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Documented Dilapidation

Film Aims to Make Point in S.C. Funding Fight

Enter a new weapon in school finance lawsuits: the documentary film.

That's what Bud Ferillo, a public relations executive and political strategist from Columbia, S.C., hopes his first film will become. "Corridor of Shame: The Neglect of South Carolina's Rural Schools" highlights the decrepit conditions of some public school buildings in poor rural parts of his state.

Hoping to build public support for increased state aid to rural school districts, Mr. Ferillo plans to make at least 500 DVDs of the film and is lobbying South Carolina Educational Television to show it.

His goal is to persuade legislators to take action even as a 12-year-old school finance lawsuit by rural districts and parents against the state drags on in court. The trial phase of the case ended in December, and a decision is expected by summer. ("[Passions High as S.C. Finance Case Comes to a Close](#)," Jan. 5, 2005.)

Mr. Ferillo produced the film using donations from private foundations and other donors sympathetic to the finance case. The idea is to influence debate, perhaps before a ruling in the finance case comes down, and certainly afterward.

"We are anticipating this being a legislative fight. We're simply getting ready for that with this video and all this community organization," said Mr. Ferillo, who is working with a coalition of groups that advocate more school funding.

The film focuses on eight of the districts that sued the state in 1993, seeking greater funding. Those districts are largely located along Interstate 95, a major North-South corridor—referred to in the title—that cuts through South Carolina's poorest and most rural counties.

The film, which is set to premiere April 3 in Columbia, S.C., shows schools where roofs have collapsed, a junior high school gym that has no heat, buildings with failing elevators and fire alarms, and even a classroom where sewage seeps in during heavy rains.

"We're appealing to our legislative members: Would they allow their children to go to school under the conditions we have just seen? I think the answer is no," a teary Superintendent Ray Rogers of Dillon County School District 2 says in the film. "We know it's wrong."

Jo Anne Anderson, the executive director of the state's Education Oversight Committee, which monitors implementation of the South Carolina school accountability law, was moved after watching an excerpt at a conference in Atlanta this month.

"It is embarrassing," she said.

— Alan Richard

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