

**External Evaluation of the
Centers of Excellence Program**

Final Report

submitted to

South Carolina Commission on Higher Education

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Arthur M. Recesso, Ph.D.

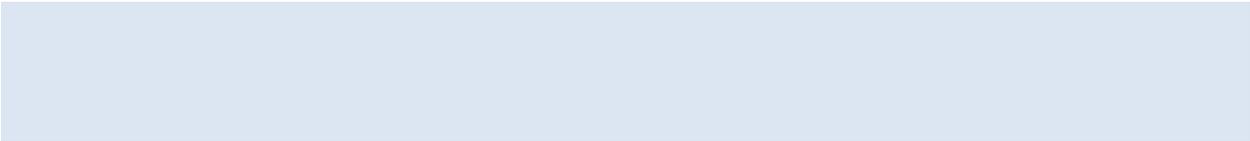


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Overview

The Centers of Excellence Program was established by the Education Improvement Act of 1984. According to that legislation:

The Commission on Higher Education, in consultation with the State Board of Education, may contract with selected public or private colleges and universities, or groupings of such institutions, to provide centers of excellence in programs designed to train teachers.

Funds for implementing this activity shall be appropriated annually to the Commission on Higher Education which, in consultation with the State Board of Education, shall monitor the performance of participating institutions and may or may not elect to renew such contracts to any original college or university.

In 1987-88, the Commission approved revised guidelines for this program to elicit proposals of greater scope and wider impact. Under these guidelines since 2010-11 the Commission has established Centers of Excellence that were part of this evaluation.

The focus of each Center and the institutions funded were as follows:

- 2010-11 Focus on Recruitment and Retention of Teachers, Newberry College
- 2011-12 Focus on Effective Teaching: English Language Learners, Claflin University
- 2012-13 Focus on Effective Teaching: STEM, The Citadel
- 2013-14 Focus on Effective Teaching for College Readiness: Mobile Learning, Anderson University

- 2014-15 Focus on Effective Teaching for College and Career Readiness, Francis Marion University
- 2015-16 No funding
- 2016-17 Focus on Effective Teaching, University of South Carolina – Columbia
- 2017-18 Effective Teaching that focuses on Knowledge, Skills, and Characteristics of the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate, TBD

Purpose of the Program

The purpose of the program, as stated in the 2016-17 RFP, is to “have the ‘state of the art’ ‘resource centers’ develop and model state of the art teaching, practices, conduct research, disseminate information, and provide training for P-12 and higher education personnel in the Center’s specific area of expertise.” To achieve this goal, the program RFP states the priority of efforts are as follows:

- developing and modeling state of the art pre-service preparation programs for other institutions of higher education to emulate that focus on increasing the number of teachers appropriately prepared to work effectively with students in low-performing schools and with diverse needs;
- developing innovative school-based projects to enhance student and teacher achievement at low-performing schools;
- conducting statewide school-based and campus-based faculty development activities related to State content and assessment standards;
- conducting research and evaluation activities related to teacher quality and student achievement;

- serving as a state (and/or regional and national) clearinghouse for information dissemination on center activities; and
- providing demonstration, outreach, and technical assistance programs for low performing schools and districts and institutions of higher education as requested.

The characteristics of a Center, key factors the CHE is looking for to fund an institution's Center, are also defined in the RFP and include:

- innovative practices that enable school personnel to improve student achievement;
- effective, sustained, high quality professional development;
- collaboration with major education stakeholders, including local school districts and schools, other higher education institutions and Centers of Excellence, professional associations, parent groups, and the private sector;
- field-based teacher education programs, including professional development schools that are aligned with in-service teacher professional development;
- technology-based instructional techniques;
- innovative practices for teaching children with diverse backgrounds and diverse learning styles; and
- assistance to teachers in understanding state content and assessment standards and how to help all students meet or exceed these standards.

The RFP also states the Center must directly support activities and have clearly defined benefits for both P-12 and higher education and these efforts should be directly linked to training of high quality teachers and raising student academic achievement. Furthermore, the Center should demonstrate how the activities will support improvement in low-

performing school partners and be tied to State content and assessment standards. The Center must also address the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. Fully, each the requirements are representative of education related challenges of importance locally and at the state and national level. It is important to point out, each one of these items and characteristics is worthy of funding on its own, yet the RFP requires all of them to be addressed. Furthermore, all of the requirements must be adequately addressed for up to \$150,000 annually on a decreasing sliding scale over 5 years.

Scope of the Report

This report was created at the request of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and involves an external evaluation of the Centers of Excellence Program. The intent of this report is to communicate results of the external program evaluation including a synthesis of the goals, activities, and challenges. It will also offer recommendations for consideration during future funding cycles.

The analysis and synthesis of information was conducted for the time period 2010-11 through 2015-16 during which Centers of Excellence were funded. A review of the original proposal, annual reports, and external evaluation for each of the funded Centers was reviewed. A site visit of each Center funded during this time period was conducted. Although the site visit did provide an opportunity to see local implementation activity, the main purpose was to interview local Center staff and discuss the state level program. EIA Program Reports and original request for proposals (RFP) were reviewed and an interview with the Commission on Higher Education Centers of Excellence program manager was also conducted. A backward mapping and evidence informed methodology

was used in the analysis of information collected. Recommendations were generated based on the extent to which there was a variance between program level expectations and local level implementation outcomes.

The scope of work for this effort focused on the Center of Excellence Program, not individual Centers, as each one already has an annual external evaluation in place as required by the RFP. A synthesis of the Center activities was created to report the extent to which the Centers of Excellence Program met its goals during the aforementioned time period and is not intended to reflect local Center's progress towards its goals and objectives. However, the synthesis of Center reported activities does speak to the Program's capacity to address the educational priorities of the State of South Carolina outlined in the original legislation and those reflected in the annual RFP. Hence, the core question of the evaluation effort was, 'To what extent does the Centers of Excellence Program meet its goals of implementing "state of the art" resource Centers for the State of South Carolina that lead to the improvement of teacher education.'

Herein, the structure of this report reflects an analysis of policy documents, Center reports, and interviews with Center and Commission on Higher Education staff. The report begins with an overview of all the Centers. Next, the report provides a synthesis of the individual Center's goals, accomplishments, and implementation challenges over multiple years beginning in 2010. Finally, recommendations for further inquiry are provided.

Centers of Excellence Program

The following is a synthesis of Centers of Excellent Program funded between FY 2010 and 2016. No Centers were funded in 2015 and the Center funded in 2016 was not formally funded at the time this report was generated. A few patterns emerge. **The Centers of Excellence as a Program is successfully addressing significant issues in education – challenges important to students, parents, educators, institutions of higher education, local school districts, the state, and the nation.** The RFP review and selection process appears to be an effective process for selecting institutions and individual lead units to address these critical challenges reflected in the focus of each Center. The purpose of this section is to highlight the vision and core efforts, the accomplishments, and implementation challenges across all of the Centers funded during this time period.

Vision and Core Efforts

Overall, the Centers of Excellent Program is successful at selecting and funding Centers that are:

- focused on a significant education related challenge in the state – and nationally, including mobile learning, college and career preparedness, English Language Learners, STEM, and teacher induction;
- concerned with local and regional impact;
- implementing efforts to impact preservice teachers, inservice teachers, and students; and
- focused on professional development and passionate about working with teachers.

Populations Served

The Centers of Excellence are clearly dedicated to serving populations defined in the RFP including:

- inservice teachers from a wide array of subject areas and school demographics;
- preservice teachers from a variety of institutions;
- students from a wide array of subject areas and school demographics; and
- school districts and schools with a high percentage of underserved populations.

Accomplishments

In terms of accomplishments, the Centers of Excellence Program is supporting local Centers that are:

- highly valued by the participants and the school or school district partners;
- conducting critical work that directly informs important challenges in education;
- creating and delivering high quality and engaging professional development and learning opportunities;
- conducting work directly applicable to the classroom to the benefit of teachers and learners;
- dedicating significant portion of center resources to teachers and students; and
- generating evidence of impact on preservice teachers, inservice teachers, and students.

Challenges to Implementation

Local implementation of the Centers of Excellence Program has experienced challenges that may be attributed to:

- an expansive RFP which requires a wide array of categorically broad issues be address and the lack of focus creates incredible challenges for implementation;
- a need for increases in opportunities for director professional development and Center technical assistance;
- a need for more centralized support (increase CHE staffing) enabling synergy across centers and to encourage collaboration across centers;
- a need for more cohesion across state agencies, state level task force entities, and meeting groups that all focus on issues similar to the Centers and where the synergy alone would be very beneficial to impact on teachers, learners, and the policies that drive decision making;
- constant change in national and state priorities
- an expectation of conducting research focused on student achievement and not funding at a level required for such research;
- expectations the Centers focus on learner research when the centers were funded for teacher professional development
- a declining sliding scale of funding to encourage sustainability that is in direct conflict with an expectation of scaling which requires escalation of funding (often significantly) over time; and

- the current educational environment and challenges school districts face (changing policies, continuously changing priorities, challenges with technology integration, limited access to teachers, and limited access to data).

Collectively, the Centers of Excellent Program is supporting a wide array of important activities that address critical issues in education, especially low performing schools and schools that serve a high percentage of underserved populations of learners. The work is being done with a significant portion of allocated funding dedicated to the direct benefit of local teachers and students. The challenges include continuous changes in educational policy, an expectation that each Center implement activities across very broad categorical challenges in education – pre-service and inservice teachers, professional development and research, teachers and learners, with add-ons such as the more recent focus on the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate. Finally, the centralized support at the Commission on Higher Education is very lean in terms of staffing and resources for oversight and coordination – to the point it warrants consideration to increase support in ways that would permit more technical assistance, centralized data collection and analysis, and activities to integrate the Centers into the state and national fabric of ecosystems that are working to address the same educational challenges.

Synthesis of Efforts: Individual Center Profiles

The following is a synthesis of individual Centers funded by the Centers of Excellent Program between FY 2010 and 2016. The original proposal, interim reports, annual final reports, and annual external evaluations were reviewed for each year of funding. A site visit to each Center and interviews with directors and staff were also conducted and contributed to the information provided here.

NEWBERRY COLLEGE (2010-11)

Vision and Core Efforts

The Center experienced multiple changes in leadership in the first two years of implementation. Therefore, in Year 3 a new Director began with a different interpretation of the original goals and intent of the Center and proceeded to implement and deliver based on this new direction. As evident from the external evaluation this changed the course of the Center for the better and success was experienced in each of the remaining years. In fact, the Center received a special 6th year of funding, an indication of how well it had progressed in serving induction teachers and their students.

First Goal: The Guaranteed New Teacher Program (GROW) was not working as initially intended. The challenge was that new teachers tend to not ask for help, so the institution decided to bring the help to them. Furthermore, the external evaluator questioned whether there was a need for GROW and if a small college could successfully administer the program. Based on his questions and evaluations done by RETAIN, the director determined the program needed to be repurposed. In order to fund other RETAIN

initiatives that have been extremely successful, funding dedicated to the GROW program was used in more impactful ways such as the GROW Symposium, which was a success (evidenced by evaluations and evaluator's comments). Hence, these activities were continued under the new division of RETAIN and renamed GROW PD. This division focused on providing high quality professional development to teachers statewide. The Center launched GROW PD in the fall of 2013. By reimaging the GROW Guarantee program to GROW PD, they provided high quality professional development for teachers with a focus on new teachers and increasing teacher retention. Additionally, they felt the action research mini grants had not done enough for enough people especially when dealing with the South Carolina State Standards. They decided to focus funds on providing events that can impact more teachers thereby serving more students. They accomplished this by providing multiple sessions on many topics including the South Carolina State Standards through our GROW and New Teacher Induction Symposia.

Second Goal: The Center continues to implement this goal through the Data and Assessment Literacy course that launched in January, 2014.

Third Goal: Multiple position papers were created; however, the Center intended to add to the literature on mentoring and retention through writing manuscripts submitted to national peer-reviewed journals in order to gain national attention on center activities.

The RETAIN Center of Excellence quickly gained momentum under the new leadership and provided quality events for new teachers.

Center Goals and Objectives

According to the final reports and external evaluation the Center made an adjustment in Year 3, refined its goals, and then proceeded to gain momentum and meet those goals in subsequent years of funding. The goals and objectives were stated as follows.

1. Increase teacher retention in high need school districts through an innovative retention programmatic model.
 - Establish and implement a Guaranteed New Teacher Program at Newberry College that is replicable to other institutions.
 - Extend support of mentors to three years through an incentives-driven mentorship program.
 - Offer assistance to new teachers in implementing the common core standards through action research mini-grants.
2. Increase teacher retention in high need school districts through high-quality in-service professional development.
 - Develop and implement advanced mentor training for Program for Alternative Certification of Educators (PACE) mentors.
 - Develop and implement a professional development course related to data and assessment literacy. This course will cover mentoring first year teachers in the use of assessment and use of action research to improve teaching and learning, and will address implementation of the common core standards.
3. RETAIN will conduct and disseminate research related to teacher retention.

- Conduct current research and publish position papers specific to South Carolina on topics that relate to teacher retention including, but not limited to strategic management of human capital; needs of millennial teachers; working with students of poverty; teacher working conditions; and effective teacher and principal leadership.
- Conduct action research with teacher participants on issues specific to local and statewide retention needs.
- Plan and host an annual Teacher Retention /New Teacher Induction Symposium.

Population Served

The School District of Newberry County was a participant in the mentoring program, paid for substitute teachers in order to send induction teachers to GROW symposium, and participated on advisory board. The School District of Newberry County is the second largest employer in the County and the sole local education agency serving Newberry County. The district serves over 6,000 students in three attendance areas containing a total of 12 schools (one K-12 community school, two high schools, two middle schools, seven elementary schools, and an alternative school) plus a technologically advanced career center.

The Lexington 4 School District participated in the mentoring program and served on the advisory board. The district serves a student population of over 3400 students.

The Lexington 1 School District provided a facility for New Teacher Induction Symposium. Lexington One serves more than 25,000 students from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 with more than 3,700 employees (not including substitutes) and 30 schools (17 elementary schools, seven middle schools, five high schools, one technology center). 2010 Census Data shows Lexington County's population as 262,391 and the area that makes up Lexington One's population as 121,030 or 46 percent of the county. During the past 10 years (2004–2014), Lexington One grew by an average of 527 new students per year. The district remains one of the fastest growing school districts in the state, ranking eighth in the state using the 2014–2015 135-day headcount released by the S.C. Department of Education (Greenville, Charleston, Horry, Berkeley, Richland 2, Dorchester 2, Aiken, Lexington One). To keep up with this tremendous growth, Lexington has built 14 new schools since 2000.

Induction teachers were the main focus of the Center. The following table indicates the location of induction teacher participants and speaks to the statewide influence:

2013 Induction Symposium Participants by District	
Abbeville	1
Aiken	13
Anderson	9
Barnwell	1
Beaufort	21
Berkley	6
Cherokee	3
Charleston	1
Chesterfield	4
Citadel	1
Clover	2
Darlington	2
Dillon	1
Dorchester	1
Edgefield	3

2013 Induction Symposium Participants by District	
Fairfield	3
Florence	4
Fort Mill	1
Georgetown	3
Greenville	2
Greenwood	3
Horry	6
Kershaw	7
Lancaster	1
Lander University	1
Laurens	2
Lee	1
Lexington One	13
Lexington Two	2
Lex/Rich 5	3
Marion	3
Newberry	7
Newberry College	4
Oconee	1
Pickens	4
Richland One	12
Richland Two	14
Rock Hill	4
Saluda	5
Spartanburg	4
Sumter	7
SC Calvert Academy	1
York	1
Warren County Ga	1
Williamsburg	1
Other	10

Accomplishments

According to annual reports and external evaluations, the Center experienced limited success in Years 1 and 2. Under new leadership, the Center was on track beginning in Year 3 and began to see statewide influence by Year 5 which continued into an extension Year 6. One of the significant accomplishments was an innovative and entrepreneurial effort to create and deliver credit bearing courses. Participants who completed the series

of courses earned a Middle Grades credential valued by the state and local school systems. Therefore, the courses not only served a need – they generated revenue to sustain the Center. The following are a few major accomplishments that reflect the success of the Center.

- The Pace Mentor Training was a statewide event. Teachers were recruited statewide to participate in this training. The Advanced PACE Mentor Training was a joint development effort between RETAIN, CERRA and the SDE and was offered in Fall, 2012 with 27 participants. School districts represented ranged from Pickens in the upstate to Beaufort on the coast. As indication of the level of collaboration the Center achieved -- the developers and presenters were Jason Fulmer, Mentoring Coordinator for CERRA and Dr. Chris Burkett, Division Head at Columbia College and former PACE instructor. PACE Mentor Training builds on Foundations of Mentoring and covers the following topics: Assumptions about PACE teachers, What Makes a Highly Effective Teacher, Overview of Retention Data and PACE Program, Research about the PACE Program, Mentor Roles and Review of Initial Mentor Training, Tools for Support, Mentor Language and Scenarios, and Closure/Evaluation. The evaluations were very positive and indicated that the material presented informed them of the process and transformed their thinking about PACE. The program was disseminated to increased numbers of PACE mentors each year.
- The New Teacher Induction Symposium was a statewide event and was deliberately held in the Midlands in order to accommodate teachers from all regions of the state. Attendance was high with 195 educators registered for the

conference and evaluations were very positive. RETAIN plans to continue this effort in years to come and is already making plans for the 2014 Induction Symposium.

- In Year 3, the Center presented the Advanced PACE Mentor Training at Columbia College for 27 statewide participants. This was a joint development effort between RETAIN, CERRA and the SDE. According to reports, the evaluations were very positive and indicated that the material presented informed them of the process and transformed their thinking about PACE.
- 6 Action Research Mini-Grants were funded during the 2012-13 grant year. Although small in number, these projects showed increases in student achievement. Selected teachers were awarded money for the use of books, Kindles, and iPad minis. All teachers presented RETAIN with an Action Research Protocol Form, student data, and a PowerPoint presentation of their research. 141 students were served through these Action Research projects.
- During Year 3 the 2nd New Teacher Induction Symposium was held in the midlands to provide a central location for participants. Attendance was high with 195 educators registered for the conference and evaluations were very positive. The Center collaborated with CERRA to plan and implement the event. The Center provided 40 breakout sessions for new teachers to attend. These sessions addressed issues on technology integration, Common Core, innovative strategies, advocacy, and professionalism to name a few. This year's event expanded to a two-day event that featured a dinner and keynote speaker. The Center gained attention for our National keynote speaker, Jeff Charbonneau, National Teacher of

the Year. An interesting observation the Center found this year was that many of the first year teachers that attended our first year symposium returned as a second year teacher and some even presented this year. The Center believes this speaks volumes to the success of this event.

- During 2012-2013, the GROW Symposium was partially funded by Albert Williams. The New Teacher Induction Symposium was funded through a Supplemental Grant from CHE. Additional funding for this event came from participant fees, vendors, and CERRA in kind contributions.
- The Center was able to generate income during FY 2013-14 and beyond through GROW PD. This professional development hub will provide much needed professional development and add-on certification opportunities for teachers in the state. In Summer 2014 three on-line courses, Edu 335, Edu 336 and 455 were developed and offered. A common evaluation was submitted from all participants and the results were as followed:
 - **EDU 335** was taught by Jennifer Morrison and 16 students enrolled. All found that the course syllabus contained clearly stated student learning outcomes, requirements, due dates for assignments, and a grading system. All found that class sessions were relevant to student outcomes as were course assignments and examinations. Students found that assessment procedures for determining grades were explained before assignments were to be submitted and materials used in this course were well selected.
 - **EDU 336** was taught by Lisa Waller and 10 students enrolled. All found that the course syllabus contained clearly stated student learning outcomes,

requirements, due dates for assignments, and a grading system. All found that class sessions were relevant to student outcomes as were course assignments and examinations. Students found that assessment procedures for determining grades were explained before assignments were to be submitted and materials used in this course were well selected. The instructor demonstrated an enthusiasm for learning as well as a command of the course subject matter. The instructor was available via telephone, text or e-mail to answer questions and the online course was well designed and easy to navigate. The instructor communicated the subject matter clearly with relevant examples, stimulated further thinking about the course content, and expected a high level of performance from the students.

- **EDU 455** was taught by Don Lawrimore to seven students. All participants found that the syllabus contained clearly stated student learning outcomes, requirements, due dates for assignments, and a grading system. Six students found the class sessions relevant to student learning outcomes while one disagreed. All found the course assignments and examinations to be relevant to student learning, assessment procedures for determining grades were explained before assignments were to be submitted, and that the materials used in this course were well selected.
- **GROW Symposium 2015:** This symposium was the largest to date with over 180 attendees. Both undergraduates from Lander University and Newberry College were invited to attend. Attendance was so large that the symposium had to be

moved from the Mathematics and Science Auditorium to the Wiles Chapel. The opening session speaker was Jeremy Rinder, the 2011 SCATE Student Teacher of the Year.

Challenges

The largest challenge was a change in leadership the first two years of the Center. Mentor participation was also a challenge in the early stages. According to annual reports attendance was low at mentoring events and the program lacked structure. To resolve this issue, the Center started over, with a new mentoring cohort. New, very specific expectations were re-established for mentors including - mentors must have a teacher they are mentoring to participate and they must attend and actively participate in the program in order to continue in the program and be compensated. Additionally, the new Center director restructured the program to include induction teachers in the process. Research was limited in the initial two years of the Center. The new director took action and designed a research study surrounding the Mentor Match-Up Event that was held in year 4 and made plans to write manuscripts based on the findings. The Data and Assessment Literacy Course (DAL) was behind schedule and there was also a concern related to ownership of the materials. This was such an issue since there was not a contract created prior to the consultant starting this task. This issue had to be resolved before moving forward with the course. After speaking with all involved parties and investigating documentation, it was determined that the DAL course did belong to RETAIN and could be used for profit for the center. This process set the course back; however, the course materials were all given to RETAIN and have been created in

Moodle. To avoid a repeat of this event, a contract was written and signed by the course developer. This contract was used for all center consultants.

CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY ('11-12)

Vision and Core Efforts

The Center of Excellence for English Language Learners at Claflin University is designed to provide inservice educators with the skills to meet the needs of student's. The Center of Excellence for English Language Learners (ELL) at Claflin University is designed to provide inservice educators with the skills to meet the needs of students who are learning English as a second language. A central aim of the Center is to support teachers with instructional techniques and strategies to support their students and improve their outcomes.

The goals of the project were:

1. Develop an exemplary teacher training model that is collaborative, field-based, and uses proven strategies to prepare teacher professionals for effective teaching to improve instruction and achievements for K-12 ELLs;
2. Develop an influential constituency and leadership role for the ELL Center that is composed of stakeholders to work with the Center over the period of funding and beyond to support the academic success of the ELLs so that these K-12 students are college and career ready (CCR-CCSS components) in literacy no later than the end of high school.

The objectives were:

1. Participants will *learn* and *gain* the basics of L2 theories and teaching strategies through on-campus workshop training and field-based practices;
2. Participants will *have* the enhanced L2 theoretical knowledge, teaching strategies/skills, and the improved dispositions to work with K-12 ELLs;
3. K-12 ELLs will have the improved L2 proficiency to enhance their content knowledge so that they are college and career ready (CCR-CCSS components) in literacy, i.e., reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.

Population Served

The focus of the Center and the professional development it provides are essential in supporting teachers to meet the complex needs of ELLs. One-of-six students in U.S. (public) schools speak a language other than English (Howard, 2010; Milner, 2010). Between 1991-2000, 82% of documented immigrants came from nations in Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa. Currently, most immigrants who come to the U.S. are from nations in Asia and Latin America. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014):

The percentage of public school students in the United States who were English language learners was higher in school year 2011–12 (9.1 percent, or an estimated 4.4 million students) than in 2002–03 (8.7 percent, or an estimated 4.1 million students). In contrast, during the latter part of this period, between 2009–10 and 2011–12, the overall percentage of ELL

students remained about the same (9.1 percent or an estimated 4.4 million students). <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=96>

South Carolina has the highest increase of the ELL school population in the nation. From 1995 to 2005, the national increase of the ELL population was 105 percent. However, in South Carolina, the increase of the ELL school population was 714% (NCELA, 2010). The opportunities for in-service and pre-service teachers to be engaged in ELL professional training are especially limited. The increase in ELLs in South Carolina between 1997-1998 and 2007-2008 was 827.9% (Yin, 2011). Most educator preparation programs do not provide the type of training that a teacher would need to address the needs of ELLs. Given the growing number of ELLs in the state of South Carolina, the Center of Excellence for English Language Learners was developed to increase the academic performance of ELLs by providing training to a select group of inservice educators.

There are three participating school districts in Orangeburg: *Orangeburg District 3*, which has 4 Elementary Schools, 3 Middle Schools and 1 High School. *Orangeburg District 4*, which has 1 Primary School, 3 Elementary Schools, 3 Middle Schools, and 3 High Schools. *Orangeburg District 5*, which has 8 Elementary Schools, 4 Middle Schools, and 3 High Schools.

During the 2007-2008 school year in Orangeburg District 3, a total of 3,260 students were enrolled with 15 ELLs. In 2008-2009, 3,176 students were enrolled with a total of 38 ELLs. During the 2009-2010 academic year, a total of 3,131 students were enrolled with 19 ELLs enrolled.

In Orangeburg District 4, during the 2007-2008 academic year, 4,181 students were enrolled with 30 ELLs. In 2008-2009, 4,105 students were enrolled with a total of 49 ELLs, and during the 2009-2010 academic year, a total of 4,059 students were enrolled with 48 ELLs.

During the 2007-2008 academic year in Orangeburg District 5, 710 students were enrolled with 22 ELLs. In 2008-2009, a total of 7,059 students were enrolled with 58 ELLs. During the 2009-1010 academic year, 6,943 students were enrolled with 66 ELLs.

Accomplishments

The external evaluator for the Center found that the professional development opportunities afforded educators in the Orangeburg, South Carolina area meaningful opportunities to deepen their understanding, enhance and deepen their knowledge, and sharpening their instructional practices with ELLs. Especially noted were the innovative and engaging presentations of the workshop presenters, which provided models for educators to enact in their own classroom. According to feedback from participants, the workshop presenters for these sessions were very knowledgeable, engaging, and provided the type of learning environment where teachers were able to develop, grow, and improve. It is important to note that the Center of Excellence for English Language Learners has been recognized with two national awards for outstanding contributions to preparing and developing educators to meet the needs of ELLs. The Center received the National Association for Multicultural Education Program (NAME) Award—Rose Duhon-Sells Multicultural Program award at the NAME conference in Tucson, Arizona in 2014. In addition, the Center of Excellence for English Language Learners received the SRATE

Innovative Teacher Education Award from the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE), the largest ATE regional organization with 16 southeastern states.

Overall, the training workshops impacted a total of 249 teachers. In addition, feedback from participants attending the workshops was extremely positive. The combined feedback from 180 participants for the trainings in January and February demonstrated very positive responses overall. The combined feedback from 69 participants for the summer trainings demonstrated very positive responses overall. The qualitative feedback also provided positive feedback in terms of the educators' learning and development as well as their feedback on particular presenters. However, the vast majority of feedback focused on the helpfulness of the presentation and appreciated the activities and resources provided. Several participants stressed that they would be able to utilize the many resources offered them in their own classrooms

Phase I of the project involved inservice teachers participating in professional development training focused on understanding issues associated with working with ELLs. Forty-eight (48) teachers in the targeted districts participated in a series of workshops focused on understanding the educational needs of ELLs, L2 theoretical concepts, and working with ELLs in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) areas.

At the end of Phase I, the project provided 40 hours of L2 acquisition training and teaching strategies for ELLs to a total of 48 educators who had no or very little prior training working with ELLs. The initial phase of this project provided educators with contemporary training on working with ELLs. Perception data were collected from participants regarding

information acquired from the workshop. Data from program participants indicated that participants felt that the information presented was informative and that they would use the teaching strategies in their classrooms. Participants were also administered a pre/post test to determine the extent to which they acquired the knowledge necessary to work with ELLs. Based on the final scores, participants increased their knowledge of L2 acquisition and teaching strategies related to ELLs. After participating in training 98% of the participants increased their understanding of L2 theories and teaching strategies based on the pre-test and post-test that were administered.

During Phase II between thirty-seven (37) and forty-one (41) teachers in the targeted districts participated in a series of workshops focused on understanding the educational needs of ELLs, L2 theoretical concepts, and working with ELLs in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) areas. Participants participated in on-going workshops during the fall of 2012 and spring of 2013 and 3 workshops were held during the summer of 2013.

The ELL Center at Claflin University also receives funding from U.S. Department of Education. Based on the approved proposal, the ELL Center is to prepare teachers to work effectively with the ELL students in these four target school districts: OCSD 3, OCSD 5, Bamberg Two and Calhoun County District. However, the ELL Center is planning to expand the project beyond the current school districts. For example, we are planning to host the ELL Center Summer in June 2016. This will allow the statewide teachers to have the opportunity to receive the ELL professional training so that they can work effectively the statewide ELL students and prepare these K-12 students to meet the current South Carolina State Standards and to graduate and become productive citizens.

According to the annual reports and external evaluations the ELL Center project produced a positive impact on K-12 ELL students and their learning outcomes as measured by pre- and post- assessment data. The number of the ELL students served by the program in four target school districts in Year 4 (2014-2015) is 375. Service was provided by the pre-service and in-service teacher participants. We use the LEARNS assessment, the standardized assessment instrument, to measure ELL learning outcomes in various language content areas (i.e., listening, reading, and writing), the ELLs served in Year 4 have shown an average increase in these three language content areas over the project period by the end of the fall 2014 with the continued LEARNS assessment data to be added in May at the end of the spring 2015. Specifically, the total increase in the three language areas was 34.9 percent with listening increased by 47.9 percent, reading increased by 30.8 percent and writing skills increased by 26.1 percent as resulted from the LEARNS pre- and post- test scores. The ELL learning improvement is also demonstrated through the ELL writing sample works collected in the appendixes included in the teacher reflections from both pre- and in-service teacher participants. The standard bio writing is required for all ELLs at the beginning of the service and end of the service so that the data is comparable. From this assessment data, the ELL writing works were compared from their writing sample from the beginning of the service to the end of the service. This data also indicates that the ELLs have better writing skills and they can also write and express better in English with more fluency and less grammatical errors than their initial writing samples.

Challenges to Implementation

At the completion of Phase I, it was recommended the project give special attention to (1) the extent to which teachers incorporate learned strategies into their instruction, and (2) the extent to which strategies improve learning for ELLs in participants' classrooms.

At the completion of Phase II it was recommended special attention be given to (1) data from teachers on ELLs in their class, and (2) the extent to which the applied strategies can be linked to improved learning outcomes for ELL students in participants' classrooms.

Sustainability is a challenge as access to K12 and higher education funding continues to force institutions to make difficult decisions regarding support or initiatives they value. The Center is valued and experienced a high level of success in meeting its goals and meeting the needs of learners in South Carolina. However, at this time it is unclear how the Center could be sustained absent continuous external funding.

THE CITADEL ('12-13)

Vision and Core Efforts

The Center experienced turnover at the director's early in the funding cycle. However, the position has stabilized in Year 3. Under new leadership the Center transformed from a wide variety of initiatives to a focused effort – one where it would make a significant contribution to the state. The following goals and objectives reflect the current direction of the Center.

Goal: Place content, career and pedagogical experts (STEM Ambassadors) in classrooms across the Lowcountry.

Objectives:

- Develop and deliver a year-long professional development program for middle and high school teachers of S.T.E.M. disciplines that is comprised of online and in-person modules that focus on interdisciplinary S.T.E.M. content and pedagogy with a concentration on college and career readiness
- Develop and deliver a year-long professional development program for middle and high school teachers of S.T.E.M. disciplines that builds knowledge and skills in utilizing technology to create and deliver S.T.E.M. content for their classroom
- Develop and deliver a year-long professional development program for middle and high school teachers of S.T.E.M. disciplines that provides training in successful leadership models that integrate S.T.E.M. into educational endeavors

Goal: Build and expand upon existing relationships with Lowcountry school districts to serve as a resource for S.T.E.M. education.

Objectives:

- Facilitate formation and implementation of S.T.E.M. Ambassador teams to serve as future S.T.E.M. mentors and leaders in their home schools/districts
- Establish an annual *Best practices in Interdisciplinary S.T.E.M. Education Conference* with peer reviewed open source published proceedings

Population Served

Last Name	Content Area	School
Batkins	Science and Technology	St. George MS
Bordieanu	Mathematics	Colleton Co. HS
Bordieanu	Mathematics	Colleton Co. HS
Dortch	Science	Hardeeville-Ridgeland MS
Eugene	Science	Colleton Co. MS
Francis	Mathematics	Whale Branch Early College
Howard	Mathematics	St. George MS
Inabinett	Special Needs	St. George MS
Mambou	Mathematics	Colleton Co. HS
Millen	Special Needs	Colleton Co. MS
Mitchell	Science	St. George MS
Paul	Special Needs	Colleton Co. HS
Schulze	Technology	Battery Creek HS
Simmons-Hill	Science	Whale Branch Early College
Tra	Science, Math and Technology	St. George MS
Vaught	Technology	Whale Branch Early College

Accomplishments

Thus far, a significant accomplishment of the Center is the STEM Ambassadors program. STEM Ambassadors is a program developed by The Citadel's STEM Center for Excellence that ultimately seeks to place content, career, and pedagogical-experts, "STEM Ambassadors", in classrooms across the Lowcountry and beyond. The STEM

Center developed a set of Objectives which “will directly impact teachers and students from Beaufort, Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester 4 and Jasper counties. STEM Ambassadors will be agents of change in the development of STEM skills necessary for success in college and in the workforce. Through the efforts of the STEM Center, an exponential number of teachers will improve their STEM skills and their ability to teach STEM concepts to diverse populations. By involving higher education, the STEM industry, and district curriculum leads in the development and delivery of professional development, teachers will have the skills to make their traditional STEM content relevant and engaging and will have new resources that will enable them to teach in innovative and exciting ways. Additionally, teachers of non-STEM subjects will learn ways to bring STEM content and skills into their classrooms while meeting state standards.”

Role of the STEM Ambassador:

- Advocate for Students
 - Collaborate with educators to identify student’s understanding/misconceptions about STEM education and careers.
 - Create an environment in which all students can focus on their strengths and interests.
 - Ensure inclusion of students with disabilities in all STEM related activities and projects.
- Facilitator of Learning
 - Collaborate with other educators and share STEM-related resources.

- Recommend more problem solving and projects based learning and evaluations.
- Create website via googlesites.com and provide student/parent access.
- Encourage students to utilize various technology resources such as google docs, etc.
- Decision Maker
 - Use engineering process approach when team/departmental planning.
 - Encourage higher order thinking and problem solving skills with lessons.
 - Emphasize projects based learning
 - Highlight extensive use of media by sharing knowledge of resources.
- Determiner of Classroom Climate
 - Assist in developing classroom rules
 - Encourage positive teacher-teacher and student-teacher interaction
 - Promote interactive/safe environment
- Reflective Practitioner
 - Frequently examine impact of role in creating a successful STEM program

There are many other notable accomplishments made by the Center including the following:

- The Kickoff event was very successful in introducing the teachers to the Ambassadors program, and getting them started on PBL teaching and learning strategies.
- For the EDUC 546W-1 course, PBL, online discussions, and learning from other teachers during the meetings at the Citadel stand out as the highlights of the course.

Base on survey and interview results, for future planning purposes, teachers want more interaction with each other as they go through the app development process, and more time with the staff at the Citadel as well in face to face meetings.

- The app building process throughout the year was an excellent way of introducing Ambassador teachers to PBL, while at the same time also involving students in many cases in the app building process.
- Teachers were provided with a wealth of college-level content in biology, physics, chemistry, math (including mathematical modeling), statistics, computer science (including simple programming using Raspberry Pi) and engineering (building a trebuchet).
- Local businesses including Google and the Charleston Digital Corridor gave presentations that included opportunities for teachers to see useful programs for their own students, including the Code Camp offered by the Digital Corridor.
- Teachers learned about macro and micro plastics in the environment and were able to actually take part in transect sampling on Sullivan's Island. They were later able to analyze what they collected in the lab.
- Teachers were given a Dell Venue 7 Android Tablet and were given pedagogical tips on successfully engaging their students using Apps, and learned how to make an App that could be used in their classrooms.

Challenges to Implementation

The challenges faced by the Center are typical of a complex initiative and consistent with the education sector broadly. According to annual reports and the external evaluation the

Center is making progress in addressing challenges and continues to make progress towards its goals and objectives. A few of the challenges it has faced are as follows:

- Leadership turnover early on hindered progress in the early stages.
- The Center faced another challenge common to education initiatives - too many goals and initiatives in the original proposal. In year three an effort to focus has resulted in immediate success.
- According to the external evaluator the content assessment aspect of the program for teachers and students should focus on using more consistent pre-post content instrument delivery and assessment reporting. They also recommended finding a mechanism for assessing the impact of this content delivery to the teachers on their students. Instruments need to be developed with the help of the teachers that can be delivered in their classrooms so that we can better assess the impact of this program on the population of students this program is most invested in connecting with.
- While observing the students as they worked on their LiveBinder assignment, the external evaluator realized the need for additional follow-up sessions when new content or a new technology skill is presented to the STEM Ambassadors. As the students worked through their assignment, they had questions and problems that were not addressed in the original instruction. At least one follow-up session would have been helpful.
- The external evaluator noted that an adjustment to the STEM teaching schedule might address teacher implementation concerns presented by the teachers. Instead of a quick review from the previous instructor, spending and in-depth

review on specific questions and concerns would address problems the teachers had during their implementation of the new technology concept or skill. Perhaps the teachers could send their questions to the instructor ahead of the review time. Participants would benefit from open discussions on new content and skills. Some teachers are hesitant to initiate questions and an open forum would allow increased participation. An individual on-line question and answer session would not allow for this open discussion.

- Technology implementation and support remains a challenge in many K12 schools. The external evaluator noted that since different technology is available and operational at each school, the teachers had difficulty using some of the materials and supplies and they suggested giving a survey of available technology for each school.

ANDERSON UNIVERSITY ('13-14)

Vision and Core Efforts

Anderson University was funded to establish the Center of Excellence in Mobile Learning. The topic of mobile learning is increasing in importance as more learners look to and expect to utilize a hand-held device to access information – and learn. The goals of the Center advance knowledge about teacher and learners' use of mobile learning in the classroom. They are as follows:

Goal 1 Develop and model a state-of-the-art teacher preparation program for other institutions of higher education for a) integrating mobile learning and mobile technologies

and b) increasing the number of teachers appropriately prepared to work effectively with students in low-performing schools and with diverse needs.

1. Effectively integrate and model the use of mobile and other classroom technologies in the teacher preparation program
2. Redesign several courses in Anderson University's teacher preparation program
3. Provide training, support, and professional development for faculty within and outside of the teacher education program

Goal 2 Design and implement innovative school-based projects to enhance student and teacher achievement at partner schools and districts.

1. Prepare teachers at partner schools to effectively integrate and model the use of mobile and other classroom technologies
2. Identify, provide, and prepare teachers to use innovative software to support learning
3. Provide observations, feedback, and consultations for teachers at partner schools for CML related activities/initiatives

Goal 3. Serve as a statewide leader for training and professional development for inservice teachers, teacher educators, and faculty, staff and administrators in higher education.

1. Provide workshops/seminars to other teacher educators, teacher practitioners, and administrators in higher education and K-12
2. Design and deliver a mobile learning conference

3. Disseminate experiences, results, and findings at state, regional, in national conferences, through refereed publications, and through the website. Targeted organizations for publications and presentations will be those such as AACE, AMLE, AERA, AECT, ISTE, and/or ELI. The project team will investigate the organizations; identify specific conferences and/or publishing opportunities. The goal is to submit at least two presentation opportunities and at least one manuscript for publication.

Goal 4 Promote and foster college readiness.

1. Provide and prepare practicing teachers with tools and strategies to promote critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity in their classrooms.

Population Served

CML has a strong partnership with Carver Middle School. In Year 1 the Center provided high-quality professional development and outreach. It supported the work of faculty and teachers to create resources and disseminated those resources through its website. Additionally, the CML delivered a one-day mobile learning conference in July 2014. Twenty-eight teachers representing 17 schools and five school districts attended the event. Based on the feedback received from the teacher participants, it was evident that the event was well received. Over 95% of attendees indicated that they would recommend attendance at future events like the mobile learning conference.

In Year 2, there were teachers engaging in survey data collection and participating in workshops. The teachers educate in six disciplines, represent a wide age range, and are veteran (6+ years) middle school (grades 6-8) teachers. Survey instruments were used

to collect data on several key points of teaching, teacher perceptions, and use of mobile learning technologies in the classroom.

CML Summer Institute 2 and Academic Year Workshops

- 25 participants
- 4 Day Summer Institute
- 7 Academic Year Meetings

Mobile Learning and Science Workshop

- 9 science teachers
- 2 administrators
- 2 Full day workshops

Mobile Learning Conference

- 40 attendees
- Full day event

Accomplishments

The CML is addressing a critical element for bringing innovation to K12 education by implementing efforts to modeling mobile technology use in teacher preparation. Faculty in the Anderson University (AU) College of Education (COE) are participating in and planning seminars and individual consultations. Thus far, there is evidence of multiple professional development experiences in which COE faculty redesign their courses to integrate mobile technologies and mobile learning principles.

A Summer Institute and the Academic Year Support Program were implemented to introduce the participating teachers to the TPACK framework, reform-based teaching strategies, college readiness strategies, and formative assessment practices. Teachers were provided with mobile technology training and strategies for integrating that technology into teaching in ways that improve student learning. An important outcome of the CML efforts were the class observations and personal consultations that provide individualized support, feedback, technical support, and ongoing professional learning. From this compendium of efforts, the teachers demonstrated competencies in designing lessons and activities that fully integrate mobile technologies.

Challenges Plans to Implementation

The evaluator continues to advise that the CML engage strategic planning processes to fully define the mission of a statewide center and establish a framework of principles that guide specific strategies and activities for the long term. Within the scope of this project the CML may consider fully developing one strand (or a very small subset) of these principled activities at a very thorough level (e.g., mobile learning technology for World Class Skills in grades 6-12). The broad framework would be utilized to define future funding pursuits and clearly define how this and other institutions can contribute to the Center's core mission, thus making it sustainable and a resource integral to mobile learning use through the state.

College continuation continues to challenge many of the South Carolina schools. The lessons and activities developed by the teachers participating in CML activities are attending to the learning needs of students. However, this is such a broad topic and

another large undertaking, the CML may consider supporting an effort to review the literature on college readiness, what's known to have a significant impact on students knowing about and electing to pursue a post-secondary learning opportunity. Then, it could establish a small and focused subset of activities (e.g., a workshop or small team of teachers) dedicated to fully developing a resource (e.g., lesson(s), learning activities, seminar for other teachers to be distributed through the Center) that would help promote students' continuing on to college. A large percentage of students don't even know college is an option. Therefore, even a module designed to provide basic information about how a student can access college (e.g., geared for students from underrepresented populations and underprivileged schools and neighborhoods) would be helpful.

FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY ('14-15)

Vision and Core Efforts

According to the original proposal and McREL external evaluation, Francis Marion University (FMU) was awarded funds from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education for development of the Center for Excellence in College and Career Readiness (CECCR). The Center's purpose "is to serve as a statewide professional development and resource center for P-20 educators in South Carolina" (SC CHE, 2014). The CECCR will

- Provide resources, programs, and support to existing P-20 initiatives;
- Develop new activities and materials in consultation with P-20 educators;

- Develop a research plan and conduct research to further understanding of how to best prepare South Carolina students for challenges after high school;
- Have a statewide focus from the outset for the continuation of the South Carolina Course Alignment Project (SCCAP) and statewide meetings with P-20 initiatives; and
- Create a directory of P-20 initiatives in South Carolina.

The FMU CECCR will partner with the North Eastern Strategic Alliance, a regional economic development organization, as well as the South Carolina Advanced Technological Education Center of Excellence at Florence-Darling Technical College. During Year 1, the FMU CECCR will have a concentrated focus on Florence School Districts One and Four. In subsequent years, the Center's work will expand to other districts.

Three goals will drive the FMU CECCR's work:

1. Serve as a state-of-the-art resource center for P-20 initiatives. Form relationships with existing P-20 initiatives in South Carolina to create a statewide definition of "college and career readiness."
2. Develop and implement best practices for promoting college and career readiness in the four key areas defined by the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC): (1) cognitive strategies, (2) content knowledge, (3) learning skills and techniques, and (4) transition knowledge and skills.

3. Contribute to the creation of a college and career readiness culture in the state of South Carolina.

The Center has also established multiple project objectives. They include:

1. Create a directory of P-20 initiatives in South Carolina.
2. Provide opportunities for leaders of P-20 initiatives to collaborate.
3. Coordinate and facilitate the work of P-20 initiatives.
4. Disseminate information on college and career readiness preparation to stakeholders (i.e., administrators, educators, parents, and students) throughout the state.
5. Develop a consensus definition of college and career readiness for South Carolina.
6. Provide opportunities for eighth-grade students to learn more about the strategies, content knowledge, learning skills, and transition knowledge and skills necessary for college success.
7. Compile and disseminate statewide assignments and activities in math, science, and English based on Conley's Four Keys to College and Career Readiness.
8. Provide detailed specification of the content and skills necessary for college and career readiness to both secondary and postsecondary faculty.
9. Provide high quality professional development for teachers and school districts.
10. Provide opportunities for interactions among high school and college faculty focused on issues related to college and career readiness.

11. Facilitate the continuation of cross-level class visits to educate high school students, college instructors, and high school teachers about the transition from high school to college.

Career preparedness has emerged as a priority for the state and the nation. Hence, funding a Center to focus on this topic was timely.

Population Served

The Center was established to serve as a statewide professional development network for P-20 teachers in South Carolina. The initial activities were targeted for the Florence County District One and Florence County District Four middle school and high school teachers.

- **Course Alignment Project.** 18 participants, including 2 superintendents, 1 board member, 5 guidance counselors, 3 principals, 1 principal, 1 Career and Technical Education/EEDA Coordinator, 1 director of secondary education, FMU Provost and President, CHE Program Manager, Executive Director of Pee Dee Education Center,
- **Activate Academy Recruitment.** 32 teachers: high school and college, 16 English, 6 Math, 10 Science
- **Readiness Consultant Course.** 13 Teachers: 3 middle school, 10 high school, 4 math, 3 English, 1 special education, 2 social studies, 1 student services, 1 business education, 1 science
- **Administration of CampusReady Survey.** Five high schools: West Florence HS, South Florence HS, Wilson HS, Timmonsville HS, and Lake City HS

Accomplishments

According to the external evaluation and reporting documents the Center as an early stage implementation is making progress towards its goals and objectives as defined in the original proposal:

- **Activate Academy Recruitment:** Solicit nominations for current 8th graders from Florence One and Florence Four guidance counselors for students who have the potential for or interest in college but have some risk factors that might make it difficult for them to realize that goal.
- **Readiness Consultant Course:** Weekly meetings of middle and high school teachers from Florence One and Florence Four to discuss readings (on mindset, college and career readiness, project-based learning) and to develop classroom activities and assignments that foster readiness.
- The Center held a meeting with teachers from all over the state and will be holding a conference for teachers and administrators from across the state as well. In April of this year, the Center Co-Directors will travel with Greg Hopper-Moore from EPIC, to a number of different sites in South Carolina to discuss readiness and to share the new Center of Excellence toolkit.
- Creating a database of assignments that encourage and/or support readiness. This will be done at the direction of CAP participants and in consultation with our content area teams which represent high schools, technical colleges, and four-year institutions across the state.

- During the summer of 2015, we will pursue the development of the online system for The Write Stuff. We will then seek to establish partnerships with schools in different areas of the state to pilot our portfolio program with 9th graders.
- Partnerships underway and in development:
 - **Center of Excellence for Mobile Learning:** The Director is helping with the incorporation and use of iPads in the Activate Academy. He will be attending the Academy for at least one day in June 2015.
 - **Honda Florence:** Will be giving a tour of their facilities for both the Readiness Consultants and the students in the Activate Academy.
 - **TransformSC:** The Director will be a keynote speaker at the CAP Conference in March.
 - **Educational Oversight Committee:** Executive Director Melanie presented to teachers at the fall CAP Meeting.
 - **Writing Improvement Network:** The Director is offering advice on the development of The Write Stuff portfolio program.
 - Throughout the summer, the Center plans to have meetings with SCCATE at Florence Darlington Technical College, Apprenticeship South Carolina, and the North Eastern Strategic Alliance to pursue potential partnerships and learn more about the needs of businesses in the area, especially in terms of how those needs map onto the soft skills articulated in the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.

Challenges to Implementation

According to the external evaluation and final reports filed with the Commission on Higher Education the Center appears to be facing typical challenges of a first year project. The following are a few excerpts from documents that were reviewed during the evaluation:

- “We found it necessary to spend more time on the Course Alignment Project than we had initially intended. Therefore, we shifted plans for a P-20 Conference to the Fall of 2015 and decided to focus on CAP by holding a CAP conference on “building partnerships” in March 2015. We also realized, before adopting the Write Stuff immediately, it was wise to work closely with the Content Team members and other stakeholders to craft a program. The Writing Improvement Network has given some good advice about that program; a small pilot is planned for the 2015-2016 academic year.”
- “We also hoped to be in the schools conducting “college nights” for students and parents; however, we have found that it might best to rely on the results of the Campus Ready survey and subsequent conversations with administrators and teachers when thinking about how to best serve the schools in Florence One and Florence Four. Campus Ready will help us to obtain baseline data for the high schools we are working with in our area.”
- “Due to various delays, we were not able to begin work with our research partner or external evaluator until more than five months into the project year. Now that the contracts have been completed, we should have little or no problem in this area in Year Two. We have already had significant buy-in on the part of higher education

faculty, and we expect that current participants will be actively involved in further recruitment efforts.”

It is clear the Center staff are working diligently to work through the challenges of an early stage Center.

Recommendations

The evidence of activities within close proximity to teachers and learners is in alignment with the original intent of Centers of Excellence Program. The Centers of Excellence Program is generating resources and contributing to the knowledge base across multiple significant educational priorities including: teacher induction and retention, English Language Learners, STEM, mobile learning, and college and career preparedness. Clearly, the decision making and request for proposal process are amplifying attention to these matters to the benefit of local K12 school districts, teachers, and their learners. The review and synthesis of documents, site visits, and interviews with Center staff and participants has revealed several themes that evolved into recommendations. Given the positive impact of the program it is highly recommended the initiative continue. The following recommendations are based on patterns that emerged during the analysis of information available. They are intended to be potential starting points for further inquiry that would inform future policy and processes as the program evolves.

Recommendation #1

Consider revising the request for proposal (RFP) so that it allows future Centers to focus on a narrow topic embedded within one of the expansive categories. Currently, the Centers are expected to design and deliver professional development for inservice and preservice teachers (two very large and very distinct populations), conduct research, have an impact on student achievement, and provide some level of focus on college and career preparedness. This is expecting too much of any Center and well beyond realistic expectations of an initiative at the current level of funding. But even more funding should

not bring forward an expectation of doing more across such vast categories – focus and depth would be a significant improvement and yield even more impact. The Centers are doing well to implement many activities across the broad categories. However, allowing them to focus and remain focused will increase the impact on a specific population (e.g., induction teachers in high poverty rural schools). It is recommended the RFP allow for focus on professional development OR research, inservice teachers OR preservice teachers OR learners – not all of them at once, it is in effect diluting the funding and attention – and eventually the impact.

Based on interviews with Center directors there may be a need for clarification about the intent and goal of research as it relates to student learning. The projects are not funded to conduct research on student learners – most are focused on and were funded for teacher professional development – however, there is an impression measures of student achievement and learner research are required. This may be remedied with some adjustments to language in the RFP.

Recommendation #2

Consider leaving a Center focused on its original goals and objectives, efforts, and population to be served. Adding-on a new effort such as student achievement or college and career readiness only dilutes attention from the initial intent of the Center and does not improve the impact of the Center. Furthermore, adding on initiatives during the subsequent years of funding for a Center increases the difficulty of scaling and sustaining the Center as it means doing more with the same level of funding. The RFP and selection process are effective in finding institutions to deliver efforts focused on prominent

challenges in education today, the Centers should be permitted to remain focused on that challenge.

Recommendation #3

Consider increasing efforts to systemically link the centers to prominent initiatives, people, and institutions in the state. Each of the Centers is focusing on a challenge so important to the state and the nation – simultaneously there are multiple organizations and agencies working on the same problem. In fact, some of *those* initiatives are also supported directly by the State of South Carolina. Hence, to help facilitate progress and achieve statewide scale (or even national scaling) the Centers need assistance and concerted efforts to help them gain access to, collaborate with, and engage in complementary work with these other initiatives. The Centers could play a more prominent role in informing policy and given more prominence to inform statewide decision making.

Recommendation #4

Consider delineating the role of the Centers as incubators of an idea for small initial investment – and then prepare to scale those product, processes, or policies as outcomes of the Center's efforts that clearly demonstrate impact. Highly successful centers could be given consideration for future funding that would permit an appropriate amount of time for statewide scaling such as an additional five years for a total ten-year commitment. Hence, consider the existing RFP process as incubation grants, to vet ideas for addressing significant challenges in education, and then fund those Centers and their products or services that show evidence of being scalable throughout the state. Furthermore, statewide scaling will require substantially more money, longer

commitment, and more integration with state institutions and agencies than is currently taking place. The National Science Foundation has a model that could be used – whereas five-year development projects may have an opportunity to pursue an additional five years of substantial more funding as a Center.

Recommendation #5

Consider transforming the professional development that is delivered by the Centers and advocate the Centers implement new learning models. The existing professional development efforts are clearly having a positive impact. However, requiring participants to attend on-site and in-person is not scalable (without an incredible amount of resources). Hence, the State and CHE may give consideration to funding a center to fully test and develop the idea of creating or adopting a new learning model that is known to have a positive impact on teachers and shows potential for scaling statewide. In any case, the heavy reliance on face to face professional development is no longer a cost-effective model nor is it the most effective model of adult learners. Clearly, there is evidence the Centers are enacting new learning models (e.g., mobile learning, online learning, project based learning). However, it is not pervasive or systematic in implementation across Centers. The Commission on Higher Education could encourage attention to this matter and require a cohesive approach – and funding a Center to focus on new learning models would serve a significant need to determine how professional development can be scaled to impact all teachers in the state. This recommendation should not be interpreted to mean all face to face and onsite learning be eliminated, this is still a valuable model. However, it is not the only way to deliver highly effective professional development and

could be transformed and offered through other learning environments (e.g., self-paced, online, hybrid).

Recommendation #6

Consider revising the funding model to focus on sustainability OR scaling. The current funding model requires the funding to decrease over time (to encourage sustainability) but this is direct contrast to scaling which needs more funding especially in the late stages of the project. One option to consider would be 5-year development grants with option to apply for another 5 years (10 total) for the most successful Center(s) to scale.

Recommendation #7

Consider implementing efforts to improve the depth of data collection for future evidence-informed policy making. Clearly, data is being collected by the Centers, however, a centralized common database of variables that are consistently collected across all Centers may be valuable in getting an understanding, for example, of the populations served, demographics of teacher participants, demographics of learners impacted, and evidence of impact on teaching and learning. Such an endeavor would require a systematic design process and be managed. Thus, it is acknowledged this would require the dedication of already scarce resources.

Recommendation #8

Consider increasing the allocation of resources to the centralized program management at CHE and thus increase access to technical assistance for center directors and staff. This would permit for more center director development opportunities: how to sustain a

center, expectations of evaluations, project management, data collection and management, and host meeting between Centers to increase sharing of information.