

MARCH 2007

ANNUAL REPORT

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**SC EDUCATION
OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

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STUDENT / SCHOOL / DISTRICT PERFORMANCE

4-K

In January 2006 the General Assembly commissioned the Education Oversight Committee (Education Oversight Committee) to inventory and study all publicly-funded kindergarten programs for four-year-olds and to recommend the program that should be funded statewide for all children who qualify for free- or reduced-price lunches. These programs included the Education Improvement Act (EIA)-funded half-day child development program, the Office of First Steps pre-kindergarten programs, the ABC Voucher program (managed by the Department of Social Services) and the Head Start program. The Education Oversight Committee report identified 29,737 students at-risk for school failure based upon federal lunch status; that is, 53 percent of the total four-year-old population. In 2005-2006, approximately 8,200 of these students were not served in the public programs. The Education Oversight Committee report, issued on March 15, recommended the following:

- + Full-day programs providing a research-based curriculum with wraparound services to four-year-olds eligible for the free-or reduced-price lunch program and/or Medicaid;
- + Services provided in approved public schools and private settings with equipment and materials grants to encourage the establishment of new classrooms;
- + Funding mechanisms that “follow the child;”
- + Approval, monitoring and technical assistance from a single state agency; and,
- + A long-term evaluation to measure program quality and impact on student success.

The General Assembly appropriated \$23.5 million for the first year of a two-year pilot program in the Abbeville lawsuit plaintiff districts. The Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP) incorporated a majority of the Education Oversight Committee recommendations, including expanding the definition to include students eligible for Medicaid. CDEPP funding and responsibilities are split between the State Department of Education and the Office of First Steps.

In January 2007, the Education Oversight Committee released an interim evaluation report to inform members of the Education Oversight Committee and the General Assembly of the progress in the first six months of the pilot. Twenty-nine of the eligible school districts chose to participate as public providers. Private providers could serve students residing in any of the thirty-seven plaintiff districts. Generally, there

has been some gain in the number of at-risk four-year-olds served in the plaintiff districts. Enrollment patterns across South Carolina's 85 districts suggest that the plaintiff districts now enroll fewer students, but a larger proportion of the enrolled students are poor. Many school district programs have shifted from half-day to full-day. Providers and agency personnel report a number of barriers to program expansion: per pupil funding is below actual costs; too little time between the passage of the Appropriations Act and the program starting date; inadequate facilities; and, difficulties in recruiting students. Finally, the Education Oversight Committee and agencies have been hampered by incomplete and inaccurate data on students enrolled and teachers providing services. As of a February update, CDEPP should expend only \$11 million of the appropriated funds.

Future reports are scheduled for July 2007, January 2008, July 2008 and each January thereafter as students are followed through the elementary-secondary educational system.

SIX-YEAR MATCH REPORT

In order to analyze achievement trends over time and to describe student progress, Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT) results from the six-year period from 2000 through 2005 were matched to create a longitudinal database containing yearly test results for 39,988 (75.8 percent) of the 52,783 students who were tested in grade 3 in the 1999-2000 school year. The data were disaggregated to identify achievement levels and trends for demographic groups. An analysis of the database led to the release of the six-year longitudinal match study.

The study's findings indicate that there was insufficient growth in student achievement over the six-year period to reach our goals. The findings also suggest that currently used intervention strategies for improving student achievement and current policies regarding grade retention and promotion should be reviewed for their effectiveness. Complete data over the six-year period were studied for the students' PACT achievement progress and for their history of promotion or retention in grade. For one or more years, data from 12,795 (24.2 percent) students could not be matched because their test results were incomplete.

Education Oversight Committee staff continues to disseminate the study's findings to school district superintendents and instructional leaders, as well as State Department of Education personnel, to generate discussion and to identify needed changes in local or state policies.

ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Education Oversight Committee staff conducted the annual study on progress toward closing the gaps in Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT) achievement among different demographic groups of South Carolina students enrolled in grades 3-8. Sixteen percent (138 of 863) of elementary and middle schools were recognized for closing the achievement gaps in PACT ELA or math in 2005 for at least one historically underachieving demographic group. Although progress is being made, the sizes of the gaps are discouraging if South Carolina is to meet its 2010 achievement goal for all students.

The study included data from all four subject areas – English language arts (ELA), math, science, and social studies (science and social studies were studied for the first time). With the exception of white vs. Hispanic group comparisons, the study showed there has been minimal progress diminishing the gaps at the Proficient and Advanced levels for all groups. Gaps between white and African-American students, while lower each year studied through 2004, remain consistently larger than gaps between white and Hispanic students and between pay and free- or reduced-price lunch students.

MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL CHALLENGES

Student performance on the PACT test in the middle school grades of 6-8 continues to be an area of concern. Of the 271 middle schools that received an absolute rating on the 2006 School Report Card, 61 (22.5 percent) received an Absolute rating of Unsatisfactory, 90 (33.2 percent) received an Absolute rating of Below Average, 83 (30.6 percent) received an Absolute rating of Average, 27 (10 percent) received an Absolute rating of Good, and 4 (1.5 percent) received an Absolute rating of Excellent. In an effort to better understand the middle school student and environment, and the challenges of the age group, the Education Oversight Committee received information from a number of entities in hopes of helping identify areas where substantial progress could be made in student achievement quickly. Increasing the number of teachers having middle level or middle school certification was one topic that received particular attention.

GIFTED AND TALENTED PART II

During 2005, a descriptive study of the Gifted and Talented Program in South Carolina was conducted through a research agreement among Education Oversight Committee, Department of Education (SDE) and the University of South Carolina. During 2006 a performance analysis of the gifted and talented was conducted. The study found that gifted and talented students outperformed students not served by any gifted and talented program on PACT in all four subject areas. The study found that achievement gaps exist among the various demographic groups in the gifted and talented program, just as they exist in the overall population. In addition, results of the study indicate that a barrier for gifted and talented students exists in underperforming schools; the few students served in gifted and talented programs in underperforming schools are not being adequately served.

REPORT CARD STUDY GROUP

Staff from the Education Oversight Committee and SDE are studying the present school and school district Report Card formats to determine what, if any, changes need to be made to the formats. The purpose of the discussions is to enlist the help of various groups to assess the “readability” and “usability” of the current report card format. An example of a suggested revision is to separate clearly information required under the Education Accountability Act and data required by No Child Left Behind. The study group will report to the Education Oversight Committee in March.

ACCOUNTABILITY MANUAL

Each spring the Education Oversight Committee staff produces the Accountability Manual, which provides detail on the ratings system for educators and interested individuals. Accountability Manuals are distributed to school and school district administrators each summer and contain the current data on formulas, expectations, procedures, etc. on the accountability system.

ACT 254 – TESTING TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

During the 2006 legislative session, the General Assembly adopted Act 254, and with the adoption, approved many of the recommendations of the Testing Task Force. Included in the legislation was a reduction in PACT testing, primarily through a cutback in science and social studies testing in grades 3-8. A process to approve formative assessments provided by the state in grades 1-8 was included, and a provision to study the feasibility of computerized testing in grades 1-10 was included in the state budget. A contract was awarded to Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) to conduct the feasibility study. The study will be presented to the Education Oversight Committee in January 2008.



STATE SUPPORT FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

CHANGES IN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RECOMMENDED BY EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE AND ADOPTED BY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Section 59-6-10 of the EAA charges the Education Oversight Committee “to assist in, recommend, and supervise implementation of programs and expenditure of funds for the Education Accountability Act and the Education Improvement Act [EIA] of 1984.” Specifically, the EAA requires the Education Oversight Committee to 1) review and monitor programs and funding; 2) make programmatic and funding recommendations to the General Assembly; 3) report annually to the General Assembly, State Board of Education, and the public on the progress of the programs; and, 4) to recommend changes as it considers necessary. The Fiscal Year 2006-07 EIA and EAA budget and proviso recommendations of the Education Oversight Committee which can be downloaded online included substantial changes to the EAA technical assistance program.

The release of the 2005 annual school report cards provided a compelling reason for new initiatives to improve student academic performance and a revised approach to the EAA technical assistance system. As reflected on the 2005 report cards, the needs of schools, students and communities are so significant that South Carolina has to provide long-term solutions to meeting the needs of students, parents, teachers and communities. The 2005 School and District Ratings identified 287 schools that were performing below expectations. Sixty-five schools had an absolute rating of Unsatisfactory with another 222 schools having an absolute rating of Below Average. In 2006, 390 schools were rated Below Average or Unsatisfactory. Most importantly, the Education Oversight Committee determined that 84 percent of these schools had been identified and served with state technical assistance since 2001.

Recognizing the reasonable limits on state-delivered assistance and the need to build local capacity to address educational needs, the Education Oversight Committee adopted the following strategy for improving the technical assistance delivery system:

Through shared responsibilities and services, South Carolinians working at state and community levels can create conditions in which all of South Carolina’s students can achieve successfully at high academic levels.

Rather than the state prescribing specific technical assistance services, schools with an absolute rating of Unsatisfactory or Below Average would create school renewal plans that expressed specific goals and

intervention strategies to improve student academic assistance. The Education Oversight Committee and the State Department of Education determine the alternative research-based technical assistance criteria that schools incorporate in their intervention strategies. The State Department of Education and the State Board of Education also are responsible for approving the school renewal plans and assisting in the brokering of services and personnel to accomplish the intervention strategies and actions. Funds expressly allocated for homework centers, teacher specialists, principal specialists, retraining grants, principal leaders and all other technical assistance programs are reallocated to individual schools and used to implement the school renewal plans. This approach to technical assistance was endorsed by the General Assembly in proviso 1.44 of the 2006-07 General Appropriation Act.

According to proviso, schools with an absolute rating of Unsatisfactory received a minimum of \$250,000 this fiscal year with additional funds contingent upon student enrollment. Based upon an evaluation by an external review team, the school submits a school renewal plan that included specific actions consistent with alternative research-based assistance criteria. The plans determine how funds should be expended on strategies and activities.

A similar approach was adopted for schools having an absolute rating of Below Average. These schools are submitting a school renewal plan that included actions consistent with the alternative research-based technical assistance criteria approved by the Education Oversight Committee and Department of Education. Upon approval of the plans by the Department of Education and the State Board of Education, the school received a minimum allocation of \$75,000 with additional funds based on student enrollment. These funds could only be expended on specific strategies and activities as outlined in the school renewal plans.

The Education Oversight Committee will monitor academic achievement in these schools to determine the impact of the alternative technical assistance model. Again, the goal of the new system is to improve student academic assistance through systemic, research-based strategies which are supported at the state and local levels.

FUNDING MODEL

During the fall of 2006, Education Oversight Committee staff updated the Education Oversight Committee funding model first presented in 2003. As proposed, the funding model incorporates a base student cost of \$5,311. In addition, there are three separate and distinct weightings. (1) The first weighting is characterized as the general education weight and incorporates students in grades kindergarten through twelve, including all special needs students, young adult education and homebound. (2) The second classification of weightings, compensatory, includes additional funding for students in poverty and non-English speaking students. (3) The final classification, program weights, funds additional weights for students scoring Below Basic, students served in gifted and/or talented artistic and academic programs, and students enrolled in career technology courses. Funding for compensatory weights and program weights come from EIA revenues without any local match requirement. The Funding Model also compared existing revenues and policy options for funding the revised model.

SCIENCE STANDARDS

The Education Oversight Committee approved the South Carolina Biology Course Academic Standards in June 2006. Approval of the standards was delayed as wording in relation to evolution was refined. Approval of the Biology Course Standards completed the approval of new academic standards in science for implementation during the 2006-07 school year.

REVIEW OF THE US HISTORY AND CONSTITUTION END OF COURSE FIELD TEST

In accordance with EAA, the Education Oversight Committee conducted a review of the US History and Constitution End of Course field test during the fall of 2006. The review covered the technical quality of test items and their alignment to the course standards. The review found that the “field test appears to be well aligned with the academic standards, to make appropriate cognitive demands of students, to be generally adequate in technical quality, and to reflect very high expectations for performance.” Approval of the test, however, was delayed until additional data on student performance on the test could be obtained and information from US History and Constitution teachers on their understanding of the course standards could be obtained and related to student performance.

REVIEW OF THE MATHEMATICS CURRICULUM STANDARDS

During the spring and summer of 2006, the Education Oversight Committee conducted a review of the 2000 Mathematics Curriculum Standards in order to provide recommendations for revision of the present standards. Three panels, one of national mathematics experts, and two comprised of South Carolina educators, parents, community leaders and business people reviewed the standards in regard to rigor, manageability, measurability, comprehensiveness/balance and organization/communication. Recommendations included writing the standards in a less-instructional format, reducing the number of standards per grade level, removing the emphasis on technology as a means of instruction and modifying the content of the high school statistics course to reflect an introductory course. Final action is expected in April 2007.

REVIEW OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM STANDARDS

During the spring of 2006, the Education Oversight Committee conducted a review of the 2002 English Language Arts Curriculum Standards in order to provide recommendations for revision of the present standards. Three panels, one of national English Language Arts experts, and two comprised of South Carolina educators, parents, community leaders and business people reviewed the standards in regards to rigor, manageability, measurability, comprehensiveness/balance and organization/communication. Recommendations included providing improved differentiation of the standards between grade levels, reducing the number of standards per grade level, aligning the standards with other core discipline area standards and providing more specific standards on vocabulary development and grammar. Final action is expected in April 2007.

RETRAINING GRANT PROGRAM REPORT

Education Oversight Committee staff conducted the annual review of the Retraining Grant Program. In 2005-06, 307 schools participated in the program; 48 schools new to the program received a \$10,000

planning grant and 259 received \$450 per each certificated staff member. The majority of schools reported positive use of retraining grant funds. The review of the program found that the schools receiving the planning grant did not receive adequate notice that the funds were available to use in a timely manner.

EXTENDED LEARNING TIME STUDY

Learning Point Associates conducted a study of Extended Learning Time programs throughout the state. The study included a review of best practices literature, documentation of the various types of programs implemented throughout the state, an analysis of the effectiveness of the different approaches to extended learning time on student achievement, and an analysis of the cost effectiveness of the various approaches. Extended learning opportunities include, but are not limited to, summer school, compensatory and remedial programs, homework centers and before- and after-school programs. Many different programs exist throughout the state and in and among the districts. The findings of the report included: district-level involvement in implementation, support from building administration, and program leadership are all important; insufficient funding and low student attendance are areas in need of attention; that homework center participants showed relative gains against all student in grades 5 and 7 in English language arts and in mathematics in grades 5 and 6; and, funding of the programs range from \$5,000 to \$241,781, with programs funded from more than one source having a greater impact on student achievement.

TEACHER LOAN STUDY

Education Oversight Committee staff completed the annual review of the Teacher Loan Program. The program continues to provide needed assistance to individuals seeking certification in a qualifying subject area or teaching in geographic-needs schools. Recommendations to improve the program included a call for a Policy Board of Governance as part of the Commission on Higher Education to set goals, facilitate communication among the cooperating agencies, advocate for the loan participants, and effectively market the program.

FLEXIBILITY STUDY

Education Oversight Committee staff completed the annual review of fund transfers completed by school districts as allowed by budget proviso. Over the last four fiscal years, 71 of 85 school districts have utilized the flexibility proviso a least once. Almost two-thirds of instructional funds transferred under the flexibility proviso come from the Reduce Class Size program. Most transfers come during the last two months of the fiscal year, raising the issue of whether school districts are using the flexibility proviso as an accounting tool to balance expenditures against available revenues at the end of the year instead of using the proviso to realign financial resources to meet the educational needs of students in a systematic manner. To date, there is no correlation between the use of the flexibility proviso and changes in either academic achievement by students or in school district Absolute ratings.



PUBLIC AWARENESS

COMMON GROUND

South Carolina is experiencing unprecedented economic and demographic changes. An innovative approach to long-range planning was used to identify Common Ground. By Common Ground, we mean a set of principals to respond to questions such as: How can we continue the improvements we have made in South Carolina amid challenges such as increasing family poverty and teacher/administrator shortages? What are the long-term implications of increasing populations in some school districts and declining enrollments in others? Common Ground also is providing an opportunity for these conversations to occur at the local level.

We commit to use our influence and energies to create and sustain an aligned educational system that achieves the common mission of South Carolina's young people obtaining the knowledge and skills to be successful members of families and community, participatory citizens in a democratic society and productive contributors to the state's economy.

The above statement represents a commitment, forged in January 2006, by over 50 individuals from various areas of South Carolina and representing diverse audiences. The common mission for these individuals is to use influence and energy to build a strong South Carolina. Divisions exist regarding educating young people in SC but Common Ground focuses on those areas where we agree.

The Common Ground process also revealed five responsibilities which focus on:

- 1 all students succeeding;
- 2 individual students at the center of education;
- 3 the critical role of families;
- 4 recruitment, development and retention of educators; and,
- 5 facilities and technology to serve the entire community.

In June 2006, Education Oversight Committee members and staff began a tour of South Carolina counties focused on the Common Ground commitment and specific community and individual actions which can be outlined to accomplish the goals. The tour, "Looking Forward: Building Upon Common Ground in South Carolina's Changing Environment," is a two-hour discussion occurring in each of South Carolina's 46

counties. Each of the meetings is attended by an Education Oversight Committee member and an Education Oversight Committee staff person. In February 2007, the tour concluded in Bamberg county.

In each county presentation, small group sessions occurred focused on Common Ground at work specific to each county. Small groups answered three questions:

- 1 What is occurring in your communities which addresses these responsibilities and areas for action?
- 2 What are the critical barriers to fulfilling the commitment in your community?
- 3 List the five most important things your community can do to address the responsibilities of Common Ground and list the five most important things you as an individual can do to address the responsibilities of Common Ground.

Several county meetings have resulted in the formation of county Common Ground groups, allowing participants to use the commitment and responsibilities to continue the conversation in their community. Results of the small group discussions were compiled on the Education Oversight Committee's Web site as the tour progressed. A final publication will be produced and disseminated to the Education Oversight Committee and all individuals who have participated in the Education Oversight Committee's nine-month tour.

PUBLIC OPINION POLL

In September, the Education Oversight Committee released the results of a public opinion poll that showed that South Carolinians have more confidence in public schools than they've had in the past. The poll, conducted by an independent, Columbia-based research firm, showed that a positive shift in opinion had occurred since a similar poll was conducted in 1998. In a telephone poll conducted this summer, South Carolinians were asked to evaluate the state's public school system with a report-card style letter grade. Overall, responses were more positive than those from a similar 1998 study; South Carolina schools received more A and B grades than in 1998, and they received fewer grades of D and F. The percentage of A grades given increased from 3 percent to 4 percent. B grades given increased from 15 percent to 24 percent. Grades of D decreased from 26 to 21 percent, and F grades decreased from 16 to 12 percent. Grades of C remained at 38 percent. The Education Oversight Committee conducted the polls to better understand the needs and priorities of South Carolina families who utilize public schools.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY STANDARDS

The Education Oversight Committee, in cooperation with the SDE, published the annual "A Guide for Parents and Families About What Your Child Should Be Learning in School This Year." The publication, available in both English and Spanish versions, provides current information on the standards in the four core content areas in grades K-12. They will be revised and reissued again in 2007.

PARENT SURVEY

Education Oversight Committee staff completed the annual review of the Parent Surveys completed in accordance with the EAA. The review found that the number of parents returning surveys increased for the third consecutive year, but only one-third of all schools and three districts had more than 50 percent of the parent surveys returned. Parents continue to have an overwhelmingly positive perception of the learning environment and social and physical environment of their child's school, but only about two-thirds of the parents responding to the survey had a favorable view of home-school relations at their child's school. Parents continue to express concern over three issues: student behavior; lack of being involved in decision-making and decisions affecting their school; and, lack of having information about what their child should be learning. As in previous years, the primary impediment to parent involvement is their work schedule.

EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE PUBLICATIONS SURVEY

This year, the committee initiated a conscious effort to be mindful of the impact of communication materials regularly published by the agency. In December 2006, Education Oversight Committee staff issued an electronic survey to elicit the views on five publications regularly produced by the Education Oversight Committee. The intent of the survey was to evaluate existing publications to assist the committee and staff in determining how to better serve varied audiences.

PAIRS

Launched in February 2005, Parents and Adults Inspiring Reading Success (PAIRS) is a project of SC's daily newspapers and is administered as a public awareness initiative of the Education Oversight Committee. The mission of PAIRS is to encourage and support the achievement of reading literacy on grade level for every child in South Carolina.

Highlights of the year include:

- + Publication of a "Summer Reading" supplement, a pilot project with The State newspaper. A total of 150,000 copies were printed and distributed in all copies of The State. In addition, multiple copies were provided to school districts statewide and pediatricians' offices and county libraries in Richland, Lexington and Kershaw counties.
- + Establishment of a moderated listserv for PAIRS Affiliate members, allowing members to communicate easily with one another
- + Completion of the first survey and needs assessment of PAIRS Affiliate Programs.

REVISIONS TO REPORT CARD COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

In 2001 the Education Oversight Committee published a communications toolkit to help schools and schools districts communicate the contents of the school and school district report cards to the public. During the spring of 2006 the toolkit was updated and distributed to school and school district administrators through regional workshops.

IV

ADVISORY GROUPS

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