Why we took on this challenge

An involved, engaged group from the University of South Carolina is seeking to answer this question. More importantly, we want to find the reasons for these problems and support local communities in solving them. The Accelerator for Learning and Leadership for South Carolina – ALL4SC is bringing the expertise and resources of our state’s flagship university to bear in an unprecedented way to reinvent education in our state for the betterment of all South Carolinians.

Over the past year, ALL4SC began our work in Fairfield County schools. The situation in Fairfield mirrors that of other Palmetto State communities. Poverty. Teacher turnover. Hunger. Geographic isolation. Limited horizons when opportunity is literally just down the road.

Nationwide, reforms have been tried. Often, they're top down. They're narrow. They haven't drawn on the experience, ingenuity and insight of classroom teachers as well as community leaders, parents, and students. They don’t address the needs of a whole person from birth to career.

ALL4SC proposes a comprehensive, whole child, whole community system of education to leverage the resources and talent of the entire university for the betterment of all South Carolinians. Research shows this approach works. Students in disadvantaged school communities achieve at higher levels when there’s community support and when teachers are allowed to integrate effective social and emotional practices in their rigorous academic instruction. ALL4SC can be catalyst for this type of change in Fairfield County and beyond.

Our next steps

As we launch Year 2, ALL4SC will expand our influence in Fairfield and beyond. Our Fairfield partners identified three key priorities to address in our initial work together:

- To develop a community school model that fully addresses the health disparities among young people and the negative impact on their academic achievement, social-emotional and physical well-being.
- To accelerate comprehensive mentoring and career development opportunities for all students of the district.
- To expand 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:

We will finalize partnerships with local and national organizations to bring a seamless education system of Zero to Workforce to South Carolina.

We’ve learned a lot in our small and unexpectedly challenging start. We ask for your continued support as we move from thinking big into achieving our full vision of learning and leadership for all of South Carolina.

For more information

www.ALL4SC.org

Jon Pedersen
UofSC, College of Education Dean

Barnett Berry
UofSC College of Education

Thinking big

Starting small

Learning fast

Let me introduce you to S.C.’s education problem

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.
ALL4SC is showing what effective, community-based reform looks like and can accomplish. That’s true even as we adjust in these most unusual times.

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged our public schools on an unprecedented level. The result shows how classroom teachers and communities can innovate and lead when given a chance to do so. Teachers around the state, without notice and often without much support, literally overnight reinvented our educational delivery system. Teachers in Fairfield tell us this allowed them to focus on student-centered learning. The constraints of year-end standardized tests were gone. Parents – even peers – were engaged to support students. There are gaps, of course, from lack of broadband service to lack of reliable parent contact information. But they made progress anyway.

Prior to the crisis, we learned about the strengths of some community offerings in Fairfield, the challenges of expanding them and the possible payoff when we do. Students excel in the arts, athletics, Junior ROTC, culinary arts and digital technology. Engineering students at the Fairfield Career & Technology Center and STEAM students at the Fairfield Magnet School for Math and Science see improved outcomes. The Fairfield Promise allows high school graduates the chance to attend Midlands Technical College for free through a scholarship program funded by the county. Dual credit courses are increasingly available for high school students to earn college hours. Students who have benefited from these programs believe professional and collegiate mentors could help spread interest to others. Those same students would like to see all of their peers in Fairfield realize their full potential.

One high school student observed, “Many do not always think they are smart enough, but they are.”

ALL4SC is showing what effective, community-based reform looks like and can accomplish. That’s true even as we adjust in these most unusual times.

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged our public schools on an unprecedented level. The result shows how classroom teachers and communities can innovate and lead when given a chance to do so. Teachers around the state, without notice and often without much support, literally overnight reinvented our educational delivery system. Teachers in Fairfield tell us this allowed them to focus on student-centered learning. The constraints of year-end standardized tests were gone. Parents – even peers – were engaged to support students. There are gaps, of course, from lack of broadband service to lack of reliable parent contact information. But they made progress anyway.

Prior to the crisis, we learned about the strengths of some community offerings in Fairfield, the challenges of expanding them and the possible payoff when we do. Students excel in the arts, athletics, Junior ROTC, culinary arts and digital technology. Engineering students at the Fairfield Career & Technology Center and STEAM students at the Fairfield Magnet School for Math and Science see improved outcomes. The Fairfield Promise allows high school graduates the chance to attend Midlands Technical College for free through a scholarship program funded by the county. Dual credit courses are increasingly available for high school students to earn college hours. Students who have benefited from these programs believe professional and collegiate mentors could help spread interest to others. Those same students would like to see all of their peers in Fairfield realize their full potential.