

## **SCP Includes Numerous Educational Objectives**

By Michele Page

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The educational goals for the Strategic Community Plan for Phillips County 2005-2010 include many organizations and ideas that should benefit this impoverished Delta region. In the press release received at the news conference held Monday at the Historically restored Malco the Strategic Planning Committee outlined the plans they have already implemented for Phillips County.

Southern Bancorp provided \$2.3 million in financing for expansion of the KIPP school expansion. This figure includes a \$1.9 million construction loan to KIPP for construction costs related to the expansion. The loan allowed for completion of a 21,000 square foot building on Cherry Street that houses the grade levels currently there. Additionally, Southern Bancorp has provided a \$1.2 million in permanent financing for the KIPP School.

Southern Bancorp and local community leaders formed the Phillips County Education Foundation in the spring of 2004 to reconnect the business community with the public education system now in place in the county. This foundation is composed of public school superintendents and board members from all four public school districts in the county as well as business and community leaders. Former State Senator Barbara King chairs this foundation.

The press release states, " It should be noted that the recent changes made at the school board and superintendent level have dampened public support for the Helena-West Helena School District."

The foundation facilitated a meeting with local high school superintendents to introduce them to the Rensselaerville Institute's School turnaround program and Core Knowledge's curriculum sequencing program. The Helena-West Helena District is currently enrolled in both programs. The school turnaround program helps principals improve student achievement at under performing schools. The foundation uses a 12-month guide and partnership between the principal and one of the foundation's "specialists." These "specialists" are other principals and superintendents who have personally turned schools around from being an under performing school.

The foundation believes that all the administrators need is the right tools and the right support to achieve the goals. During the year, the

schools receive access and support through site visits, web conferences, newsletters, and other forms of technical assistance. After the schools are diagnosed, performance targets are set and a turnaround message is established. The resources are realigned so that the focus is back on the students.

The Core Knowledge Program's web site states, "That for the sake of academic excellence, greater fairness, and higher literacy, elementary and middle schools need a solid, specific shared core curriculum in order to help children establish strong foundations of knowledge, grade by grade."

Southern Bancorp also has provided a \$10,000 grant to hire a consultant for the Helena-West Helena School District to resolve problems that lead to the suspension of \$5.2 million in Title 1 funds. The consultant's work was successful and the school district has received notice that the school will receive the \$5.2 million in Title 1 funds.

In 2004 Southern Good Faith Fund's program graduated 23 nursing assistants in Helena. The job placements goal was 80 percent and 87 percent of the graduates have found employment. The six-month job retention level was 71 percent compared the goal for a retention level that was set at of 65 percent. Other goals for the plan include expansion of the KIPP School to educate grades K-12, acquire the land to make this expansion possible and to finally initiate the plan.

The Good Faith Fund also would like to implement a PRISIM initiative (Partnership to Renew Interest and Improve Student Mathematics), develop an occupational program for high school students, develop a Career Pathway Program for adult residents of Phillips County. Other plans include establishing a University Center at Phillips County Community College to accommodate post secondary study beyond a two-year program and develop a comprehensive plan to provide broadband Internet services to the communities of Helena-West Helena, Marvell and Elaine.

Good Faith Fund's final educational goal will be to formalize and expand the Phillips County Educational Foundation to reconnect the local business community with the public schools in the area.