



district five  
OF LEXINGTON & RICHLAND COUNTIES  

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Media Release



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**School District Five becomes first professional development district of its kind in the nation**

**IRMO** – Lexington-Richland School District Five has partnered with the University of South Carolina to become the first ever professional development school district of its kind in the nation.

Through the National Association for Professional Development Schools, professional development schools (PDS) nationwide are partnerships between university education departments and schools to prepare new teachers, offer faculty training, help improve classroom practices and enhance student achievement.

Schools in South Carolina must apply to the University of South Carolina and be approved through a rigorous review process before receiving the PDS designation. In School District Five, there already are four Professional Development Schools: Irmo Middle School, Oak Pointe Elementary School, Irmo Elementary School and Dutch Fork High School. There are 21 active PDS sites in five Midlands school districts.

Superintendent Dr. Christina Melton said the new Professional Development Schools-District (PDS-D) will impact every school in School District Five, utilize several colleges within UofSC and focus initially on two key areas: preschool and the social-emotional and physical health of students.

“This is a landmark initiative with exciting implications for our district and public education as a whole,” Melton said. “PDS-D is intended to wrap services to support the whole child, bringing in several colleges from the university into our schools. This will allow for laboratory learning, best practices, up-to-date research implementation and professional development led by specialist for our educators. We are honored to be the first PDS-D partnership of this kind in the nation.”

At the University of South Carolina, the Professional Development Schools Network has been a key part of the education preparation process at the University of South Carolina for more than 28 years. The University of South Carolina began sponsoring a PDS National Conference in March 2000. That initial event, held in Columbia, S.C., attracted nearly six hundred educators, prompting the university to sponsor annual national conferences and helping to establish the National Association of Professional Development Schools.

“Central to the success of PK-12 education in our state is the nurturing of strong partnerships between colleges of education and school districts. For 28 years, the College of Education has been a national leader in combining school improvement with the preparation of teachers through our Professional Development Schools network,” said Jon Pedersen, dean of the College of Education. “Our long history is only strengthened through our new endeavor, a Professional Development School-District, with Lexington-Richland Five. Together we will continue to transform the lives of our future teachers and the students they teach by supporting the whole child.”

In 2017, Melton and USC officials met to discuss and develop the idea of a PDS district. School District Five has consistently been recognized for high achievement in academics, the arts, athletics, leadership and community service, earning state and national awards each year. Niche.com, a national clearinghouse for evaluating public education, recently ranked School District Five among the top school districts in South Carolina. The district’s SAT and ACT scores are among the top in the state

annually, and *U.S. News & World Report* recently ranked School District Five among the top in South Carolina for preparing students for college.

For School District Five administrators, having the first PDS-District of its kind in the nation has several benefits.

“We have a lot to gain and give through this new initiative,” said Irmo Middle School Principal Cassy Paschal, who has served as principal at two of the district’s PDS sites. “We all know how important it is to have highly-skilled, well-trained teachers in classrooms and how important it is to focus in on the needs of our students. As principal of a Professional Development School, I see the benefits each day. It’s a huge honor, and we can’t wait to see the impacts this will have on our students.”

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