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Grants awarded to SC school districts focused on improving four-year-old kindergarten quality

Columbia - Grants for the South Carolina Community Block Grant for Education Pilot Program were awarded to six new initiatives throughout the state, with fifteen participating districts and additional community partners. This one-year block grant program is a matching grants initiative designed to encourage sustainable partnerships among South Carolina school districts and community groups. The General Assembly and Governor approved the grant in the state budget to improve children's readiness for kindergarten by enhancing the quality of state-funded full day 4K programs and instruction." Over the past two years, applicants have requested \$6.4 million in funding with \$2 million allocated during fiscal year 2015-16 and \$1 million allocated during fiscal year 2016-17.

2016-17 awardees and their grants were as follows:

- Richland School District 1 \$118,000
- Lexington School District 4 \$201,000
- Lancaster County School District \$164,000
- York One \$84,000
- Pee Dee Consortia of school districts including Florence 1, Florence 2, Florence 3, Florence 4, Dillon 3, Dillon 4, Marion, and Pee Dee Head Start \$250,000
- Consortia of Spartanburg School Districts 3 and 7 \$142,000
- Cherokee School District \$10,000
- Chesterfield School District \$10,000.

The Pee Dee Consortia is a regional initiative that has grown from the partnership of Florence 1 and Florence 2 to include five additional Pee Dee districts and Head Start.

While the awarded projects' strategies and approaches vary, all focus on enhancing children's learning and the quality of the interactions between teachers and their students. Young children's relationships with teachers predict future emotional, social and academic success. In studies of teacher-child relationships, children who had a secure relationship with their preschool and kindergarten teachers demonstrated good peer interactions and positive relationships with teachers and peers in elementary school.

"The Education Block Grant program encourages and incentivizes evidence-based early childhood strategies that enhance the quality of 4K programs and instruction," said Dr. Tammy Pawloski, chair of the grants committee that decided final grant awards. "The demand is evident in the \$6.4 million districts have requested over the past two years. We are grateful the General Assembly has allocated funding, and it's critical we continue to encourage innovation that can impact young children's learning and kindergarten readiness." The grants committee is an independent group of educators and business leaders who review and make the final decision.

Per Proviso 1.70, the Executive Director of the Education Oversight Committee is charged with reviewing and reporting on the results of the funded programs. Upon the completion of an evaluation, the Education Oversight Committee will disseminate a report with project outcomes, lessons learned and best practices in 2017.

The SC Education Oversight Committee is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected leaders. Created in 1998, the committee is dedicated to reporting facts, measuring change, and promoting progress within South Carolina's education system.

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