



July 24, 2009

TO: Members, Education Oversight Committee

FROM: Jo Anne Anderson  
Katrina Greene

RE: Promoting Higher Levels of Achievement in Reading

*“Which schools are achieving success in teaching young people to read?”* Over the last several years, South Carolina’s policy makers repeatedly have asked this question in one form or another. The State has invested heavily in improving the reading proficiency of her students through a variety of resources and/or initiatives to include: professional development on the standards, formative assessments, lottery-funded professional development, the South Carolina Reading Initiative (SCRI), etc. Yet our schools and services that support them have not been as successful as we had hoped and our young people have not achieved the level of performance we desire for them.

Studies of student achievement and success after school are replete with examples and exhibits of how the capacity to read with understanding and comprehension undergird performance in other endeavors. In 2008 ACT reported that only “one in five 2008 high school graduates is prepared for entry-level college courses in English Composition, College Algebra, social science and Biology, while 1 in 4 is not prepared for college-level coursework in any of the four subject areas.”<sup>1</sup> Achieve, an organization affiliated with both the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA), indicates that “most high school graduates need remedial help in college. More than 70 percent of graduates quickly take the next step into two- and four-year colleges, but at least 28 percent of those students immediately take remedial English or math courses. Transcripts show that during their college careers, 53 percent of students take at least one remedial English or math class.”<sup>2</sup> The American Management Association (AMA) indicates that 38 percent of job applicants lack necessary reading skills.<sup>3</sup> The American Federation of Teachers cites research indicating that “children who are poor readers at the end

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<sup>1</sup> ACT, *Measuring College Readiness: The national graduating class of 2008* (Iowa City, Iowa: 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Achieve. *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts* (Washington, D. C.: 2004).

<sup>3</sup> AMA, *US Corporations Find Prospective Employees Lack Basic Skills* (Washington, D. C.: American Management Association, 2001) 1.

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of first grade are never likely to acquire the reading skills they need to successfully complete elementary school, unless these students are identified early in their school career and given intensive, systematic, intervention.”<sup>4</sup> The recently published *Putting Middle Grades Students on the Graduation Path* documents that sixth graders who failed English had only 10 percent to 20 percent chance of graduating on time.<sup>5</sup>

Studies and examinations of the critical nature of reading for South Carolina’s students confirm the national conclusions. In 2002 Miley and Associates, under contract to the EOC, found that students not scoring proficient on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT) in grade eight had only a 50 percent chance of graduating from high school.<sup>6</sup> In the 2009 stakeholder’s studies conducted by Clemson University in partnership with the EOC, the priority South Carolinians placed on reading was apparent:<sup>7</sup>

Table One

Question: “I’m going to list a set of skills that may be important for young people leaving school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How would you rate those skills in terms of importance?”

Percent of respondents

Skill	Critical	Very Important	Important	Total (Columns left to right)
Reading	82.4	15.0	2.4	99.8
Math	68.2	24.7	6.8	99.7
Writing	64.6	26.6	8.3	99.5
Skills to Succeed in the Workplace	68.3	23.8	7.0	99.1
Knowledgeable Citizen	59.0	30.1	10	99.1
Science	38.5	36.4	21.9	96.8

The General Assembly has indicated the priority that is to be placed on reading through the statements in §59-18-300 which provide

The State Board of Education is directed to adopt grade specific performance-oriented educational standards in the core academic areas of mathematics, English/language arts, social studies (history, government, economics, and geography), and science for kindergarten through twelfth grade and for grades nine through twelve adopt specific academic standards for high school credit courses in mathematics, English/language arts, social studies, and science. The standards are to promote the goals of providing every student with the competencies to:

- (1) read, view, and listen to complex information in the English language;
- (2) write and speak effectively in the English language;

<sup>4</sup> American Federation of Teachers, *Charting the Course: The AFT’s Education Agenda to Read All Children* (Washington, D. C.: June 2007) 4.

<sup>5</sup> National Middle School Association, *Putting Middle Grades Students on the Graduation Path: A Policy and Practice Brief*. (Westerville, Ohio: 2009) 4.

<sup>6</sup> Miley and Associates, *The Relationship between Reading Proficiency and High School Graduation Rates* (Columbia, S.C.: Education Oversight Committee, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Clemson University, *South Carolinians Speak Out on Education* (Columbia, S.C.: Education Oversight Committee, June 8, 2009) 6.

- (3) solve problems by applying mathematics;
- (4) conduct research and communicate findings;
- (5) understand and apply scientific concepts;
- (6) obtain a working knowledge of world, United States, and South Carolina history, government, economics, and geography; and
- (7) use information to make decisions.

The standards must be reflective of the highest level of academic skills with the rigor necessary to improve the curriculum and instruction in South Carolina's schools so that students are encouraged to learn at unprecedented levels and must be reflective of the highest level of academic skills at each grade level.

S.C. has invested heavily in reading instruction. For example, Fiscal Year 2009 state appropriations provided the following:

- \$1.6 billion for the state portion of the Education Finance Act for instruction in the core academic disciplines,
- \$3.2 m for Reading Recovery (Clemson University received funds for summer training, 37 or 85 districts participated);
- \$2.3 m for Institute on Reading (Includes \$1.2 m in competitive grants of \$50K in 17 of 85 districts);
- \$1.2 m from Professional Development on the Standards (direct flow-through to districts based upon the number of K-12 teachers);
- \$50 m lottery funds (spread across four core disciplines)
- Professional development funds spread through the disciplines;
- \$76 million in state technical assistance allocations to underperforming schools, again with priority emphasis on English language arts and mathematics;
- \$ 34 million in gifted & talented program allocations (Note: this includes a 12 percent set-aside for the arts)

The Education Oversight Committee, in collaboration with the education associations and State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex, advocated for and achieved a roll-up of several Education Improvement Act (EIA) line appropriations into a general reading budget category. That appropriation is \$6.5 million. In the 2009-2010 General Appropriations Act, the proviso directing use of those funds states

*Of the funds appropriated for reading, the Department of Education must allocate a minimum of twenty-five percent of these funds to school districts based on the number of weighted pupil units in each school district in proportion to the statewide weighted pupil units using the 135 day count of the prior school year. Districts must expend the funding on teaching teachers how to teach reading at all levels and across all content areas. The remaining funds are retained by the Department of Education to implement a comprehensive plan to improve reading, including the use of Reading Recovery and other reading initiatives and to increase the number of students scoring at met and exemplary levels on state assessments.*

The purpose of this memorandum is to outline the status of reading achievement in our elementary and middle schools, to examine high status and high growth performance in our elementary and middle public schools and to identify the constellation of factors that may impact performance in reading. The information and data presented in the memorandum are intended to lay a foundation of understanding upon which a state level reading initiative can be built, to form the basis for studies of school leadership and instructional practices and to inform policy and practice.

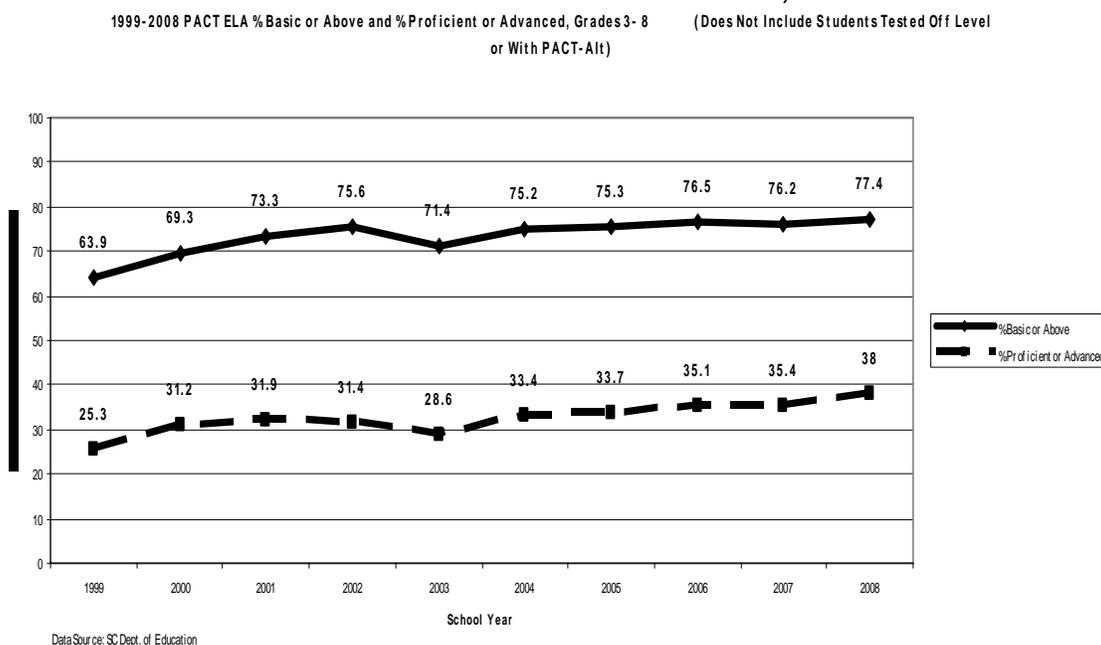
## Reading Achievement in S.C. Elementary and Middle Schools

Between 1999 and 2008 the reading performance of elementary and middle school students in South Carolina was assessed using PACT. As indicated in the chart below, S.C. students improved generally on PACT.

Chart One

1999-2008 PACT ELA % of Students Scoring Basic and Above and % Scoring Proficient or Advanced, Grades 3-8

(Does not include students tested off-level or with PACT-Alternate)



While some improvements are seen, the percentage of students (statewide, across all grades) scoring Basic and above has improved by less than two points since 2002. At the proficient and advanced levels more gains are evident; however, performance has been relatively flat since 2005. Explorations of data published on the S.C. Department of Education website and/or studies published by the EOC indicate the following:

- The highest level of performance, greatest growth in cohort scores and highest percentage of students scoring Advanced over the 1999-2008 PACT years has occurred at grade three<sup>8</sup>;
- Gaps between the performance of groups of students disaggregated by ethnicity, income, disability status and English language learner status persist over the PACT years;<sup>9</sup>
- Studies of advanced scores indicate that, in any given year, the percentage of students scoring Advanced ranged from 1 to 12 percent and that students were consistently less likely to score advanced in grade five<sup>10</sup>;

Changes in performance on PACT of English Language Arts varied between 2005 and 2008. As the summary table below indicates when the performance of successive groups of third

<sup>8</sup> S.C. Department of Education. Retrieved from [www.ed.sc.gov](http://www.ed.sc.gov), June 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> S.C. Education Oversight Committee, May 2007 Academic Standards and Assessments Subcommittee Meeting Materials. Retrieved from EOC Files, June 2009.

graders is examined there were insignificant changes in performance at the elementary grades, large gains at grade six, slight gains at grade seven and losses at grade eight. Groups of students over time did not improve relative to the expectations of grade level tests.

Table Two  
 PACT –English Language Arts Performance  
 Comparison of 2005 with 2008  
 Percentages of Students Scoring Basic and above

Tested Year	Grade 3			Grade 4			Grade 5			Grade 6			Grade 7			Grade 8		
	All	AA	F/R															
2008	86.7	80	80.8	80.8	70.4	72.3	77.6	66.2	67.5	74.8	61.2	63.5	73	60.6	61.9	71	56.6	58.4
2005	81.1	80.5	81.1	79.6	69.4	71.1	76.8	63.9	66.7	63.5	47.3	49.7	71.5	57.7	59.7	74.7	61.5	63.3
Change	5.6	-0.5	-0.3	1.2	1	1.2	0.8	2.3	0.8	11.3	13.9	13.8	1.5	2.9	2.2	-3.7	-4.9	-4.9

The growth in the middle grades is encouraging. A previously published EOC study, *Longitudinal Analysis of Six Years of PACT Achievement Data, 2000-2005*, reported that, when followed longitudinally (i.e., using data matched at the individual student level) performance declined over the six years studied, most notably at the middle school grades.<sup>11</sup> The study highlighted the intractability of performance noting that two-thirds of students who scored Below Basic in 2000 also scored Below Basic in 2005. In contrast 58.1 percent of the students who performed at the Proficient or Advanced levels in grade 3 in 2000 also scored Proficient or Advanced in 2005.

Much attention has been paid to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) because of its utility in comparing state performance at grades four, eight and twelve (S.C. does not participate in grade twelve testing). While the scale scores for both the state and nation have not risen significantly, S.C. has risen in rankings among the states. In 1998 53 percent of S.C. students scored at or above Basic in comparison to 58 percent nationally; by 2008 the percentages are 59 and 66 respectively. At grade eight, S.C. came closer to the nation by increasing the percentage of students scoring at or above Basic from 66 to 69 across the 1998-2007 time periods while the nation grew from 71 to 73 percent.

A recent analysis of state NAEP achievement at all performance levels by the Center on Education Policy indicated that for the period 2002-2008 S.C. accomplished slight increases (<1.0 percentage point per year) in elementary reading at the basic and above and at the advanced levels and moderate to large increases ( $\geq 1.0$  percentage point per year) at the proficient and above levels. For grade eight NAEP reading, S.C. gains were deemed slight at all performance levels.<sup>12</sup>

#### Language Development and Performance in Reading

Much has been written about the relationship between poverty and language development. Regardless of the assessment, students from middle class environments, with educated mothers and who are exposed to rich stimulating life experiences score better than those

<sup>11</sup> S.C. Education Oversight Committee, *Longitudinal Analysis of Six Years of PACT Achievement Data, 2000-2005*. (Columbia, S. C. October 2006) 11.

<sup>12</sup> Center for Education Policy, *Is the Emphasis on "Proficiency" Shortchanging Higher- and Lower-Achieving Students?"* (Washington, D. C., June 2009).

without those assets. While poverty does not determine success, a number of studies document the relationship between early language development and lifelong language experiences to school performance generally and reading performance specifically. Berliner summarizes a number of studies in his work on out-of-school factors, noting the differences shown below by family income group:<sup>13</sup>

Chart Two  
Comparative Language Development in Young Children

Vocabulary by age 3:

- Welfare families 525 words
- Working families 749
- Professional families 1116

Cumulative language exposure by age 4:

- Welfare families 13 million words
- Working families 26 million words
- Professional families 45 million words

Ratio of communications: encouragement v. discouragement

- Welfare families 5:11
- Working families 12:7
- Professional families 32:5

S.C.'s young people typically are enrolled in schools with high concentrations of poverty. Over half (56 percent) of S.C.'s schools are composed of student bodies in which 70 percent or more of the students are participating in the federal lunch program and/or Medicaid. Only 6 percent of schools have less than one-third of their students living in poverty (67 of 1172 schools). Only 47 schools (4 percent) serve a population of 30 percent poverty or less. Almost one-quarter (23 percent) of S.C. schools serve a population that is 90 percent poor.<sup>14</sup>

High Performing Elementary and Middle Schools

Which schools are experiencing success and with which students? What can we learn from these schools that is transferable to schools not demonstrating the same level of success?

To answer these questions, Dr. Mandeville examined the relative success of schools on reading as a status measure, on gains in reading performance from one year to the next and on success (either status or growth) with students historically at risk for under-achievement. For the purposes of this study the at-risk focus was limited to African American status and those students participating in the free/reduced price lunch program. Schools included in the study were those elementary schools with grades 3, 4, and 5 (n= 516) and middle schools with grades 6, 7, and 8 (n= 205). A minimum of ten students was required for each grade level for each year. The researchers implemented a methodology which extracted the scale scores on reading items from PACT English Language Arts (ELA) scores from the 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 administrations. School mean scale scores for reading across the four years were ranked by grade and across grades (i.e., grade 3, grade 4, grade 5 and across grades 3-5 for elementary schools and grade 6, grade 7, grade 8 and across grades 6-8 for middle schools). The top 25 schools in each category were identified and compared to the other three groups to produce an unduplicated listing of high performing schools. A similar strategy was used to identify high growth schools. To confirm the scale score methodology, a separate analysis of

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<sup>13</sup> Berliner, David C. *Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success* (East Lansing, Michigan: The Great Lakes Center for Education Research & Practice. 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Education Oversight Committee. *Discussion Points for 2008 Annual School and District Report Cards*. Retrieved from [www.eoc.sc.gov](http://www.eoc.sc.gov), June 2009.

the data was conducted using z scores. The correlations between the ranks, using the two methodologies, were .98 (Pearson) and .99 (Spearman). Thus, the two approaches produced similar results.

The Table below displays the number of unduplicated schools, hereafter referred to as Reading Study Schools, within each study category. The greater variability among grade levels within the middle schools is evident from the larger number of schools identified at that level than among elementary schools.

Table Three  
Unduplicated Count of Reading Study Schools by Category

School Level	High Status	Low Status	High Growth	Low Growth
Elementary	34	41	71	75
Middle	32	34	64	62

School ratings and profile data were examined to determine factors that the schools may hold in common. The 2008 absolute ratings of the schools affirm the pattern of absolute ratings designations seen in the annual school and district report cards over time. The distribution of improvement/growth ratings is more varied than reviews of all school ratings.

Table Four  
How Are the Reading Study Schools Rated?

	Excellent	Good	Average	Below Average	At-Risk
High Status Elementary	25	9	6	7	7
Low Status Elementary				7	34
High Growth Elementary	7	18	21	16	7*
Low Growth Elementary	2	5	20	31	17
High Status Middle	3	15	14		
Low Status Middle				2	32
High Growth Middle	3	8	19	22	12
Low Growth Middle		4	13	20	25

\*Missing data on two schools

Analyses of the school profile data for 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 (the data presented in Table 4 below are means across the four years) identified majority-minority enrollment proportions and participation rates in the free/reduced price lunch program as the major differences between high and low status Reading Study schools.<sup>15</sup> At the elementary level the high status Reading

<sup>15</sup> Annual School and District Report Cards, 2005-2008. Retrieved from S.C. Department of Education, [www.ed.sc.gov](http://www.ed.sc.gov), June 2009.

Study schools had mean minority enrollments of 18 percent at the elementary level and 24.6 percent at the middle school level. For low status Reading Study schools the mean minority enrollment was 86.7 percent at the elementary level and 80.4 percent at the middle school level. Minority status correlated with Reading Study group assignment (based upon rank of reading achievement) at a .7 level, consistently at each grade level and across grades. The mean free/reduced price lunch participation for high status elementary schools (20.9 percent) and low status schools (91.7 percent) varied significantly. For middle schools high status schools had a mean participation rate of 29.1 percent, compared to 83.9 percent for low status schools. Lunch status correlated at the .8 level consistently across each grade level and across grades.

Neither minority status nor poverty correlated with assignment to a High Growth category for elementary or middle schools.

On other published profile factors, the variability was such that no one factor could be considered deterministic. In fact, the variability suggests opportunity for changes in instruction and school experience to enhance reading performance. These, with ranges noted, include:

Table Five  
 DESCRIPTIONS OF THE READING STUDY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS  
 Mean Values across Four Years  
 (Minimum - Maximum)

	Students			Educators				Resources			ELA Scores
	Dis-abled	Gifted & Talented	Prime Instructional Time*	Adv. Degree	Returnin g	Attenda nce	Principals ' Years at School	S:T Ratio	\$/stud ent	% on inst.	ELA Basic & Above 2008
High Status	5.5 (2-10.4)	30.9 (0-75.9)	90.9 (88.2-96.3)	60.7 (26-80.6)	83.2 (60.7-92.2)	95.1 (91-98)	7.1 (1.3-24.5)	20.1 (16.7-23.6)	\$6339 (\$465- \$8459)	70.7 (56.1-78.4)	94 (77.6-99.9)
Low Status	7.6 (3.7-13.8)	2.9 (0-11.5)	87.9 (84.2-92.7)	50.2 (25.8-78)	84 (64.7-96.5)	94.6 (89.7-98.7)	3.9 (1.3-12.5)	16.3 (13.3-19.3)	\$7986 (\$535- 12306)	68.5 (55.1-81.4)	59.7 (48.7-73.3)
High Growth	7.1 (2.7-14.3)	13.5 (0.7-47.2)	89.5 (85.6-93.9)	54.2 (20.9-80.9)	86.1 (66.7-97.4)	95 (89.8-99.1)	4.9 (1.5-17.3)	18.2 (12.1-23.3)	\$7073 (\$394- 11486)	68.2 (56.98-81.6)	81.9 (54.1-98)
Low Growth	8.3 (2.3-17.6)	10.5 (0-37.9)	89.4 (84.4-93)	54.1 (23.4-76.7)	85.1 (63.1-97.7)	99.4 (89.3-94.8)	7.3 (0.6-xx)**	17.7 (10.9-21.5)	\$7468 (\$536- 23939)	69.3 (58.8-90.9)	73.6 (49.1-95.6)

\*Prime instructional time is an aggregation of teacher and student attendance; therefore, the factor is shown as applying to both students and teachers.

\*\*Data set includes erroneous values.

Table Six  
 DESCRIPTIONS OF THE READING STUDY MIDDLE SCHOOLS  
 Mean Values across Four Years  
 (Minimum - Maximum)

	Students			Educators				Resources			ELA Scores
	Dis-abled	Gifted & Talented	Prime Instructional Time*	Adv. Degree	Returnin g	Attendan ce	Principals' Years at School	S:T Ratio	\$/stude nt	% on inst.	ELA Basic & Above 2008
High Status	9.5 (1-16.5)	32.8 (15.3-75.9)	90.1 (88.2-92.6)	55.9 (35.3-78.2)	80.4 (58-94.7)	95 (91.6-97.9)	5.6 (1.3-15.5)	22.4 (17.8-25.9)	\$6094 (\$4724-8304)	65.7 (53.6-75.6)	85.7 (78-99.9)
Low Status	13.7 (4.9-22.1)	7.5 (0.7-12.6)	87.4 (84.1-90.4)	50.7 (36.3-67.5)	81.9 (62.3-93.6)	94.6 (87.6-98.3)	2.7 (0.9-9.5)	18.2 (13.3-23.7)	\$7873 (\$5193-12429)	64.2 (52-72.7)	52.8 (32.5-71.2)
High Growth	11.8 (0.8-26.7)	18.7 (3-75.9)	89.1 (83.2-93.7)	53.1 (20-78.2)	81.6 (57.8-94.5)	94.9 (89.3-99.1)	4.2 (1-15.5)	20.7 (13.2-28.5)	\$6593 (\$4945-9174)	64.5 (52.1-77.6)	74 (46-99.9)
Low Growth	12.9 (4.9-19)	15.8 (0.7-34.6)	88.7 (84.1-92.3)	51.5 (36.4-73.1)	82.6 (58.5-94.6)	95.1 (88.3-99)	4.4 (1.3-19)	20.5 (13.3-26.3)	\$6760 (\$4886-12429)	65. (505-73.8)	65.1 (32.5-87.1)

\*Prime instructional time is an aggregation of teacher and student attendance; therefore, the factor is shown as applying to both students and teachers.

Are there Reading Study schools that achieved both a high status rank and a high growth rank or low status and high growth?

When examined for the performance of all students, seven elementary schools are identified as both high status and high growth schools. Eleven middle schools achieved the high status-high growth designation. Seven elementary and six middle schools were identified as both Low Status and High Growth schools.

Are the schools affiliated with a particular program or initiative?

Early reviews of the schools indicate that they are not identified with a particular reading initiative. Over the 2000-2008 academic years the S.C. Department of Education implemented three reading initiatives: S.C. Reading Initiative; S.C. Reads and S.C. Reading First. Four hundred forty-eight (448) primary, elementary, middle and high schools participated in one or more aspects of the study. Of the Reading Study schools in this study, only 16 of the 99 high status or high growth elementary schools participated in one of the initiatives. Therefore, there are insufficient data and/or experiences in the Reading Study schools to make inferences or draw conclusions about those programs.

The Low Status elementary and middle schools are and have been receiving technical assistance funding for at least three years. Those achieving high levels of growth have experienced increases in the school's absolute index as the index is linked to performance on the PACT (although it should be noted that indices reflect performance across the four major content disciplines and therefore gains in the index cannot be attributed to reading alone.) None of the Low Status – High Growth middle schools is a Palmetto Priority School.

### Are these schools successful with groups of students who historically have under-achieved?

The procedures used to identify elementary and middle schools for the Reading Study were repeated using criteria specific to historically underachieving populations. For African American student progress, schools enrolling at least 30 African American students (i.e., ten students per grade per year) were included and a second analysis was conducted based upon participation in the free/reduced price lunch program. Again, schools were ranked and unduplicated schools added to the count. For elementary schools identified as high status schools, there is minimal overlap with schools achieving high status with African American students or students participating in the free/reduced price lunch program. Data presented earlier in this memorandum demonstrate that that high status schools enroll significantly lower numbers of African American students or students in poverty. There is considerable overlap among the groupings of low status-high growth schools, with three elementary schools leading in every analysis. The same data patterns emerge for middle schools.

### What do the school leaders say is working?

This is the focus of the next stage of our work. I have spoken with leaders in three low status-high growth elementary schools. In fact, these three schools are identified as outstanding in all three analyses (all students, African American students and free/reduced lunch program students). While we should not generalize their experiences to all of the successful schools, the conversations suggest topics to be explored with other school leaders.

Each of the leaders described the work with students as “explicit”, “direct” and “relentless.” Similarities in their approaches emerged from the conversations:

(a) Language Development: Each of the three schools has made efforts to strengthen the kindergarten through grade two experiences and for one school, the district has funded full-day pre-kindergarten programs for four-year-olds through a combination of federal, EIA and state funds. Emphasis is placed on core reading words. One principal elaborated on this strategy, indicating that the school could not assume that a student arrived at school with a basic vocabulary or that the student would acquire that vocabulary through informal experience. The students must be taught the words, their meanings and their utilization. Teachers use extensive conversation and encouragement of writing to expand student facility with language. As one principal described, “the children come to us with minimal language development. Not only do we have to teach them the meaning and use of words, we have to build their confidence and their security in expressing ideas.”

(b) Instruction differentiated at the individual student level: Each of the three schools uses the *Measures of Academic Progress* formative assessment program to place students in small groups to supplement classroom instruction; at the primary grades *Domini* is used by two of the schools. Two of the three schools use small groups extensively and organize those groups based upon students’ knowledge and skill rather than grade assignment. To elaborate, students receive initial instruction from their primary teacher (who is held responsible for their learning) and receive supplementary instruction from another certified teacher. This coordination requires extensive collaboration among teachers. Class sizes are generally small in all three schools (18-20 students) with supplementary small groups limited to six students. In each of the schools English language arts was provided a minimum of 120 minutes; notably each principal indicated that reading is emphasized in science and social studies. One school is using single gender approaches.

(c) Embedded collaborative professional growth: Two of the principals suggested that teachers in the upper elementary grades required professional development and support to prescribe and implement strategies for struggling readers. At least one of the schools brought in a Reading Recovery master teacher to provide professional development. Two school leaders indicate that they have reallocated the time from three of four monthly faculty meetings from

administrative issues to professional development and teacher collaboration. All schools have restructured schedules to permit lengthier planning periods for teachers.

(d) Extended learning time: School leaders reach out to their communities for support and for providing extended learning time. Boys and Girls Clubs programs after school and in the summer, use of City Year volunteers or teacher retirees are examples of other learning time extensions.

(e) Fidelity to the student, not the program: There are no *silver bullets*. When asked about federal or state initiatives, each leader expressed support for the framework, structure and wealth of professional development and technical assistance available; however, they agreed that the challenge “when your school is on everyone’s radar” is to blend the assistance into one coherent school plan. The circumstances of the students’ lives and in the school are so complex that a single program cannot be the answer. The educators must diagnose, prescribe and implement strategies that are faithful to the needs and potential of the student.

#### Actions for Developing Policies and Practices to Enhance Achievement in Reading

The EOC has identified a group of elementary and middle schools achieving at high levels or improving more than their peers. Examinations of the extant data suggest that differences in policies and practices implemented through the instructional program have greater and more consistent impact than any single characteristics of students, teachers, and resources. Success is accomplished in classrooms when high impact decisions are made at the point of instruction. While the data affirm the challenges of poverty and the underperformance of African American students, the data indicate that some schools are successful with students who historically have not achieved. To advance our understanding and progress, we are pursuing the following:

(1) Further Analyses: The next stage of analyses should explore the following questions with district and school administrators to determine:

- How teacher expertise is developed, encouraged and utilized with students?
- How is instruction differentiated to the student level?
- What reading strategies or programs are used in the schools (e.g., models of instruction)?
- How has the school allocated time, additional personnel or other resources to facilitate students learning to read?
- How have parents and the community been engaged?
- How have external investments impacted status or growth for schools? What opportunity exists either to change or supplement current practices?
- How are district policies and attention focused on learning to read?
- What are the linkages between PACT/PASS to earlier performance (e.g., CDEPP, district-administered formative assessments)?

During fall 2009 EOC, SCDE and Kids Count staff persons are to construct a web-based survey to be administered to district and school administrators in order to understand the issues outlined in the questions above. As funding is available we would like to conduct structured interviews of school leaders and teachers to identify transferable practices.

(2) Investments in Successful Services: In January 2010 the EOC is to report on the school readiness and developmental or achievement gains made by students participating in the Child Development Education Program Pilot (CDEPP.) CDEPP currently serves eligible four-year-olds who reside in the plaintiff school districts for *Abbeville et. al. v. The State of South Carolina*. Early experiences with the program suggest that General Assembly should be urged to place a

priority on expanding the program to serve eligible children across the state, regardless of the district of residence.

The SCDE is revising its approach to professional development and technical assistance in the areas which would enhance reading achievement. Dr. Harrison is to discuss that initiative at the August 10 meeting.

(3) Policy Development: S.C. Kids Count, the SCDE and EOC are pursuing a policy grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to further explore the achievement gaps among grade kindergarten through grade four students of differing ethnicities and income levels and to support the development of comprehensive policy recommendations.

(4) Community Engagement: The EOC and the S.C. State Library are in the early planning stages for statewide community engagement activities around reading. Over the fall, the ideas are to be solidified and partners identified and recruited.