

**At right  
is a  
collapsed  
ceiling at a  
school in  
West  
Hardeeville.  
The ceiling  
collapsed  
during a  
holiday  
break in  
January.  
No one was  
injured.**

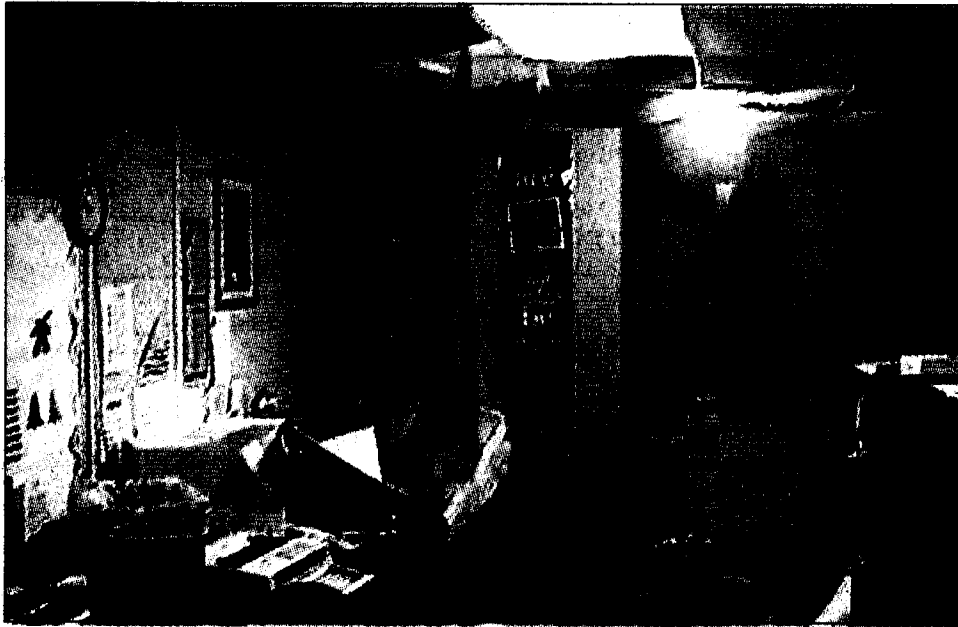


Photo courtesy  
of Charles  
"Bud" Farillo Jr.

# Poorly funded schools a disgrace to the state

**By Harriet Keyersling**  
Special to the Herald

The good news is that Put Parents in Charge, the bill to give tax credits to parents who choose to send their children to private schools or home-school, was defeated in the S.C. House of Representatives. But I didn't celebrate. As a former legislator, I knew it could pop up again. And sure enough, it did, just one day later.

About the same time, I watched "Corridor of Shame," a documentary about some rural public schools, most of which were party to an ongoing lawsuit against the state for not providing



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# Disgrace

from 1E

adequate and equal education funding. Thirty-six school districts — educating more than one-third of South Carolina children attending public schools — are represented in the lawsuit.

## Heartbreaking documentary

As I watched this heartbreaking film, I could only gasp at the difference between these schools and the spiffy new schools in my home town of Beaufort. How could those children compete with our children under such conditions? How could the state allow so many of its children to struggle against such odds?

Can you believe that we allow our children to attend classes in a building more than 100 years old, and others between 60 and 80 years old?

The documentary shows ill-equipped science labs and libraries with outdated books resting on almost empty shelves. These schools are so cold in winter that children have to wear hats and gloves. Some of the schools have leaky windows, falling ceilings, broken and rusting water fountains ... One school has raw sewage backing up into hallways on rainy days. Another often is visited by poisonous snakes.

As if such inadequate buildings weren't bad enough, these schools also are plagued by a steady exodus of teachers who can no longer abide inadequate pay and poor working conditions. Yes, some of the schools are blessed with a few dedicated teachers and administrators who have stayed to fight for the children they love. With tears in their eyes, some of them describe the problems with which they cope daily.

Why can't school officials patch up such problems? Because they have no money. In these communities, factories have shut down, unemployment is high, the tax base has shrunk. Ironically, many of these citizens already are paying a higher percentage of their wealth in taxes than do many of us living in more prosperous areas of South Carolina.

The enormous disparity between the have and the have-not school districts will continue until the General Assembly and the governor find ways to bring these rural communities industry and jobs. Or until the state sends them additional money for new schools and equal teacher salaries.

S.C. Highway Patrol troopers earn the same starting salary, no matter where they are assigned. Why should it not be the same for teachers?

Let us hope that, if the judge in the equal-funding lawsuit rules with the plaintiff districts, the state won't waste more time and money by appealing the decision. South Carolina taxpayers already have paid \$10 million in legal fees trying to defend the indefensible. The money would be better spent by addressing the shortcomings that caused the lawsuit in the first place.

The very economic health of our state depends on improving conditions in these impoverished rural areas.

## How could PPIC help?

As I watched "Corridor of Shame," my mind returned to Put Parents in Charge. How could that bill possibly help these thousands of children living in parts of South Carolina where there are few, if any, private schools and no means of public transportation for children to take advantage of them if there were?

Most of their parents don't earn enough to pay the amount of taxes to qualify for a tax credit to offset the cost of private school. Even if privately funded scholarships were available — as PPIC supporters claim would happen — nothing would force existing private schools to accept needy children seeking to break out of impoverished schools.

"Corridor of Shame" was produced and funded by businessmen and community leaders, many of whom gave passionate interviews in the film. They were Republicans and Democrats, liberals and con-

servatives. Copies of the documentary were sent to all legislators.

You can learn more about this issue yourself by going to [www.cor-](http://www.corridorofshame.com)

[ridorofshame.com](http://www.corridorofshame.com).

You may want to contact your state senator or representative and ask whether he or she has seen

“Corridor of Shame.” If not, suggest they do so before they vote again on a tax credit or voucher bill with the potential of siphon-

ing millions of dollars away from the public schools when so many schools face a crisis caused by underfunding.

*The author represented S.C. House District 124, which includes parts of Beaufort and Jasper counties, from 1977-92.*