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College of Education Shares in Riley Award of Excellence with Chester School

Winthrop University

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College of Education Shares in Riley Award of Excellence with Chester School

Quick Facts

- The award, which highlights innovative educational initiatives throughout the state, was presented to Chester Park Elementary School of Inquiry for its project-based learning initiative.
- Despite being a Title I school, the Chester school's first and second grade classrooms saw significant growth in student learning averaging 84 percent.



Sue Spencer

ROCK HILL, S.C.— Winthrop University's successful partnership with a Chester County school was recognized recently with the [2013 Dick and Tunky Riley WhatWorksSCSM Award for Excellence](#).

The award, which highlights innovative educational initiatives throughout the state, was presented to [Chester Park Elementary School of Inquiry](#) for its project-based learning initiative. It was presented during the [WhatWorksSC awards luncheon](#) held Oct. 16 in Columbia in conjunction with the [South Carolina Future Minds' annual Public Education Partners meeting](#).

The Chester school initiative was selected from among two other finalists which serve students statewide: [Parents as Teachers SC](#), [South Carolina First Steps](#); and [Teacher Cadet Program, Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement \(CERRA\)](#), which is housed at Winthrop.

The Chester school, which is a professional development school in partnership with Winthrop, is a **Title I school** where 90 percent of the 435 students receive free or reduced lunch. Despite that, in the first year of its project-based learning initiative, the school's first and second grade classrooms saw significant growth in student learning averaging 84 percent.

[Sue Spencer](#), associate professor in Winthrop's [Department of Counseling, Leadership and Educational Studies](#), said she has worked with Chester teachers over the past four years to develop a school culture in which students learn content by working in collaborative teams to solve real-world problems.

"I work collaboratively with the teachers to develop and implement at least one project-based learning unit each semester," she said. "Each teacher designs a **WebQuest** that he or she uses to teach the students how to conduct research online, compile information, work in collaborative teams and think critically. Students then develop presentations that they and teachers present at our annual Friends and Family Math and Science Fair."

For example, kindergarten teachers worked with students to develop a landscaping plan for the new **Chester District Education office**. As teachers taught students learned new math, science, and reading content within the context of how they would solve this particular problem.

"These types of projects show children how they might one day use the academic skills they are acquiring to become, in this case, a landscaper or horticulturist," **Spencer** added. "This approach is very different from learning the content for the sole purpose of doing well on a test. It teaches them how to use what they are learning to become productive citizens."

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Candidates for the award were selected from more than 80 entries in the [Riley Institute's WhatWorksSC clearinghouse](#). The **WhatWorksSC clearinghouse** showcases initiatives that explore and exemplify key strategies for improving South Carolina's public schools.

The award was presented in conjunction with the [South Carolina Chamber of Commerce](#), and was sponsored by [Childs and Halligan, P.A.](#), the [South Carolina Education Oversight Committee](#), the [South Carolina School Boards Association](#), the [South Carolina State Board of Education](#), and the [South Carolina Association of School Administrators](#).

For more information about the Chester school initiative, contact **Spencer** in the [Richard W. Riley College of Education](#) at 803/323-2151 or e-mail her at spencers@winthrop.edu.

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