

SC COALITION IN ACTION AT JV MARTIN MIDDLE SCHOOL

J. V. Martin Junior High School in Dillon, SC has been receiving a lot of attention lately. Middle school student, Ty'Sheoma Bethea wrote a letter to President Obama about the physical condition her school was in and other difficulties she and fellow students encounter while trying to receive a good education in this rural setting. The attention has had both positive and negative effects for the school and the issues Miss Bethea wrote about will not be solved quickly.

However, the student's plight at J. V. Martin is not as dismal as it may sound. Three eighth grade science teachers have been on a mission to provide their students with the best research-based science materials currently available. Mr. Kermit Chavis, Mr. Famon Whitfield and Mr. Harold Wilson have been teaching Science and Technology for Children Middle School (STC MS) *Earth and Space* kit to their classes since February. The teachers have described using the science kit as a positive experience for them as well as the students. Mr. Wilson said, "My own learning and my own personal growth was an added bonus to the teaching of the kit. The CD, *Starry Backyard*, that is part of the kit just fascinated me. I plan to take it home over the summer and study it in detail."

Scott May, executive director of Project 2061 states, "It's in middle school where many students have trouble and don't recover." The SC Coalition had the opportunity to partner with Fluor Foundation to make sure that Mr. May's comment did not prove true at J. V. Martin Junior High School. Through this partnership a curriculum guide for seventh and eighth grade science was developed around the revised SC Science Academic Standards and Support Guide. Local professor, Dr. Jefferson Lee of Francis Marion University, helped to develop and edit the guide which has proven to be a wonderful resource for the science teachers. However, there were other science resources in the school that could help with the hands-on teaching of science but the teachers had not been trained in how to use the STC MS kits.

At the request of the SC Coalition, Alice Gilchrist, Science Specialist with the Math and Science Unit of the State Department of Education, assisted the eighth grade teachers in implementing the STC MS kit *Earth and Space*. Mrs. Gilchrist acknowledged, "Teaching with a research-based, hands-on science kit program is completely different than teaching from a text book. One of the major differences is time. It takes more time to teach with a kit program and teachers

using a kit for the first time feel as if they will not cover all of the required standards before state testing." The SC Coalition hoped that providing someone experienced in kit implementation, like Mrs. Gilchrist, would provide the teachers with the necessary support they needed as they embarked on this new endeavor. Mrs. Gilchrist said, "I had the privilege to observe class instruction and watch the students as they learned science in a new and exciting way. While reading is an important part of learning science, science needs to be taught by hands-on methods in order for students to grasp the concepts. This is especially true for students in rural areas that may lack experiences in science content."

Barbara Ann Hawkins, school Curriculum Specialist said, "There has been an enthusiasm born in the science teachers that we have not been able to establish in the past. The enthusiasm was a missing link with the teachers that Mrs. Gilchrist was able to cultivate. I believe they will continue to teach with the kits next year. Because the teachers have become excited as a result of using the hands-on materials, they are inspiring the students who are showing an improved attitude for science instruction making their learning more meaningful."

The teachers also agree the students show more excitement for science than in the past. Mr. Chavis stated, "The materials in the kit provide hands-on activities that students could physically demonstrate and see actual results from the experimentation. It left the students with a lasting impression that just reading about the content in a book could not supply." Chiming in on the conversation, Mr. Wilson said, "I also liked that the learning went outside of the classroom. Teaching with the kit allowed my students to raise questions they would never thought of by just reading about shadows. This allowed me in turn to question them and challenge the students to find out the answers or solutions." Mr. Whitfield was also in agreement and thought the students seemed more excited about science. He relayed the story that one student asked if they were going to "do" science like this tomorrow. When Mr. Whitfield answered in the affirmative, the student pumped his fist in the air and said "Yesssss"!

The teachers are learning to deal with issues such as storage of the vast amount of materials, not having adequate space with individual desks and regular size classrooms, students learning how to work together and teaching students how to reflect on their learning through science notebooks. While all of these are issues that could hinder the teaching of kits, it has not stopped these eager teachers.

So, what impact has been made at J.V. Martin through the work of the SC Coalition? The teachers are eager to teach this kit again. Mr. Whitfield said he planned on teaching the kit earlier in the school year and Mr. Chavis agreed this would allow the students to study shadows at different times of the year. The teachers were already talking about adjustments they would make next year from what they learned from their teaching and were enthusiastic when the idea of planning together was suggested by Mrs Gilchrist. Mr. Wilson's childhood dream of becoming an astronaut may not have come true but now he is enabling his students to reach for the stars. One of the most apparent ways this effort from the SC Coalition has made an impact is that the teachers have requested new science tables for their classrooms next year to make the teaching of kits more conducive to a regular classroom setting. That request has been granted.