**SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

**Full Committee Meeting**

Minutes of the Meeting August 9-10, 2026

**Members Present:** April Allen, Dr. Brian Newsome, Tammy Achziger, Barbara Hairfield, Melissa Pender, Dr. Patty Tate, Sen. Ross Turner, Melanie Barton, Rep. Terry Alexander, Rep. Neal

Collins, Laura McKinney, Sidney Locke, Rep. Bill Hager, and Dr. Abbey Duggins (for Superintendent Weaver)

**Guests:** Vincent Sheheen, Mayor of Camden, SC; Dr. Christina Melton, Associate with Creative Leadership Solutions; Britt Gardner, Principal, North Central Elementary School; Ryan Gerald, Principal, Green Sea Floyds Elementary School; Nick Harris, Principal, Green Sea Floyds Middle/High School; Dr. Jaime Hembree, Superintendent, McCormick County School District; Skip Hopkins, Principal, McCormick Middle School; Dr. Lee D'Andrea, consultant to the EOC; and, from the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), Dr. Kristi Austin, Director of Assessment and Standards, and Dr. Vann Holden, Director of Accountability and Research.

**EOC Staff Present:** Crystal Garcia, Gabrielle Fulton, Tenell Felder, Dr. Rainey Knight, Dr. Matthew Lavery, Dr. Jenny May, Dana Yow, and Amina Asghar.

EOC Chair April Allen opened the August 9th meeting and welcomed Camden Mayor Vincent Sheheen. Mayor Sheheen welcomed members to Camden and discussed the city's focus on entrepreneurship, tourism, Revolutionary War history, the arts, downtown development, and public education and thanked members for their service to public education. Following Mayor Sheheen, the committee approved the Full Committee minutes from the June 15, 2026

meeting.

Dana Yow provided an overview of the EOC's 2021–2025 Strategic Plan, including the historical context for its development and the agency's progress over the five-year period.

She explained that staff would highlight key accomplishments, lessons learned, challenges, and ways the work evolved, particularly through stronger partnerships and improved internal processes. Yow recognized EOC staff for their work in carrying out the plan and encouraged committee members to consider how the work should continue as the agency transitions to its next strategic plan. She noted that the review also provided an opportunity to celebrate the agency's accomplishments under the 2021-2025 plan.

Dr. Matthew Lavery reviewed work under the strategy focused on reporting facts, including improved access to verified statewide data, the development of pre-accountability and data-validation dashboards, strengthened data-request and quality-control processes, support

for

interoperable data systems, and enhanced privacy protections. He noted that recent report-card correction activity involved fewer than one percent of records and highlighted Dashboard SC, report-card resources, National Student Clearinghouse data, Data Trailblazers, Be Present SC, and accessibility improvements to EOC web resources.

Staff then reviewed work focused on measuring change. The discussion included alignment of the pre-K-12 system with college- and career-readiness expectations; use of longitudinal data through the Coordinating Council for Workforce Development; evaluation of credentials, dual credit, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate outcomes; the Seal of Biliteracy; the tiered credential framework; value-added measures; the High School Student Success Indicator; the 4K waitlist pilot; the development of a CTE center report card; the Beating the Odds investigative study; Palmetto Gold and Silver; and other school recognition initiatives.

Tenell Felder reviewed the strategy focused on promoting progress. She highlighted the EOC's role in supporting the state accountability system, using research to inform policy and continuous improvement, and collaborating with agencies, schools, postsecondary partners, business and industry, and other stakeholder groups. Examples included the cyclical review of the accountability system, University of Georgia technical reviews, the multilingual learner indicator redesign, the Seal of Biliteracy, the Beating the Odds Investigative Study, Data Trailblazers, the 4K pilot, pre-accountability dashboards, and early childhood collaborative work.

Dr. Christina Melton, Associate with Creative Leadership Solutions, presented the proposed 2026-2031 Strategic Plan and reviewed the planning process that began in November 2025. She explained that the plan is intended to function as a living, visionary document rather than a static five-year plan and that implementation would include routine monitoring, committee updates, and revisions as needed. The plan maintains the EOC's three

overarching strategies: 1. Reporting Facts, 2. Measuring Change, and 3. Promoting Progress -- with updated objectives and methods designed to guide the agency's work while allowing flexibility to respond to evolving priorities, responsibilities, and opportunities.

A motion was made to approve the proposed 2026-2031 Strategic Plan, and the motion received a second. During discussion, members expressed support for the plan's strong emphasis on student success and discussed the need for more timely longitudinal information on postsecondary outcomes, stronger connections between education and business and industry, durable skills such as attendance and accountability, teacher preparation and industry exposure, and continued attention to national, international, and regional benchmarks. Members also

suggested clarifying statutory requirements in the plan and more explicitly reflecting business and industry and teacher-preparation stakeholders. Staff indicated that the feedback would be incorporated into ongoing implementation and future revisions. Following discussion, April Allen called for the vote, and the committee approved the 2026-2031 Strategic Plan with all members unanimously in favor.

Members were provided a projected schedule of upcoming action items and reports, with the understanding that the schedule may change based on data availability and other external factors. Staff reiterated that the new strategic plan would be monitored through routine reporting to subcommittees and the full committee.

After the update the meeting was adjourned for the day.

On August 10th, EOC Chair April Allen opened the meeting and introduced Dr. Jenny May, EOC Director of Qualitative Research and Stakeholder Engagement, to present findings from the third year of the Beating the Odds Investigative Study. Dr. May reviewed the purpose and methodology of the study, which examines practices in high-poverty schools achieving strong academic outcomes. She summarized themes that have remained consistent across the three years of the study, including strong and visible leadership, high expectations, effective Tier 1 instruction, consistent use of data, supportive school cultures, and strong community engagement. Five schools participated in the third year: Green Sea Floyds Elementary School, Green Sea Floyds Middle/High School, North Central Elementary School, McCormick Middle School, and Woodfield Elementary School.

Dr. May introduced a panel consisting of Britt Gardner, Principal, North Central Elementary School; Ryan Gerald, Principal, Green Sea Floyds Elementary School; Nick Harris, Principal, Green Sea Floyds Middle/High School; Dr. Jaime Hembree, Superintendent, McCormick County School District; and Skip Hopkins, Principal, McCormick Middle School. The

discussion was moderated by Dr. Lee D'Andrea, retired South Carolina superintendent and consultant to the EOC.

Panelists discussed the practices contributing to their schools' success, including establishing a culture of academic achievement, strengthening Tier 1 instruction, aligning expectations across grade levels, using data to guide instruction, developing teacher leaders, and creating shared ownership for student success. They described collaborative, supportive, and servant-leadership approaches centered on visibility, modeling expectations, building relationships, supporting teachers, developing staff capacity, and balancing delegation with accountability.

The panel also discussed challenges associated with sustaining improvement in high-poverty and rural schools, including overcoming historically low expectations and ensuring that students' circumstances do not limit expectations for achievement. Panelists emphasized parent and community engagement, wraparound services, K-12 collaboration, effective communication, and consistent expectations. The discussion concluded with an emphasis on recruiting and developing experienced, committed school leaders who are invested in their communities and equipped to lead challenging school environments.

EOC Chair April Allen welcomed representatives from the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), including Dr. Abbey Duggins, Deputy Superintendent of the College, Career and Military Readiness Division; Dr. Kristi Austin, Director of Assessment and Standards; and Dr. Vann Holden, Director of Accountability and Research, to discuss the invalidation of certain 2026 SC READY mathematics assessment scores. Dana Yow provided a timeline of events, explaining that approximately 2,000 students in grades six through eight had been administered the calculator and non-calculator portions of the assessment in the incorrect sequence. She reviewed communications among SCDE, the EOC, the South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA), and the South Carolina Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), including SCDE's decision to invalidate the affected scores and its plan to seek guidance from the U.S. Department of Education regarding possible flexibility in accountability calculations.

Dr. Duggins explained that SCDE considered two primary questions: whether the affected scores were valid and how invalidated scores should be treated within the state's accountability system. The TAC unanimously advised that scores from assessments administered out of sequence should be invalidated because they could not be considered sufficiently valid, reliable, and comparable. Dr. Duggins emphasized that maintaining standardized administration was particularly important because 2026 was the first administration of the assessment aligned to the state's new mathematics standards and would establish a baseline for future years. SCDE determined that federal requirements

appeared to provide no flexibility regarding inclusion of affected students in accountability calculations but planned to request a determination from the

U.S. Department of Education.

Dr. Austin provided additional detail regarding the assessment's design and SCDE's investigation. She explained that the order of the two mathematics sections was intentional and that reversing them could expose students to content in the calculator section that could cue responses to items in the non-calculator section. She provided examples from grades six through eight demonstrating instances in which related concepts or information appeared close together when the sections

were taken in reverse order. SCDE also reviewed student testing telemetry individually and identified cases in which students had completed the sections in the correct order but submitted them incorrectly; those assessments were allowed to proceed to scoring. Assessments for which students actually accessed and completed sections out of order remained invalidated. Dr. Austin emphasized that the concern was not simply calculator use or failure to follow a procedural sequence, but whether exposure to content from one section could influence responses in another and compromise comparability.

Dr. Holden reviewed SCDE's modeling of the potential accountability impact. SCDE examined several hypothetical approaches, including assigning affected students the highest possible performance level, removing affected students from both the numerator and denominator, and predicting scores using other available student assessment data. While those approaches are not currently permitted under SCDE's interpretation of applicable requirements, the analysis indicated that the statewide impact on school academic achievement ratings would generally be minimal. SCDE reported that the affected students represented less than one percent of the statewide testing-eligible population. Dr. Holden emphasized, however, that SCDE would seek federal guidance on whether affected students could be excluded from both the numerator and denominator for accountability purposes.

Melissa Pender thanked SCDE for responding in advance to questions submitted by EOC members but expressed concern about the level of communication and collaboration with the EOC before the initial decision was announced. Pender stated that she first learned of the issue when the notification regarding invalidated scores was distributed to superintendents and subsequently contacted EOC staff for additional information. Yow confirmed that the EOC's involvement before July 13 had been limited primarily to responding to a question concerning whether flexibility existed in the accountability denominator and that EOC staff had not initially been provided the full details of the

situation. Pender stressed that, given the EOC's role as an “honest broker,” members need sufficient information to accurately answer questions from educators and the public. She requested stronger communication and collaboration with the EOC on similar matters in the future.

Pender then questioned the scope and timing of SCDE's planned request to the U.S. Department of Education. SCDE indicated that the request had not yet been submitted and would ask whether federal requirements provide flexibility to exclude students with invalid scores from both the numerator and denominator of accountability calculations. SCDE committed to communicating the federal response to the EOC once received. Pender also asked whether comparable scrutiny

had been applied to other assessments, particularly ELA assessments whose sections may be administered in different sequences. Dr. Austin explained that the ELA assessment was intentionally designed so that its sections do not cue one another and may therefore be administered in different allowable sequences.

Pender questioned language in the TAC's guidance indicating that changes in administration “may” influence student responses and asked whether SCDE had considered scoring the affected assessments and comparing the results with existing student performance projections before invalidating them. Dr. Austin explained that the affected assessments were not scored because doing so would create scores whose comparability could not be established. She stated that the TAC's recommendation was to suppress the scores rather than create numerical results that could subsequently be interpreted as comparable to scores from properly administered assessments.

Patty Tate expressed concern on behalf of educators and students that students would experience accountability consequences resulting from adult error. She emphasized the effort students and educators devote to SC READY testing and questioned why the testing platform allowed students to access the second section before properly completing and submitting the first. Dr. Duggins acknowledged the concern and stated that SCDE had communicated with its testing vendor, DRC, and that the platform would be modified to prevent the same situation in future administrations. Dr. Holden clarified that individual students would not receive a reported score of zero; rather, no mathematics score would appear on the individual student report. The accountability consequence occurs only in the aggregate school report card calculation under existing rules.

Barbara Hairfield asked whether historical testing irregularities had been handled differently and whether the current situation could similarly be treated as an irregularity rather than an invalidation. SCDE responded that its current interpretation does not provide such flexibility but that the accountability treatment would be included in the request to the U.S. Department of Education. Hairfield also asked whether students would experience

consequences in future growth calculations. Pender similarly asked whether the absence of a 2026 mathematics score would create a multi-year effect. Dr. Holden explained that affected students would be excluded from the mathematics student-progress calculation because that measure requires two consecutive years of scores. Their ELA results would continue to be included when available, but the absence of a 2026 mathematics score would also prevent calculation of mathematics growth for those students in the subsequent year.

Terry Alexander raised concerns about supervision during test administration and questioned how students could access assessment sections in ways inconsistent with required procedures. Dr. Duggins stated that test administration involves significant supervision and training. Hairfield asked whether students who were identified during the testing window could have been given another version of the assessment. Dr. Austin explained that, because this was the first year of the new assessment and all forms required common linking items, an alternate form was not available for this purpose. She noted that emergency forms would be available in future administrations. Hairfield also asked whether the Test Administration Manual explicitly warned that administering sections out of sequence could result in invalidation. Dr. Austin stated that the manual repeatedly required administration of the non-calculator section first but did not explicitly state that an incorrect sequence would result in no score; that warning will be added in the future.

The discussion included the scope of the affected population. SCDE reported that approximately 145 schools across 51 districts were affected, although the impact varied significantly by school and district. Dr. Austin noted that approximately 19 percent of affected students were students with disabilities and approximately five percent were multilingual learners, with the majority being general education students.

Dr. Mathis, representing the State Board of Education, discussed the difficulty of balancing the impact of adult testing errors on students with the requirements for a valid assessment system. Dr. Mathis asked whether SCDE would request federal consideration of the validity decision itself in addition to accountability flexibility. Dr. Duggins responded that SCDE considered the validity question resolved based on the TAC's recommendation and intended to seek federal guidance only on accountability consequences. She reiterated that assessments administered in different sequences were not comparable because students could have been exposed to different content before responding to particular items.

Alexander questioned whether protecting the integrity of the assessment was being prioritized over students affected by the error. Dr. Duggins responded that assessment integrity refers to ensuring that every student receives a standardized administration so that results can be considered valid and comparable.

Pender returned to the effect on students and families, noting that schools routinely review prior-year assessment results directly with students and that approximately 1,826 families would need an explanation for why their children sat for the assessment but did not receive mathematics scores. She emphasized the importance of transparent communication acknowledging that the

assessment was administered incorrectly through no fault of the students. Pender then asked why SCDE could not submit both questions to the U.S. Department of Education: whether flexibility exists regarding the decision to invalidate/not score the assessments and whether flexibility exists regarding the accountability treatment of those invalidated scores. She reasoned that obtaining federal guidance on both issues would allow EOC members to tell educators and the public that every available avenue had been pursued.

Pender further questioned the apparent tension between SCDE's finding that the accountability impact of the invalidated scores was statistically minimal and the position that scoring those assessments posed a significant threat to assessment validity. She stated that this distinction was difficult to explain to the public and reiterated that she would be more comfortable if SCDE presented both questions, along with the TAC's evidence and recommendations, to the U.S. Department of Education for consideration.

Additional discussion addressed historical invalidations and accountability consequences. Dr. Austin explained that invalidated scores have occurred in previous years and that SCDE must demonstrate through federal peer review that its assessments meet technical requirements for validity, reliability, comparability, and standardized administration. She also noted that testing monitors are desirable but not required and that test administrators receive training and acknowledge required testing practices.

Rep. Neal Collins asked whether affected schools could experience changes in their overall report card ratings. Dr. Holden explained that final effects could not yet be determined because student-progress results had not been received. He reiterated that modeling showed generally minimal changes in academic achievement scores, although the degree of impact differed by school.

Pender asked who would communicate directly with affected families. Dr. Austin stated that SCDE had provided superintendents with a communications toolkit containing a sample parent letter, information for districts, principals and teachers, and an example of the affected student report. The student report will not display a zero; it will indicate that no score is available and direct families to contact the child's school for additional information.

Sidney Locke asked what accountability would occur for the error, including consequences for individuals or the testing vendor. Dr. Austin responded that changes were being made to the testing system and that test-security violations apply when administrators fail to follow

required procedures, while SCDE and its partners were implementing additional safeguards to prevent recurrence.

The committee then returned to Pender's request concerning the two questions. Dr. Duggins restated that SCDE originally considered: (1) whether the scores should be invalidated and (2) what flexibility exists regarding their impact on accountability. SCDE considered the first question resolved by the TAC's unanimous recommendation and planned to submit only the second question to the U.S. Department of Education. Discussion also addressed State Board of Education Regulation 43-100 and whether the State Board of Education should have an opportunity to consider the issue. Dr. Mathis stated that the State Board had not been given an opportunity to weigh in, and Pender asked why the matter had not gone before the State Board if the regulation provided a role for it. SCDE representatives reiterated that the affected tests had not been scored and that the TAC consisted of nationally recognized psychometric and assessment experts whose recommendation was based on technical validity considerations.

Pender again requested that both questions be submitted for federal review and asked whether other EOC members supported doing so. Dr. Duggins reiterated SCDE's confidence in the TAC's recommendation but stated that if the EOC felt strongly that the validity question should also be presented to the U.S. Department of Education, SCDE could include it. Chair Allen asked SCDE to restate its current plan. Dr. Holden explained that the department presently intended to ask whether students who sat for the assessment but received invalid scores could be excluded from accountability calculations rather than included under existing numerator and denominator requirements.

Yow proposed that EOC members hear directly from members of the TAC regarding how they reached their recommendation. Dr. Duggins agreed to arrange the discussion. Yow noted that, depending on attendance, the discussion could constitute a public meeting, and Dr. Duggins emphasized that the conversation would need to protect secure test items. Chair Allen indicated that the agenda should focus on how the TAC reached its recommendation regarding the invalidated assessments. Pender reiterated that she continued to question why both issues could not simply be presented to the U.S. Department of Education.

Chair Allen concluded that the EOC and SCDE would work together to schedule a public meeting with the TAC as quickly as possible so members could hear directly from the technical experts and resolve outstanding questions and concerns. She also suggested a future discussion of lessons learned from the 2026 test administration and the steps SCDE is taking to strengthen future administration and public confidence in the assessment system.

Next, Dr. Lavery provided an update on the Cyclical Review of the Accountability System and the status of the 19 recommendations developed by the Accountability Advisory Committee.

He reported that three recommendations have been completed and one was determined not to be feasible. He noted that work on many of the remaining recommendations is beginning through the advisory group established as a result of the cyclical review.

Dr. Lavery explained that Recommendations 2 and 3 focus on studying the impact of the student progress indicator on school ratings and promoting an accurate understanding and appropriate use of that indicator. Research related to these recommendations will begin at the advisory group's upcoming meeting. Recommendations 4, 12, 13, and 14 address the points and weights assigned to indicators within the accountability system. The advisory group will examine these areas through a standard-setting process, including a review of indicator cut scores and how various measures contribute to overall school ratings.

The advisory group will also begin work on the recommendation to study alternatives for a more comprehensive and balanced assessment system. Dr. Lavery described this as a significant, longer-term effort that will examine assessments administered across the state, how they interact with one another, and whether the overall assessment system is coherent, balanced, and responsive to stakeholder needs. The committee will receive periodic updates as this work

progresses.

Dr. Lavery noted that Recommendations 15 and 16 involve ongoing work to improve dashboards, visualizations, and supporting materials that help stakeholders understand the accountability system and use the information for continuous improvement. Recommendations 17, 18, and 19 relate to the Office of Leadership Effectiveness and its continuous improvement supports and

designations.

Finally, Recommendations 9 and 10 focus on the College and Career Readiness (CCR) indicator and the various college- and career-readiness measures included within it. Additional research is planned, including a detailed review of dual enrollment courses taken by South Carolina students during the past five years. A data request has been submitted, and a kickoff meeting is planned to begin that work. Dr. Lavery concluded that most of the outstanding recommendations are moving into active implementation or research and stated that the committee will continue to receive updates as the work progresses.

Following Dr. Lavery's presentation and with no further business before the committee, Chair April

Allen adjourned the meeting.