

# 'Corridor' elicits outrage, anger at FMU showing

Educators, parents, lawmakers view film's depiction of problems rural schools face

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**FLORENCE** — Where a student lives in South Carolina can determine the kind of education that child receives.

This statement is at the core of "Corridor of Shame," the controversial 58-minute documentary that depicts the argument of eight plaintiff school districts in a lawsuit against the state for what they call inadequate funding of public schools.

Educators, representatives of

Pee Dee municipalities and parents gathered in Lowrimore Auditorium in Cauthen Media Center on Francis Marion University's campus Monday night to see the film, which depicted the rural, plaintiff districts' side in Abbeville County School District v. The State of South Carolina.

"The documentary is one of the most moving I have ever experienced," said a tearful Dr. Cheryl Allread, superintendent of Marion School District 1. "To view it and not be touched would be impossible."

The film showed Dillon County School District 2 students in a classroom with their coats and gloves on to fight the freezing weather with rags stuffed under

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## REACTION

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doors to keep rainwater out, and raw sewage in the halls of Allendale School District and Marion School District 7 schools.

"I don't think there is anyone who will see this video without thinking something has to be done," said Dr. Tom Truitt, executive director of the Pee Dee Education Center. "We need to make sure every child has an opportunity to obtain a good education."

The film opened with a gospel song and a monologue from well-known author Pat Conroy about his experience working in a rural school district in Beaufort. Within the piece were comments from administrators, teachers, parents and legislators concerning the economic status and education funding in their respective communities.

Eight school districts on the Interstate 95 corridor that brought the lawsuit representing 36 rural districts were the crux of the film. One of those school districts was Marion School District 7, where Paul Hudacko and his wife, Jessica, are teachers. The two can be seen in the film giving a firsthand account of their schools.

"The film portrayed it better than I could have imagined," Paul Hudacko said. "Our kids have a voice now."

Though many of those in attendance see the conditions

## SITES TO SEE THE FILM

**The Nickelodeon Theater, Columbia**  
Today at 5 p.m.  
Thursday at 5 p.m.

**Eau Claire Print Building, 3907 Ensor Ave., Eau Claire**  
Thursday at 5:30 p.m.  
Sponsored by AAUW and the Eau Claire Community Council

**Dock Street Theater, Charleston**  
Monday at 7 p.m.

**Furman University, Burgess Theater, University Center, Greenville**  
May 16 at 8 p.m.  
Sponsored by the Department of Education

**S.C. ETV Statewide Broadcasts**  
May 22 at 11:30 a.m.  
May 29 at 7 p.m.

portrayed in the film on a daily basis, they seemed amazed at how many others deal with the same issues.

For instance, Paul Hudacko said the overcrowded classrooms and the rattlesnake story told in the film are a part of students'

daily lives in his district.

Right from the beginning of the movie where the children's faces flash by, Jessica Hudacko said she thinks of her students. Recalling one school's tale of sending food home with students, Jessica Hudacko said she could relate.

"Most don't even get fed at home," she said.

Running water is an issue for about half of the students in Marion 7.

"If their basic needs aren't met, how can their educational needs be met?" Paul Hudacko asked.

Producers raised \$75,000 for the documentary to distribute videos and DVDs to the state's 170 legislators.

Because the documentary depicts the rural plaintiff districts' side in the lawsuit against the state, a Charleston legislator filed a House bill calling for the removal of South Carolina ETV's board for airing it. Rep. John Graham Altman's bill would allow the governor to appoint replacements for the current seven-member board.

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— Dr. Tom Truitt, executive director of the Pee Dee Education Center

The film featuring such political figures as Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., drew people like Rhett Jackson, who leads the Coalition for Education Equity, and superintendents from several district in the Pee Dee to view the film Monday.

It wasn't until Graham made the statement in the film that "money isn't the answer to all problems, but if you don't have it, it's a good start," that viewers in Monday's audience made any noise, many responding with an "Amen."

Producer and director Bud Ferillo was on hand to answer questions after the viewing.

"This film has a point of view, but these are the facts told as I heard it from people who deal with these horrendous issues every day," he said.

When Ferillo was asked why he hadn't given opposing viewpoints in the documentary, Truitt stepped up to answer.

The state's argument is that it just needs to provide a system of education — there is no qualifier

that it has to be any good, Truitt said.

"This is the heart of what's wrong with public education," he said. "I would be embarrassed to put that part in the film."

Truitt added that 45 of the 50 states have filed this kind of suit and, recently, there has been a trend of the plaintiff districts winning.

The lawsuit in South Carolina was filed Nov. 2, 1993, in Lee County by 29 rural and poor school districts.

More districts later joined to form the alliance of 36 represented by the eight plaintiff districts.

Nearly a dozen years later, districts are still in court fighting this battle.

S.C. Third Circuit Judge Thomas Cooper Jr. is expected to render a verdict in the school funding trial this summer.

Cooper is the judge who originally heard the lawsuit in July 1995 that was held just to decide whether the districts had a right to sue the state over funding.