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## **South Carolina receives urgent wake-up call to improve education**

*S.C. Education Oversight Committee announces the state's progress toward improving K-12 education and fulfilling its 2020 Vision; numbers reveal South Carolina is not progressing in key areas.*

Columbia, S.C.—At an event today, the S.C. Education Oversight Committee (EOC) presented its annual progress report on South Carolina's effort toward reaching the 2020 Vision.

The 2020 Vision, developed by the EOC, sets the goal that by the year 2020, "all students will graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete successfully in the global economy, participate in a democratic society and contribute positively as members of families and communities."

The Vision focuses on four areas of educational improvement including reading proficiency, on-time graduation, college and career readiness, and at-risk schools. Progress is monitored annually in each of the four areas.

Based on the progress report, South Carolina has not made significant, lasting progress in the four key areas, with the state missing a majority of the 2011 benchmarks established in the 2020 plan. Without dramatic improvement, the state will not meet the goals set for the year 2020, according to EOC Chairman Neil Robinson.

"Education is critically important to South Carolina's citizens and the growth of our economy," Robinson said. "This progress report shows that we need a new sense of urgency in our state about improving education. We cannot afford to be complacent."

"States that out-educate us will out-compete us," echoed Jim Reynolds, chairman of the boards of the S.C. State Chamber and the Columbia Chamber. "We must take steps to ensure all of our students are given the tools they need to succeed in the global economy."

Here is a closer look at South Carolina's 2011 progress in fulfilling the 2020 Vision:

### **READING PROFICIENCY**

- The 2020 Vision goal is that 95 percent of students will read on grade level. State and national assessments are used to evaluate South Carolina's progress. Based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 2011, 61 percent of South Carolina's 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 72 percent of eight graders are reading at Basic or above. The state ranks 39<sup>th</sup> (4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency) and 38<sup>th</sup> (8<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency) nationally.
- NAEP results for 2011 indicate that achievement gaps persist among students of different ethnicities. For example, African American 4<sup>th</sup> grade students trail white students by nearly 30 percent in reading proficiency, and the number of African American students reading on grade level declined between 2009 and 2011.
- 2011 results from the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) show that the percentage of students who read on grade level decreases as students move through school. In 2011, based on the PASS, approximately 20 percent of 3rd graders and 32 percent of 8th graders were not reading on grade level.
- One in six children who are not reading on grade level in 3rd grade do not graduate on time, a rate four times higher than for proficient readers, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

### **On-Time Graduation**

- The 2020 Vision goal is that 88.3 percent of students will graduate on time and 95 percent of those 21 and over will earn a diploma, GED or State Board of Education-approved occupational certificate (for students with severe disabilities). In 2011, only 73 percent of students graduated on time. If current trends continue, only one-third of South Carolina's schools will obtain an 88.3 percent graduation rate by 2020.
- Graduation rates for Hispanic and African American students are nearly 10 percent lower than for white students.
- The graduation rate of students with disabilities is nearly 40 percent lower than students without disabilities.

### **Workforce Readiness**

- In 2011, only 65.9 percent of spring S.C. graduates were enrolled in a two- or four-year college or technical school by fall.
- This measure is important because the fastest-growing, highest-paying jobs require education beyond high school. According to the Southern Regional Education Board, jobs in the U.S. are projected to increase by 19 percent by 2018 for people with associate's degrees and by 17 percent with those with bachelor's degrees.

### **At-Risk Schools**

- The goal set out in the 2020 Vision is that by the year 2020, South Carolina will have no schools rated at-risk based on student academic achievement and graduation rates (defined in the state's Education Accountability Act). As of 2011, the state still has 69 at-risk schools.

"To achieve the goals outlined in the EOC's 2020 Vision, education reform must be a top agenda item in South Carolina," said S.C. House Majority Leader Kenny Bingham, one of the speakers at today's event. "True innovation and change are going to require all of us—elected leaders, educators, parents the business community, and concerned citizens coming together for the good of South Carolina's children. We cannot overlook the fact that education and economic development go hand in hand. For South Carolina to compete, improving education must become everyone's job."

Although the state has remained static on several education fronts, pockets of progress exist. One example is Darlington County's Lamar High School, which is hitting the benchmarks for the 2020 Vision and was spotlighted at today's event. Although it has a poverty index of 86.69, Lamar's 2011 graduation rate was 95 percent for all students including African American students, the fifth highest in the nation.

"I am incredibly proud of what the teachers, administrators and students of our district have accomplished. It has taken a great deal of blood, sweat and tears to get to this point. But we still have much to do and far to go," said Darlington County School District Superintendent Dr. Rainey Knight. "Across the state, we need to push ourselves and our students harder. We need to raise our graduation rates, close our achievement gaps and increase our reading proficiency levels. I am proud of what we have done, but I am also excited to see the determination from our teachers and administrators to raise the bar even farther for our children."

"In light of today's progress report on education, we must look at best practices of schools like Lamar High School to move our entire state forward," said EOC Vice Chair Barbara Hairfield, a curriculum specialist for the Charleston County School District. "Legislators, educators and school boards must work together to take a hard look at traditional education systems and foster innovation in the classroom. Together, we can improve individual student outcomes and build one of the best performing education systems in the nation."

*For the full 2020 Vision progress report and to learn about how to get involved in transforming education, visit [www.eoc.sc.gov](http://www.eoc.sc.gov).*

### **About the Education Oversight Committee**

The EOC was created by the S.C. General Assembly and is an independent, non-partisan group of 18 educators, business leaders and elected officials, the EOC, through ongoing review and evaluation, holds the state accountable for building the education system South Carolina needs to compete. The EOC's mission is to affect the dramatic, results-based and continuous improvement of South Carolina's educational system by creating a truly collaborative environment of parents, educators, community leaders and policymakers. For more information, visit [www.eoc.sc.gov](http://www.eoc.sc.gov).