

# A Can-Do Attitude

Even when faced with budget cuts, Kershaw County School District continues to provide a high return on investments in students.



**K**ershaw County School District is not letting a decrease in state funding prevent it from providing the best education possible to its more than 10,000 students. In the last three years, the Camden, S.C.-based district has needed to reduce its operating budget by 17 percent.

While this meant making the difficult decision to outsource its custodial services and reducing expenses, it also brought out the can-do spirit of the district's staff, teachers and surrounding community. Kershaw County School District includes 11 elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, a career center and an alternative school.

"When we had to cut the budget everyone said, 'We can work through this,' and I think we have," Superintendent Frank Morgan says. "Everyone knows they need to work a little harder and pitch in a little more."

## Outperforming resources

The efforts of teachers, administrators and volunteers to offer quality education despite the budget reductions was noted in a 2011 productivity study by the Center for American Progress. The survey, which measures a district's academic achievement relative to its spending per student, rated the district as providing a "high return on its investment."

Kershaw County School District was the only school in its region and one of only 12 in South Carolina to earn the accolade. The center averaged the percent of students scoring as proficient or above on state reading and math assignments in fourth and eighth grades and high school. The district's \$6,885 per pupil spending rate is among the lower third in the state.

"We are outperforming our resources," Morgan says. "If you look at the districts that spend significantly more than us per student, they aren't outperforming us. The taxpayer here is getting a tremendous value for each dollar spent."

The district continues to look at ways to streamline its operations while addressing student achievement. One of Kershaw County Schools' biggest challenges is closing the achieve-



ment gap between disabled and non-disabled students, particularly those considered learning disabled and Other Health Impaired (OHI). "We're struggling to keep instructional services as fine as they can be despite our funding," he adds.

## A community effort

Kershaw's budget crunch has fueled one major positive – volunteerism. "When we started making cuts, teachers, staff and administrators knew we would have to step up, and the community did, too," Morgan says. The district estimates that the monetary value of business and PTA contributions as well as volunteer hours was \$1.7 million for the 2010-11 school year. One program is the administration of a \$5.7 million, four-year federal Safe Schools Healthy Students grant received in 2009. The grant is the result of a community effort launched after a local teen was killed in a gang-related shooting in December 2007, Morgan says.

The grant provides funding for academic and truancy intervention services, support specialists, digital security cameras on school buses, an anti-drug curriculum, afterschool programs, two school resource officers, mental health counseling and a life skills and job support program for at-risk youth. "We involved the community in delivering grant services vs. setting up a school district bureaucracy to administer programs," he adds, noting that the district partners with existing community-based groups. Local organizations and government entities including the local branch of the Boys and Girls Club of America and Kershaw County Sheriff's Department also volunteer their members' time.

Other focus areas for the district include upgrading technology and developing a facilities plan. The district completed \$102 million in bond-funded construction projects, including building two new middle schools, a new elementary school and performing HVAC and roofing upgrades to several other schools. The elementary school – Jackson School – is the first LEED Gold K-12-certified school building in the state, Morgan says.

Despite funding challenges, Kershaw County Schools has maintained a laptop computer-per-student initiative in its high schools by funding the hardware through its capital fund. With wireless devices such as iPads and tablets beginning to take the forefront, the district is looking to replace the existing laptops, Morgan says.

Computers and other technology are used in instruction to engage students and help them keep up in class. Online education also is used to allow students to take courses they may not be able to fit into their schedule. The district uses the PowerSchool Parent Portal to allow parents to keep up with their students' progress in real time.

**Important connections**

Since arriving in the district in 2007, Morgan has worked to build a culture that promotes student achievement through connecting teachers, administrators and staff with students,

parents and the surrounding community. A big part of this is maintaining an open-door policy.

"I try to be visible, accessible and well-engaged," Morgan says. "I like to let people do what is within their responsibility, but am also around as a resource and to observe."

Morgan also believes in providing a supportive work environment for teachers and staff, which includes promoting from within and providing development and training opportunities.


Key partnerships include a dual enrollment arrangement with Central Carolina Technical College that allows high school students to take college-level courses for credit and provides two years of free tuition for high school freshmen who maintain good grades, graduate on time and pass a college entrance exam. In exchange, the college uses school facilities to offer both adult and high school night courses.


Other community outreach efforts include using social media such as Facebook as well as making podcasts available online to district residents unable to attend meetings. Morgan also posts a daily blog to keep persons abreast of school district activities and achievements. "We feel it's very important to do outreach to our community not just to parents, but to people who don't have children attending the district," Morgan says. ♦

– Jim Harris

**Canon**
**LANIER**
**LEXMARK**
**Square9**
**muratec**
**NEM CORPORATION**

**STATE CONTRACT APPROVED**  
Contract # 07-S7412-A13204

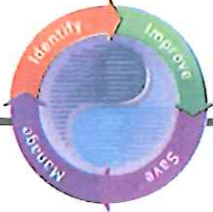





**DIGITAL  
OFFICE SOLUTIONS**


**www.digitalsc.com**

**800-852-8605**




**2011 BEST OF WEST COLUMBIA AWARD**





**MULTIFUNCTION COPIERS & PRINTERS**  
Digital Office Solutions offers full product lines through Elite Partners such as Canon, Lanier, Lexmark and Muratec

**DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT**  
Utilize our Document Management Solutions to securely capture, index, store, and retrieve important documents within your business



**MANAGED PRINT SERVICES**  
Take control of your Printer Fleet and save up to 30% with Managed Print Services