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PRESS RELEASE

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SENATOR JIM RITCHIE ANNOUNCES LAUNCHING OF *iAm* LAPTOP PILOT PROGRAM

COLUMBIA, SC - Today, Senator James H. "Jim" Ritchie, Jr. (R-13), Majority Whip, announced the six *iAm* Laptop Pilot Program grant recipient schools and two alternates. Senator Ritchie's *iAm* Laptop Pilot Program was adopted through the General Assembly's budget and provides \$5 million in funding for six public schools serving ninth grade students. These schools will receive their individual matching grants beginning this fall.

Upon announcing the Laptop Pilot Program schools, Senator Ritchie said, "The *iAm* Laptop Pilot Program provides a unique opportunity to couple cutting edge technology with modern teaching techniques to greatly enhance the competitiveness of all South Carolina students, especially those currently stuck in underperforming schools. No longer will our students be limited to traditional school hours and teaching methods. Instead, this program will provide our young people with the educational resources necessary to say 'I am in charge of my future. I am the future of South Carolina.' This program places South Carolina in the forefront of innovation and is an important strategy to improve equity and opportunity among all of our high school students."

Senator Gerald Malloy (D-29), one of the early champions of this transformative program, said, "This program has the potential to break down the educational barriers facing students not only in the I-95 corridor, but in every underprivileged household and rural area of South Carolina. I am confident this program will stimulate improvement in the academic performance and competitiveness of South Carolina's students."

The iAm Laptop Pilot Program will be administered by the K-12 Technology Initiative, a collaboration of the Department of Education, the Budget and Control Board's Division of the Chief Information Officer, the State Library, Educational Television Commission, and business and community leaders. The iAm Laptop Pilot Program will be evaluated through an independent party to determine its efficacy in anticipation of implementing a statewide laptop program in the coming years. When the program is fully implemented it will provide a laptop for every ninth grade student in the South Carolina public schools.

After a competitive grant proposal process, the Committee named six public schools as grant recipients with two alternates. The six recipients are Midland Valley, Aiken School District; Scott's Branch, Clarendon School District 1; CA Johnson, Richland School District 1; Lakewood High, Sumter School District 2; Bethune-Bowman, Orangeburg School District 5; Creek Bridge, Marion School District 7. The two alternate schools are Broome High, Spartanburg School District 3; Marion High, Marion School District 1.

Schools were chosen based on their most recent EAA school report card rating, the percentage of students on free or reduced lunch, their technological capacity, and their vision for the program. The proviso required at least half of the recipient schools to have ninth grade students that scored unsatisfactory or below average on the most recent EAA school report card and that have free and reduced lunch student counts that exceed the statewide average to ensure the program is targeted to those students most in need.

Tom Fletcher, K-12 Technology Initiative Chairman, said, "The K-12 Technology Initiative Committee would like to thank the Legislature for providing funding for this innovative program and especially Senator Jim Ritchie for his leadership on this issue. We are confident that it will provide unique learning experiences for the participating 9th grade students as they progress through high school. This program leverages the infrastructure, digital content and professional development that have been put in place over the last eleven years by the K-12 Initiative. We also expect that the lessons learned from these model projects will provide leadership and guidance to other schools as they seek to implement similar projects. We look forward to Legislative funding in future years to provide this resource to all high school students in South Carolina."

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