



*from* the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee  
P.O. Box 11867, Room 227 Blatt Building  
Columbia, South Carolina, 29211  
Contact: Dana Yow, (803) 734-6148  
[www.eoc.sc.gov](http://www.eoc.sc.gov)

**For Immediate Release: November 8, 2013**

## **SC schools and districts show consistent improvement**

### ***“transformation” in accountability necessary to prepare students for college and careers***

**Columbia** – Today, the results of the 13<sup>th</sup> annual state district and school report cards were released, showing significant improvement among schools and districts. Thirty school districts received a rating of Excellent this year, compared to only one in 2009. Only two school districts received an Absolute rating of *At Risk*. While the improvements made by students and schools should be applauded, adjustments must be made to the accountability system to better prepare all students for college and careers.

According to Neil C. Robinson, Jr., Chairman of the EOC, conversations with superintendents and instructional leaders in improving school districts have pointed to an emphasis on improving teaching as the main reason for the significant increase in student performance between 2012 and 2013. The majority of South Carolina school districts have begun to implement the Common Core State Standards, a rigorous set of standards in English Language Arts and mathematics. The integration of the new standards has provided many professional development opportunities for teachers focused on transforming the practice of delivering quality instruction to students.

“The magic bullet is not money or programs; it is improving the quality of the teaching that students receive and believing in every child that walks into every classroom,” said Robinson. “Teachers, principals, school board members, parents, legislators and community leaders should be commended for their dedication to the success of young people. It takes everyone in school buildings, homes, faith communities, businesses working together for the success of all children.”

Although the results are encouraging, Robinson points out that South Carolina cannot claim victory for students just yet. By 2020, 65 percent of all jobs will require post-secondary education, training, and/or certification. Many high school graduates do not have the skills to be “highly qualified” in an increasingly competitive job market. Additionally, 41 percent of high school graduates require remediation at the state’s two-year institutions.

“We are doing a much better job of graduating students in the current system but we must ask ourselves if all students are prepared for college and careers,” said Robinson. “Many schools have reached the top of the mountain in the current system, but a new, taller mountain awaits that will take hard work and persistence to summit.”

Robinson is calling for a “transformation” in accountability, admitting it would not be fair to ask more of students and schools while not asking more of policymakers. South Carolina currently has a federal accountability system as well as a state accountability system that measure schools and districts. While both systems use the same input measures, the performance of schools is evaluated differently.

“Educators and families need clear, consistent messages about the performance of schools and students and the system should focus solely on every student having the knowledge, opportunity, and skills to be college-ready, career ready and life ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” stated Robinson.

The EOC will be considering a proposal in December that as Robinson states “values more than student test scores.” The proposal considers opportunity measures like student access to arts and world language programs, dual enrollment, and dropout recovery programs. Measures of skills and abilities would consider authentic assessments of extended performance tasks as well as work-based and service-learning.

Robinson points out that highly valued skills in business are things like the ability to solve problems creatively and work collaboratively in teams—“skills that aren’t easily measured with a test.”

“Transforming the accountability system will not be easy work,” stated Robinson. “We must all re-commit ourselves to doing what is best for children and their success.”

### **Comments from Superintendents who have led districts who have achieved significant improvements:**

As a district, our primary focus has been on instruction for all students. We have developed a culture of continuous improvement by building our internal capacity. Ongoing data analysis, sustained stable leadership and focused professional development have further contributed to the success of our students. The majority of our professional development is led by our own teachers and administrators on District Wednesdays and designated professional development days. The focus of that professional development has remained constant--we have invested in our teachers, recognizing that programs do not impact student achievement; teachers do. This has led to continued collaboration within and across our schools furthering continuous improvement for all students, teachers, and administrators. We live our brand of “One District, One Team, One Mission.”

- **Mr. Bennie Bennett, Superintendent of School District of Newberry County (2013 Absolute Rating: *Excellent*; Growth Rating: *Excellent*)**

“...We have high-quality, data-driven instruction taking place in classrooms throughout the district every day. We have focused on literacy, worked to close achievement gaps between groups of students and improve our graduation rate, and provided intensive and ongoing professional development for our staff...”

- **Dr. Percy Mack, Superintendent of Richland School District One (2013 Absolute Rating; *Average*; Growth Rating: *Excellent*)**

“...Our greatest challenge and opportunity is closing the achievement gap in many of our high poverty schools. Cleveland Academy has been restructured and is now a Leader in Me School. We added 5 additional mandatory weeks to the school year for students and teachers. As such, students attend 205 days and teacher contracts are now 215 days. We witnessed significant increases in reading and math scores in grades 3 and 5...”

I believe our total comprehensive restructuring efforts are beginning to pay off. This includes the opening of an early learning center serving children birth to 4K in a full day, full service community school program; creating the Viking Early College in order to afford first generation male students an opportunity to earn an associate’s degree upon completion from high school; launching Seven Ignites in an effort to eliminate the digital divide and disrupt traditional approaches to teaching and learning by placing a Macbook Air laptop in the hands of every student in grades 6-12 and an iPad in the hands of students in grades 3-5, along with a continued focus on creating schools of choice throughout the district...

It is my belief that the culture of our district is one that embraces innovation and risk taking...”

- **Dr. Russell Booker, Superintendent of Spartanburg 7 (2013 Absolute Rating: *Good*; Growth Rating: *Excellent*)**

##

*The SC Education Oversight Committee is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected leaders. Created in 1998, the committee is dedicated to reporting facts, measuring change, and promoting progress within South Carolina’s education system.*