



*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)

## **Statement of Neil Robinson, Chairman of the EOC**

Good morning. I am Neil Robinson, Chairman of the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, the business appointee of the Speaker Pro Tem of the Senate since 2005. I also am an attorney with Nexsen Pruet, LLC, specializing in real estate and economic development.

South Carolina has been a national leader in accountability for public education long before Congress ever enacted No Child Left Behind. In fact, today marks the release of the 12<sup>th</sup> annual state district and school report cards.

Accountability in public schools in South Carolina is defined by state law as “an acceptance of the responsibility for improving student performance and taking actions to improve classroom practice and school performance.” The 2012 state district and school report cards substantiate that student achievement has improved in many of our districts and schools. However, South Carolina still has challenges ahead to prepare better all of our students for college and careers.

I want to summarize the 2012 state report cards with four key points.

### **# 1: There was a significant increase in number of school districts and schools rated Excellent or Good**

- South Carolina has 42 school districts with an absolute rating of Excellent or Good in 2012, up from 33 in 2011 for a 27% increase.
- South Carolina has 629 schools with an absolute rating of Excellent or Good in 2012, up from 529 in 2011 for a 19% increase.
- 61% of students attended schools with an absolute rating of Excellent or Good in 2011-12 school year

The reason for the increased ratings is improved student performance on a variety of measures and assessments.

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

Teachers, students, principals, school board members, parents, legislators and community leaders should be commended for the results on the 2012 state report cards

## # 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.
- Seven in 10 districts in our state have a poverty index that exceeds 70% for its students.

However, there are schools and school districts meeting and overcoming the challenges of poverty as they relate to student achievement. . In the 61 school districts with a poverty index above 70%, one in three had an absolute rating of Excellent or Good. This 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 SC is now Darlington County with a poverty index of 82.41. Calhoun County, Barnwell 29 and Saluda are also Excellent School Districts with poverty indices above 80 percent.

Rank	District	Absolute Index	Poverty Index	2012 Absolute Rating
1	YORK 4	4.32	<b>27.76</b>	Excellent
2	LEXINGTON 5	3.95	<b>44.21</b>	Excellent
3	<b>DARLINGTON</b>	<b>3.88</b>	<b>82.41</b>	Excellent
4	YORK 2	3.84	<b>43.44</b>	Excellent
5	LEXINGTON 1	3.83	<b>51.07</b>	Excellent
6	ANDERSON 1	3.80	<b>56.42</b>	Excellent
7	SPARTANBURG 1	3.77	<b>65.49</b>	Excellent
8	ANDERSON 2	3.74	<b>68.43</b>	Excellent
9	CLARENDON 3	3.71	<b>70.75</b>	Excellent
10	<b>BARNWELL 29</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>84.67</b>	Excellent
11	SPARTANBURG 2	3.68	<b>64.22</b>	Excellent
12	SPARTANBURG 5	3.67	<b>63.70</b>	Excellent
13	SPARTANBURG 6	3.66	<b>70.05</b>	Excellent
14	GREENWOOD 52	3.63	<b>68.95</b>	Excellent
15	FLORENCE 5	3.56	<b>75.90</b>	Excellent
16	<b>CALHOUN</b>	<b>3.55</b>	<b>90.37</b>	Excellent
17	RICHLAND 2	3.55	<b>58.00</b>	Excellent
18	GEORGETOWN	3.54	<b>75.16</b>	Excellent
19	<b>MARION 7</b>	<b>3.51</b>	<b>98.13</b>	Excellent
20	OCONEE	3.50	<b>71.49</b>	Excellent
21	<b>SALUDA</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>80.28</b>	Excellent
22	ABBEVILLE	3.46	<b>79.09</b>	Excellent
23	FLORENCE 1	3.45	<b>72.87</b>	Excellent
24	DORCHESTER 2	3.44	<b>57.61</b>	Excellent
25	LANCASTER	3.41	<b>67.21</b>	Excellent
26	SPARTANBURG 4	3.41	<b>68.72</b>	Excellent
27	ANDERSON 4	3.40	<b>68.08</b>	Excellent

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

In 2011 there were 9 At-Risk School Districts.

In 2012 there are still 8 At-Risk School Districts.

The EOC has as a goal that by the year 2020 there should be no At-Risk Districts in the state.

Thirty (30) schools with an absolute rating of At Risk in 2009 are still rated At Risk in 2012.

In 2012 nine percent of children still attended a public school with an absolute rating of At Risk or Below Average. In 2011 ten percent attended an At Risk or Below Average school. 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.
- The State spends approximately \$21 million annually on remediation for first-time students entering our two-year technical colleges immediately following high school graduation.

We also know that South Carolina businesses need:

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

We also know that new academic standards in English language arts, mathematics and probably science will be implemented in school year 2014-15. More rigorous standards and assessments are coming. These assessments will likely result in fewer schools and school districts scoring at today's levels.

The solution is not more policies and programs driven from Columbia. Given the dramatic changes taking place in our world through technology and the increased expectations of our students, we need greater accountability from all stakeholders:

Educators within our schools need to be empowered to be innovative inside and outside of classrooms. We must balance the fundamental skills that young people need to know with higher level skills like teamwork and critical thinking. We also need more educators who are trained with appropriate skills to address reading deficits of our students.

Business Leaders: We cannot sit back and be complacent; business has a great deal invested in the education system. There are many opportunities to be involved and make a difference, and I

encourage you to become invested. Promoting and assisting with public education should be a line item in your budget.

Parents and families: Hold high expectations for the young people in your life because they can achievement them. Along with teachers, you are part of a dynamic team that can be a positive support system for children at all ability levels.

Most importantly, students: we are here today because of you. Our expectations of you have increased which means you will have to work harder. It may not seem like it now, but you will thank us down the road. A high school diploma is not enough anymore. Studies show that by 2018 (six years from now), the fastest-growing, highest-paying jobs will require education beyond high school. In fact, that statement is true today. The current system must change so that you will get the skills you need to enter college (either a two or four-year institution) or otherwise be prepared to a pursue career down the road. The best part is I KNOW you can do it. Success IS within your reach.

Finally, a message for our legislators: We will continue to stress the urgent need to recognize that change has to happen – and that it has to happen immediately. In recent years, our lawmakers have made tremendous strides in the area of economic development. New commerce and industry are coming to South Carolina like never before. New jobs are being announced on a weekly basis. We now face a new and growing problem, and that is having an available work force, ready and trained, that can fill these jobs. This means re-focusing our public education system to assure that all children will graduate on time with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete successfully in the global economy, and contribute positively as members of families and communities. We urge the General Assembly to embrace innovative ideas that will be proposed in the coming session by the Department of Education, the Innovation Initiative Steering Committee, and the Education Oversight Committee.

I congratulate students, schools and school districts for the improvements seen in this year's state report card release. We have seen much to be proud of and much we can learn from. However, there is hard work ahead. I urge you to join with me in making certain that today's students can be successful in tomorrow's world.