



*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)

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## **SC schools and districts show improvement; persistent underperformance still an issue**

**Columbia** - Today marks the release of the 12<sup>th</sup> annual state district and school report cards. Student achievement improved in many districts and schools in South Carolina; however, South Carolina still has challenges ahead to prepare better all of our students for college and careers, especially in the state's historically underperforming areas.

The 2012 state report cards can be summarized in four points:

**# 1: There was a significant increase in number of school districts and schools rated Excellent or Good due to overall improved student performance on a variety of measures and assessments.**

- South Carolina has 42 school districts with an absolute rating of Excellent or Good in 2012, up from 33 in 2011, for a 27 percent increase.
- South Carolina has 629 schools with an absolute rating of Excellent or Good in 2012, up from 529 in 2011, for a 19 percent increase.
- Sixty-one percent of students attended schools with an absolute rating of Excellent or Good in 2011-12 school year

According to Neil C. Robinson, Jr., Chairman of the EOC, "teachers, students, principals, school board members, parents, legislators and community leaders should be commended for the results on the 2012 state report cards."

Robinson reiterated that student performance drives the school and district rating system. Factors that attributed to the increase in the ratings included:

- Increases in 2012 PASS Scores in 17 of 26 content areas across grades 3 through 8, especially in science and social studies;
- an increase in the number of students passing End-of-Course assessments in English I, US History/Constitution and Biology;
- an increase in the number of students passing the High School Assessment Program (HSAP); and
- an increase in on-time high school graduation rate from 73.6 percent to 74.9 percent in 2012

## **# 2: The public schools continue to see an increase in the number of students in poverty.**

- Seven in 10 children attending public schools in SC are eligible for the free/reduced price lunch and/or Medicaid programs.
- Seven in 10 districts in our state have a poverty index that exceeds 70 percent for its students.

There is evidence that schools and school districts are meeting and overcoming the challenges of poverty as they relate to student achievement. Of the 61 school districts with a poverty index above 70%, 21 had an absolute rating of Excellent or Good.

According to Robinson, “this performance is evidence that high academic standards, quality teaching, parental involvement, and community support can mitigate the negative impact of poverty on students and their successes.”

The third highest performing school district in South Carolina is now Darlington County with a poverty index of 82.41. The school districts of Calhoun, Barnwell 29 and Saluda are also rated Excellent with poverty indices above 80 percent.

## **# 3: South Carolina still has too many underperforming school districts and schools.**

- In 2012, there are eight school districts rated At Risk, down from nine in 2011. Thirty schools with an absolute rating of At Risk in 2009 are still rated At Risk in 2012.

“In 2012, nine percent of children attended a public school with an absolute rating of At Risk or Below Average,” stated Robinson. “We must put our energy into putting an end to persistent underperformance in these schools. The percentage has to come down.”

## **# 4: South Carolina: There is still significant need for improvement and innovation.**

Currently, in South Carolina:

- One in four children still do not graduate from high school.
- One in five children is not reading on grade level in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

South Carolina businesses need:

- More technically-skilled individuals;
- more employees, who can solve problems creatively and work collaboratively in teams; and
- more individuals with a four-year college degree, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas.

Robinson urged involvement and high expectations from business leaders, educators, families, and young people.

“The solution is not more policies and programs driven from Columbia,” stated Robinson. “Given the dramatic changes taking place in our world through technology and the increased expectations of our students, we need greater involvement of all stakeholders and greater innovation in the classroom.”

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*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.*