

A dozen miles from South Carolina’s glittering coastline, schoolchildren at rural Sampit Elementary School sit down every morning to a hot breakfast. Rather than single out the handful of children who do not qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, the school serves everyone through the Universal Breakfast Program.

Following a federal desegregation ruling in the 1990s, school attendance lines in Georgetown, SC were redrawn and Sampit, formerly a small, all African-American school, was reborn as a considerably larger, integrated school. In 2000, with federal funding, a handsome new one-story brick building surrounding a grassy courtyard and playgrounds was built to house the new school. Principal Maudest Rhue-Scott, the principal of Sampit prior to the new attendance lines, agreed to take over the new school.

**Sampit Elementary School  
Georgetown, SC**

372 preK-grade 5 students

African American	71%
White	29%
Students receiving free/ reduced price lunch	90%
Students receiving SPED services	22%
Limited English Proficient students	0
Student turnover rate	12%
Teacher turnover rate	10%
Student-teacher ratio	16:1

Sampit had many challenges to overcome that first year. Not only did Rhue-Scott and her staff struggle to set up the new building and train new teachers (more than half were new that year), but they immediately confronted South Carolina’s new PACT (Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test) assessment, introduced that year. Student scores fell below average that spring, but since then Sampit has found its footing as a high-achieving “Center for Transformation and Learning.” As Rhue-Scott explains, she has cultivated a “can do,” “hard work pays off,” and “no excuses anymore” culture.

**Reading Takes Center Stage**

Every morning, after the student team finishes its broadcast of school news and the national anthem, Principal Rhue-Scott announces the day’s 100 Book Challenge champions. When students log sufficient time reading, they earn Olympic-style medals color-keyed to the number of hours logged. Collecting them—with hugs from Rhue-Scott and the curriculum specialist—is a proud moment for students.



A supplement to the school's core reading program, Harcourt Trophy, the 100 Book Challenge program asks students to read for 30 minutes at school and 30 at home daily; students earn one line for each 15-minute segment. The program's leveled readers and rapid rewards program have captured the students' attention, and many have logged six and seven hundred lines. Classrooms are full of books and students eagerly remove their shoes, sprawl across the carpet, and read. The 100 Book Challenge program, published and supplied by American Reading Company, replenishes each classroom with leveled books several times a year. Next year the 100 Book Challenge Pre-K Program will be implemented at the pre-K level.

In the music room, while most of the students practice songs from *Annie*, the musical Sampit students will perform with the local high school, four students read quietly on the corner carpet amid several bins full of books. Similar book bins line the computer class, and the computer teacher notes that students read to earn 100 Book Challenge steps whenever they have extra time.

Every classroom at Sampit has six computers. The school has two additional computer labs; participation begins in kindergarten through computerized programs to encourage reading and math concept skills and continues



throughout the grade levels. Students can check out Play Stations to be used with Plato Learning Achieve Now software.

Many classrooms have rocking chairs, and students take turns sitting in the rocking chair with their books. A teacher notes, "This is the only school

where you see kids reading while walking down the hall." She added that students read not just for the medals but because they are truly "proud and excited by reading."

Each book is coded by reading level, assuring the teacher and student that the book, while challenging, is not too great a stretch for the student. Teachers are very positive about the program because it encourages students to read but does not leave them feeling helplessly lost.

Rhue-Scott explains how teachers monitor student reading for understanding. "Students read at their "just right reading level." While the rest of the class reads, a teacher works with students individually, listening to them read and coaching them forward while noting their skill mastery on a form correlated to the book's reading level.

Students also have opportunities to display their book knowledge in large groups. A teacher prompts, "Tell us about this book—not everything, but paraphrase—and summarize your book. And tell us why you like this book." In full, careful sentences, students articulate the book's topic, enumerate some supporting details, and explain why others should read the book. The teacher ends each student's presentation with a compliment and leads a round of applause.

Sampit also participates in the Accelerated Reading Program, a computerized program that helps students choose challenging reading materials. Students can check their comprehension via computer when they have finished reading, and get a measure of their progress.

In the fall, the school will implement Project Read, a phonics-based program, school-wide, having successfully piloted it with fourth and fifth grade students this year. Teachers have been trained in Writer's Workshop to help students approach literacy as producers as well as consumers.

When one student had a hard word, he used his finger to cover part of the work so he could "chunk out" the parts he recognized. Other students said, responding to the teacher's question, "we summarize because we can. Because we're third graders and we know how." A teacher consulting with a student about a book for the 100 Book Challenge program coaxed him, "These are strategies you need to know to be proficient. It's not enough to just know the words."

### School-wide Math

Math is a favorite with many students. As one says, "It's more active....You're going to use it to pay bills. And the teachers have a way of teaching math that is an easier way than my parents." In a classroom, students describe the strategies their teacher uses to help them conquer math, such as math games, a "math roundup", or "math attacks." Explains a student, "If I don't get it right the first time, my teacher gives me one more chance. She says, 'Go easy, and you can do it.'" Another math strategy the students cite is singing as a means of learning their addition/multiplication tables.



Student enthusiasm about math seems due in part to Sampit's being the only school in the district using a curriculum (Everyday Math) school-wide. Adopted four years ago, with extensive professional development, Everyday Math earns credit from most teachers, who point to its implementation as the reason for improved math test scores.

### A Committed Teaching Staff

"Teachers are the heroes of our children," says Rhue-Scott. "Teachers must inspire them and capture them." She feels a critical factor to a successful school is "getting a person (teacher) connected to the vision," then building trust and relationships—teacher to teacher, administrator to teacher, and all staff with students. To build these connections, a few years ago Rhue-Scott hired a bus and took her teachers on a field trip—down the (mostly dirt) roads her students lived on. It was an eye-opener for teachers, she says, and helped them understand why for many of her students, "school is the best part of the day." Rhue-Scott has organized the school to ensure it remains a haven.

Everyone, from the cafeteria workers to the custodial staff knows every child and keeps an eye out for him or her.

"We have to make up for the lack of experiences," a teacher says, explaining that Sampit teachers "go beyond being a teacher. ... You have to play the role as a caregiver too." Principal Rhue-Scott says she cultivates her teachers "with heart," and



then places them where they can be models for other teachers. In testament to Rhue-Scott's leadership, the teacher turnover rate at Sampit has dropped steadily, from 28% that first year in the new school to 10% today.

Teachers eat lunch with their students, deepening relationships and reinforcing the school's character and behavioral models of respect. Recognizing that teachers do not have time to network during the day and can feel isolated in self-contained classrooms, Rhue-Scott has arranged for all teachers to monitor students as they board busses at the end of the day; teachers take advantage of this time to reach out to each other. (Students are bussed or driven because the area is rural.) Bus duty thus becomes a time of fellowship, with the teachers greeting each other while the students hustle to their buses. Non-classroom teachers check off the names of students loading buses or cars in order to keep close watch on student safety, freeing the other teachers to network.

## Highly Qualified Teachers

Only two Sampit teachers are not certified as “highly qualified;” both were switched to different grades and are working on recertification. South Carolina is a non-union state and teacher salaries are not as high as neighboring districts. However, National Board-certified teachers get an additional \$10,000 (\$7,500 from the state and \$2,500 from the district) per year for ten years. Three Sampit teachers are National Board-certified and others are working toward the additional certification. The district offers tuition reimbursement for teachers and staff members seeking professional growth.

Teachers demonstrate “highly qualified” in many ways. During grade level planning meetings and Wednesday afternoon professional development session, teachers report very little non-instructional chit-chat. In every classroom, the week’s learning standards are on the board with references to the state standards. Each lesson plan has the same format: unit, strategy/activity, standards, and assessment. At the end of a class, teachers go around to each student, documenting students’ work and listing student benchmarks on the computerized grading system. Frequent student-teacher classroom discussions build student knowledge.

New teachers in South Carolina are enrolled in the ADEPT (Assisting Developing Evaluating Professional Teaching) program. In the second year of ADEPT, each teacher is assigned a three-member team who observes his or her classroom performance and continually provides feedback for improvement. The team includes a school-level administrator, a district representative, and an outside teacher. New teachers at Sampit—currently, there are five—are assigned an instructional mentor and a “buddy” teacher.

As part of the professional development strategy, each teacher is allowed to attend one outside conference per year, and the Teacher of the Year goes to an out-of-state conference.

## Making Time for Collaboration

Perhaps the most critical key to Sampit’s success has been the school’s radical restructuring of the school week to accommodate weekly school-wide planning and professional development sessions. School ends at 12:30 every Wednesday—the other four days were lengthened—and teachers meet to plan lessons together, share ideas, and take part in professional development.

Three years ago, the lead teachers expressed a need for common planning time, and Rhue-Scott surveyed the teachers and parents about changing the school calendar to accommodate the half-day planning on Wednesday.

Only a few parents and teachers were skeptical. She worked with those parents to expand the Wednesday after-school program and tested the strategy. Today, Rhue-Scott says, teachers see the Wednesday planning and professional development time as essential: “We cannot do without Wednesday planning.” Before, Rhue-Scott explains, “The teachers only had hall-talk time. Now they have time to share, experiment, and discuss effective teaching strategies.” Sampit teachers agree that the common time is useful.

Sampit has a curriculum specialist, funded by Title I, who plans staff development by mapping out new curricula or district trainings that offer onsite consultations. Consultants model instructional strategies and conduct classroom observations, and time is provided for consultants and teachers to reflect together, share how new instructional strategies are working, and discuss the evidence of improved student learning. The curriculum specialist and



principal also conduct classroom observations and determine professional development topics and activities for Wednesday afternoons. One teacher recalled how “hard it was” when the principal started coming in her classroom a couple of years ago. The principal “forced team-work initially.”

In addition to Wednesday afternoons, teachers also have 45 minutes daily for planning; twice a week that time is spent in grade level meetings. The students rotate through daily “specials,” such as art, music, or gym to allow for this planning time. During this time, teachers complete weekly lesson plans according to their pacing charts or review missed items on MAP or PACT tests. The district tried to do pacing guides according to state standards a few years ago, explains a teacher, “But we did not think that they were adequate and redid them.”

“We do not just do our copying during our 45 minutes daily planning time” teachers add. At a 4th grade planning session, teachers review items that students from three classes missed on a math PACT

benchmark test and, with the missed items in mind, create common homework questions. Even if few students in one class missed an item, that teacher agrees to include it on the homework: “My students need to reinforce that they know that concept.”

The lead teacher—one of the three 4th grade teachers who is on the principal’s leadership team—facilitates the discussion, keeps notes, and divides up the work to finalize the homework questions for the next week. She also

completes a common planning report form documenting their work for the principal. Afterwards, the teachers discuss instructional concerns, for example: “I need a strategy to teach a child about adding three digits numbers; he does it like this....How do I teach him this instead?” They offer each other suggestions, promise to check in the next day, and finish by establishing their planning goals for next week: in this case, the writing process and schedule.

### Specials and Specialists

The specialists, non-academic teachers, know how important this planning time is for the teachers. Valued members of the professional team who also contribute to students’ academic success, specialists set goals and benchmarks in their content areas and hold high expectations for the students. Every Tuesday, they focus on PACT testing strategies in 3rd, 4th and 5th grade classes, helping students recognize patterns, consider different ways to look at the same problem, brainstorm, and write.

In addition to a scheduled PE class, each grade level attends “early bird” gym once a week—a privilege students can lose for poor behavior in other classes. The gym teacher teaches physical skills, such as catching and throwing, in a cumulative spiral so that students are always challenged, and believes that “the specials get kids to school.” Students can earn non-academic awards in the specials, which is very important for some students.

### Sampit’s State Scores Advance

When South Carolina revised its state assessment test, it also raised achievement standards overall: it is one of a handful of states whose state achievement scores map closely onto its NAEP scores. That means, explains Rhue-Scott, that “basic” in South Carolina equals “proficient” on most other state assessments. By that measure, Sampit has made steady and notable progress.

However, as Rhue-Scott explains, each year the state raises the benchmark based on the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) goal that all students be at or above basic (South Carolina’s proficient) by the year 2012. Additionally, each year state standardized tests scores weigh more heavily in the formula for AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress). To accomplish these goals, Rhue-Scott explained her Data Driven Decision-Making (DDDM) process:

Step 1: At the beginning of the year, teachers use the previous year’s test results to create a roadmap for grade level planning and instruction. Student data are collected through a battery of assessments: STAR (Renaissance Learning); Edutest (Plato Learning/Achieve Now), MAP (Measures of Academic Progress, and PACT (state assessments). With these data, teachers set targets by student for the first 30-45 days of the new school year.

Teachers agree on annual school-wide improvement goals and set personal goals, identifying specific areas to address or improve, that the principal uses for teacher evaluations. The principal and curriculum specialist summarize goals by ELA, math, science, and social studies for the district and base staff development plans for the year on these goals.

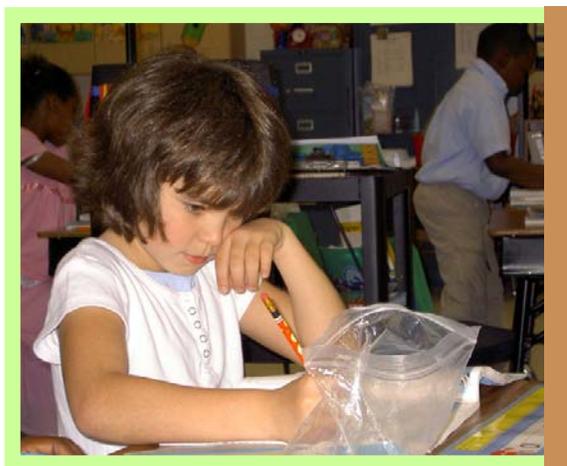
Step 2: At the end of the first semester, teachers identify students who are not on grade level and determine interventions, including a time span and statement of necessary resources, that should make measurable differences in student performance. In grades 2-5, students meet individually with teachers and set goals for MAP tests, aiming to be on grade level.

Step 3: Twice a year, at the end of the first semester and the end of the school year, teachers meet with the principal and curriculum specialist to create lists of students' standardized test scores and classroom grades (and attendance, teacher comments, and data of parent conferences) by name and class, identifying anyone who is performing below grade level. These data are used to set class goals—although Rhue-Scott has teachers write the goals out, student by student, rather than relying on printouts. Teachers can analyze the meaning better when they produce the document themselves, she says.

### Focus on the Child

According to Principal Rhue-Scott, another major reason for the school's success is its ability to maintain classrooms of no more than 16 students, thanks to Title I funding. In small classrooms, teachers can focus on every child's needs, and serious behavior problems are rare at Sampit.

Students are grouped by reading and math levels in their classroom during Focus Group—a time for small group instruction with their teacher or certified tutor. Each teacher has a certified tutor at least 40 minutes a day. The principal explains that teachers prefer to have the “extra pair” of hands in their classroom rather than sending the students to another classroom for Focus Group. No time is lost during transition.



According to the teachers, high expectations are another significant reason for Sampit's success. The administration sets high expectations for teachers, teachers set high expectations for students, and students set high expectations for themselves.

## This must be the South: there's lots of food

An after-school program feeds dinner to children who need to stay late to accommodate their parents' work schedules. During the summer, the school offers an enrichment program which both feeds children (breakfast and lunch) and takes them on field trips to the beach, zoo, and other interesting places. According to the Superintendent, the district feeds 1500 children during the summer.

During the school year, lunch buddies—relatives or businesses that have partnered with Sampit—come at noontime for a meal. Santee Cooper, a local electrical plant, is a big supporter of Sampit; through a High Performance Partnership, Santee Cooper provides the school funds for such items as landscaping, awards (souvenirs, prizes), special lunches, and field trips. Volunteers from the plant, particularly men, serve as role models and mentors for students.

## Celebrate

Sampit demonstrates its pride through celebrations. In addition to the 100 Book Challenge program winners' daily announcement, Sampit celebrates and gives awards for many things. Every month celebrations include Birthdays, Student of the Month, Spirit Day, and 100 Book Challenge parties. Bi-monthly, Sampit recognizes a Super Sampit Writer. Every nine weeks the school celebrates Super Sampit Awards Day and High Five Achievers. The Students as Authors celebration is annual, and fundraising celebrations are held "as needed."

Even amid the many celebrations, there is an attitude of seriousness at Sampit: Learning is the work and students are expected to do their personal best. As Rhue-Scott says, "At Sampit all teachers believe every child can learn" and they help each child move forward. A parent praises the teachers and staff members, remarking that "Teachers are so proud of the students." **Fifth Grade Assessment Data—Percent at or Above Basic—All Students**

	2002	2003	2004	2005
ELA	64	70	90	93
Math	74	70	84	88
Percent tested	96	96	100	100
<b>Fifth Grade Assessment Data—Percent at or Above Basic—African American Students</b>				
	2002	2003	2004	2005
ELA	60	57	94	93
Math	73	57	88	90
<b>Fifth Grade Assessment Data—Percent at or Above Basic—Free or Reduced Price Lunch Students</b>				
	2002	2003	2004	2005
ELA	61	64	90	92
Math	100	92	82	86