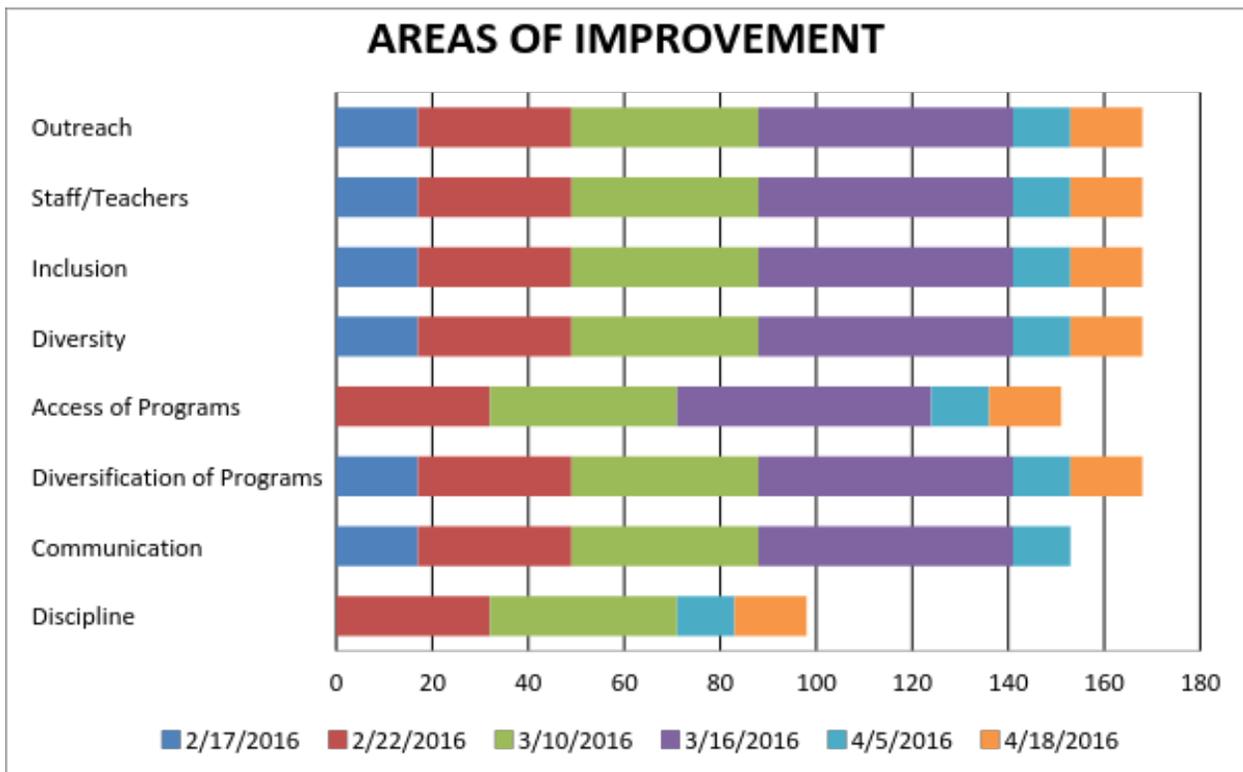
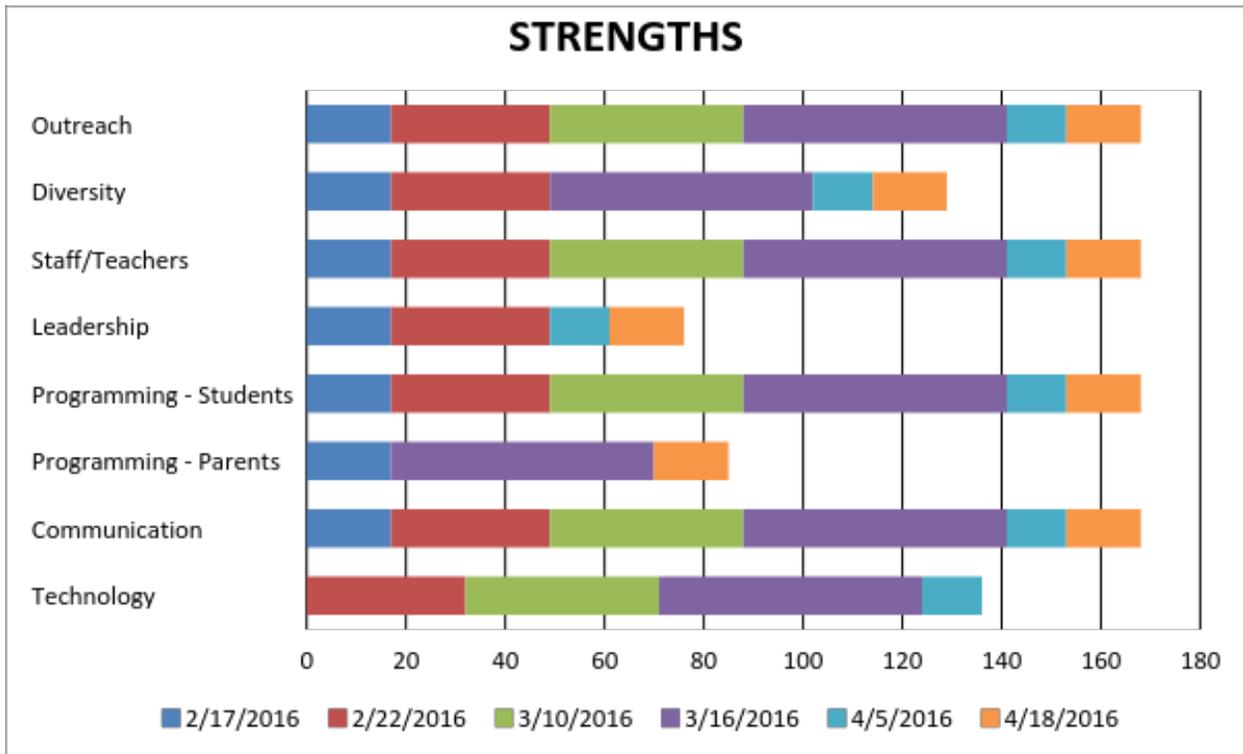
Next Steps

In conjunction with the strategic plan, we will develop a diversity and multicultural inclusion plan and we will further incorporate diversity and multicultural inclusion efforts in all aspects of district operations. We will continue to have Community Conversations with our stakeholders and we will expand professional development opportunities. (Appendix 4)

Appendix 1

Date	Place	Focus	Facilitator
February 2, 2016	Windsor United Methodist Church	Hispanic Parents (mini-conversation)	Dr. Helen Grant
February 11, 2016	Richland Two Conference Center	Business and Education Alliance (mini-conversation)	Dr. Helen Grant
February 17, 2016	Richland Two Conference Center	Community	Ms. Clarissa Bennett
February 22, 2016	Brookland Baptist Church	Community	Ms. Betty Parker
March 10, 2016	Village at Sandhill	Students	Juan Pacheco (student)
March 16, 2016	E.L. Wright Middle School	Hispanic Community	Mr. Ron Huff
April 5, 2016	Muller Road Middle School	Community	Dr. Chris LaCola
April 18, 2016	Northeast Presbyterian Church	Community	Mr. Robert Ratteree

Appendix 2



Appendix 3

Diversity Task Force SWOO Analysis

strengths

Employees committed to success.

Liaisons -

Willingness to act on issues. Willingness to help by parents and staff. Diversity in cultural backgrounds (of all stakeholders). Awareness.

Diversity Task Force. Academic programs to meet diverse needs. Leadership that recognize the need to address diversity. We have a diverse community. Starting to see more diversity in advertisements. Past success with diversity.

Systems

Task force /groups for feedback. Continuous professional development. Positive feedback from parents regarding how we handle diversity.

Open to new ideas.

Seek out different perspectives. Constantly seeking to innovate. Leadership of R2 is diverse and becoming more so (School admins and DO staff) .

We talk about diversity. District has prioritized ESOL students and families. (Family liaisons, teachers for ESOL support, etc.) . Recognition that it is an area to address so we can work together.

Becoming more diverse over time (Staffing) .

A culture of diversity and understanding (Not racism). District leaders want to focus more on diversity. Strong leadership i. e. District Monitors current and future needs.

A history of success and innovation. Hiring (HR) focus on finding diverse staff (making it a priority) .

Weaknesses

Homeless students For this group- choir is in this room-those that oppose or challenge the views are not here or do not speak up. Transparency in issues that reflect concerns in society i. e. expulsions and racial profiling. Transparent communication form RSD2. What are we doing to address diversity? Community outreach. Town hall meetings, surveys and partnerships.

- Need mandatory diversity and sensitivity training for all employees.

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- Lack of education about diversity.

- Poverty across the district and the attitudes that come with it.

- Entrenched ideas of education and society.

- Statistics indicating that nearly of jobs over the next 10-20 years will require type of education and training available at technical colleges. - Sole focus of district seems to be on sending all students

to 4 year college despite labor.

- Resistance to change.
- Communication with non-English speaking parents needs improvement and expanding.
- Working with outside agencies to meet the needs of families.
- Communicating with teacher preparation programs about what skills we need our teachers to have.
- Lack of bilingual personnel.
- Higher poverty makes for more need to change how we "get to" do things.
- District school lines are still political ... some school make ups are made up more/ less diverse than others.
- Lack of bilingual staff to meet increasing needs of schools with high populations of ESOL students.
- Human Trafficking
- Change in culture and beliefs of staff take a long time and intentional focus.
- Getting diversity topics out to all RSD2 employees. * Especially those that deal directly with students.
- Difficult to find diverse staff to hire (They are not there to hire)
- .

Obstacles

- It's easier not to change and be more inclusive.
- It's difficult to hire/ train staff to have a mindset to be compassionate.
- Some may not want to or may not know how to think, speak or act constructively about the topic.
- Professionals that do not see diversity as a problem.
- Funding.
- Lack of knowledge about the district's intent or goals in this area.
- Professionals who don't understand why this effort is critical to our success.
- District Red Tape.

Individual leaders do not have the authority to make final decision.

Communication. Not taking the time to evaluate new initiatives and making adjustments.

Focus on culture and not race. Getting participation from faculty.

Opportunities

The chance to create a plan to address the diversity needs of the District for our community with our community. Become a leader within the state of South Carolina and embracing and promoting diversity. Impact student achievement by increasing diversity of district labor force so that student from all backgrounds can see possibilities for their future because a staff member that they can identify with. A new Diversity Task Force. Making diverse connection with local

communities. RSD2 and staff members working together to create a plan. Potential to spend significant time, money and energy on building our diverse community together. Mandatory diversity sensitivity training. School. 5 year plans and diversity goals. Raise Awareness and transparency to the public about our district.

Parent education workshops - 2 day conference. Innovation funds from Sife Prede can be used for hiring Latino / Hispanic staffers. Mentoring using outside sources. Continuing education classes for faculty and staff effective sensitive communication, social Spanish, behavior/ discipline, culture, poverty. SC SICL Network, more workshops to share ideas with the groups who support our schools. More focus on innovation and technical programs to build a diverse student body. Pep and staff training times could be used to focus on diversity.

Annual employee training * * required" . Technology can help us learn from stakeholders and help to bridge gaps - training, instructor, etc. Working with USC Cooperative partnerships with the university. Create individual student profiles to highlight diversity for teachers and administrators to understand. Work with local groups.

School Improvement Council- includes a diversity goal. R2TV - Advertise what we are doing to address diversity. Parent workshops, town hall meetings and tips for home. Positivity and openness to diversity in Richland County. A commitment across the district to make diversity happen. Provide programs to teach students cultural diversity. Grooming employees from a variety of backgrounds to assume Leadership roles within the district.

Appendix 4

