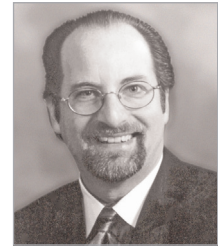


# Giving our students the tools to prosper

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The no-holds barred documentary that rocked South Carolina in 2006, *Corridor of Shame*, was a chilling representation of the failure to adequately prepare our children for success. The documentary went where no one dared—the ugly truth of inequity found in South Carolina’s rural public schools clustered along Interstate 95.

While the documentary has proven to be a necessary catalyst for change as well as a popular stumping destination for national politicians, the time has come to shift our focus away from despair and negativity to a positive message that begets positive action.

The answer is to replace the *Corridor of Shame* with the *Hallway of Hope*, thereby establishing a new culture of hope for South Carolina’s students and teachers.

At the South Carolina Council on Economic Education (SCCEE), we have a vision for the *Hallway of Hope*: clean, safe, beautiful schools; inspired and inspiring teachers; and thriving, achieving children.

While it may sound like sugarplums and lollipops, it’s a vision that is attainable. Why do I maintain such an optimistic view? It’s because state lawmakers, the business community, and educational leaders have already created an aggressive framework to make it happen. Let me explain.

The driver of hope in South Carolina’s schools is economic literacy. This may seem like an unlikely fuel for excellence. The reality is that economics is the very basis of our democracy. The spirit of entrepreneurship drives our success in a global economy. Moreover, children practice economics in their everyday lives. Those who understand and master the concepts of economics have the very tools they need to succeed in life.

Recognizing this, the South Carolina Department of Education has made economics part of the social studies academic standards at every grade level beginning in kindergarten. Students in grades three through eight are tested on economics in the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT). High school students must pass an economic course in order to graduate. Recent legislation calls for personal finance to be taught in every grade level, and in 2005, the Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA) was passed. Dubbed “*Personal Pathways for Success*,” it provides students with the resources they need to establish an education plan that supports their career goals.

The Council on Economic Education (SCCEE) is one organization that is using this framework to replace shame with hope in our

schools including schools in the *Hallway of Hope*. Specifically, SCCEE, with funding from the General Assembly and private support from corporate donors, develops curriculums for teachers that engage children in economics. Our programs are provided free of charge to all schools regardless of location or tax base. And hundreds of teachers are taking advantage of them because they’re fun, meaningful, and they get kids excited.

One of SCCEE’s most popular programs is the *South Carolina Stock Market Game™*, sponsored by Merrill Lynch. Schools sponsor student teams that compete with other teams across the state to see who has the most profitable stock portfolio at the end of the school year. This past year the top team in the state, Cheraw Intermediate School, was from the *Hallway of Hope*. Who needs shame when you can win in the stock market, albeit in a game?

This year, SCCEE has a powerful new partner in the *Stock Market Game*, the *South Carolina Conference of Black Mayors*. More than ten African-American mayors, most of whose towns dot the I-95 corridor, are joining us in sponsoring the *Mayor’s Blue Chip Investors Program*. Underwritten with a grant from the State Budget and Control Board, the program rewards local winners of the *Stock Market Game* with a celebratory dinner hosted by their mayor.

Leaders like Manning Mayor Kevin Johnson, who’s also president of the *Conference of Black Mayors*, can’t wait to get started using this as a carrot to motivate students in Clarendon County. “A little thing like dinner with the mayor can change a life,” he says. I couldn’t agree more.

I’ve witnessed other hopeful signs in schools along I-95. Last year’s winner of our *Young Entrepreneur Award* is from Hampton County. One of the best economics teachers in the state is Brandi Cook of Marion County High School. Our biggest poster child for hope is Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, a graduate of Dillon High School, firmly situated on the I-95 corridor. There is no shame here, only people who have found opportunities to shine in and beyond South Carolina’s schools.

So what is it going to be, *Corridor of Shame* or *Hallway of Hope*? I think our leaders, our teachers and our children have already voted. And it’s all about hope.

*Ms. Meyers is the president of the SC Council on Economic Education. Mr. Baker is chairman of the Council and managing partner of Baker & Baker, a real estate development company in Columbia.*