Why we took on this challenge

South Carolina’s children face some of the steepest social and economic challenges in our country. We at the University of South Carolina have a responsibility to help. A year ago, ALL4SC launched our effort to transform PK-20 education in South Carolina over the next decade. We are marshalling the resources of the entire university to this task.

We began in Fall 2019 knowing this wouldn’t be easy. And then it got harder. The past year brought unexpected challenges from a global pandemic to unprecedented calls for social change and new education delivery systems. We watched our first local school district partner, Fairfield County, adapt and we learned again that with crisis can come opportunity.

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Across the nation there are a few research universities that focus on community schools and PK-20 systems of education. Please join us as we accelerate our work, making good on our vow to think big, start small and learn fast.

An enduring question in South Carolina centers on our people. Why does the problem persist that some in our state are locked in place – prevented from getting smarter, healthier or wealthier?

Over the last several decades, U.S. PK-12 education policies have focused primarily on accelerating academic achievement by tightening curriculum, deploying new technologies, investing in professional development programs, and intensifying teacher evaluation. However, across the nation, student test score results continue to lag. Average achievement scores in 2019 were lower than in 2017 in 17 states. South Carolina is one of those states where progress has stalled.

Researchers have concluded that out-of-school factors account for the vast majority of the differences in student achievement. Increasingly so, school reformers have come to recognize that their PK-12 reforms have been “too narrow.” Now is the time for transformation, not just reform.

Our next steps

- Developing a community-based school model that fully addresses the health disparities among young people and the negative impact on their academic achievement, social-emotional and physical wellbeing.
- Accelerating comprehensive mentoring and career development opportunities for all students in the school district.
- Expanding school innovations in student-centered and project-based learning opportunities for emerging careers in STEM/STEAM and the Future of Work.

As we begin Year 2, in the midst of a pandemic, we plan to support the immediate needs of Fairfield, and begin taking to strategic actions that address the three priorities: piloting an integrated student data system, supporting social-emotional learning, expanding mentoring and afterschool programs, developing innovations in student-centered learning, using technologies to assist remote teaching and learning.

We will finalize partnerships with local and national organizations to bring a seamless education system of Zero to Workforce to South Carolina. We continue to look to our faculty partners across the university for your expertise and guidance as we grow in size and impact.

For more information
www.ALL4SC.org

Jon Pedersen
UofSC, College of Education Dean

Barnett Berry
UofSC College of Education

July 2020
We have worked directly with Fairfield County Schools and the community. We've talked to almost every teacher in the district's nine schools, students at all levels and local leaders. We've heard their stories. We are working closely with the community leaders of Fairfield Forward, representing over 25 organizations that serve children in one way or another, including the creation of a Children's Cabinet to develop a cross-sector and coherent strategy to serve the whole child.

The Fairfield County School District is an innovator in the community. One of its most effective programs is a STEM 2+2 curriculum with Midlands Tech. The program allows students, beginning in the 7th grade, to take more rigorous coursework and electives that can lead to a two-year associate's degree along with their high school diploma.

Fairfield students we talked to believe that UofSC undergraduate mentors are key to helping their peers understand the opportunity and reward of fields like engineering or medicine, learned via internships and opportunities.

Fairfield educators are looking forward to more innovative approaches to prepare students with world-class skills. Necessity is pushing the educational system to abandon its focus on year-end testing as a primary measure of educational success. Educators are eager to take advantage of this unexpected flexibility. Dozens of UofSC faculty and staff are assisting. ALL4SC can bring more of its expertise together to serve the immediate needs of the district and the state.

We have more to do in Fairfield and even more as we expand our reach to additional districts.