



REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR

OF THE

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION REFORM COUNCIL

FEBRUARY 22, 2006

“The definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing in the same way and to expect a different result.” – generally attributed to Albert Einstein

“There’s no limit to what we can do if we don’t mind who gets the credit.” – generally attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson

“If you want good manufacturing jobs, one thing you could do is graduate more engineers. We had more sports exercise majors graduate than electrical engineering grads last year. If you want to be the massage capital of the world, you're well on your way.” – Jeffrey R. Immelt

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

By Executive Order 2005-08, Governor Mark Sanford established the South Carolina Education Reform Council on February 28, 2005. A copy of that Order is attached to this Report as an Appendix. The purpose of the Council has been to review the performance and conditions of pre-school, elementary and secondary education in South Carolina and to make recommendations for changes that will improve student achievement. We have not been asked and have not undertaken either to defend or to attack a system or any of its components or constituencies. Rather, we have been about the sole task of finding the best ways to educate the children of South Carolina, wherever that inquiry leads

Obviously, the Council has not undertaken in one year to review or comment upon all facets of the content and delivery of education in South Carolina. What we have attempted is to review the delivery mechanisms (without significant emphasis on content, which is largely under the auspices of the State's curriculum standards), and to offer (1) recommendations for changes that we believe have the potential for significant positive impact and (2) recommendations for an ongoing review and reform process.

This report is organized under a series of rubrics: District Structure and Funding; Overcoming Constraints by Sharing and Leveraging Resources and Resource Reallocation; Dynamic School Leadership; Excellent Teachers and Excellent Teaching; Raising Student Achievement Levels; Expanded Options for Educational Paths; Improving Graduation Rates; Improving Accountability; and Culture and Attitude. There is naturally considerable overlap in the content of these categories. Where recommendations are relevant to more than one rubric, we have attempted to highlight the overlap and the multiple effects of the recommendation or the multiple forms it can take, without rehashing each recommendation in full at each point where it is relevant.

During our investigations and deliberations, we have benefited from the participation of Charmeka Bosket, Education Advisor to the Governor; Rita Allison, Education-Legislative Advisor to the Governor for Higher Education; Sandy Smith, Research Director for Rep. Ronnie Townsend, Chairman of the South Carolina House of Representatives Committee on Education and Public Works; Clara Heinsohn, Research Director for Sen. John Courson, Chairman of the South Carolina Senate Committee on Education; Ellen M. Still, former Deputy Superintendent, Division of Policy, Research and Technology, South Carolina Department of Education; H. Pierce McNair, Jr., Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Policy and Planning, South Carolina Department of Education; Jo Anne Anderson, Executive Director, South Carolina Education Oversight Committee; Michael Fanning, Executive Director, Olde English School Districts Consortium; Cassie Barber, Associate Director, South Carolina School Improvement Council; various members of the South Carolina School Boards Association and the South Carolina School Administrators Association; and superintendents, principals, school board members, teachers and parents. In particular, a number of superintendents of school districts in South Carolina were kind enough to provide detailed and thoughtful responses to our inquiry regarding obstacles that they have encountered and methods that they have successfully employed in raising students' academic achievement levels in their districts. The Council also held public hearings in Goose Creek (at Stafford High School, October 17, 2005), in Myrtle

Beach (at Myrtle Beach High School, October 18, 2005), in Columbia (at Brennen Elementary School, October 25, 2005), and in Anderson (at T.L. Hanna High School, November 8, 2005).

We have also been privileged to participate in other education improvement processes currently underway, in particular the South Carolina Department of Education's High School Redesign Commission, the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee's Common Ground Task Force, and the South Carolina Coalition for Science and Mathematics Summit. Information and materials that we received from that participation have been most helpful; and the seriousness of purpose of all those looking to improve various aspects of K-12 education in South Carolina has been most heartening.

Much of the Council's work has been the review of original research and data compilation undertaken by various individuals and groups over the last several years, both with particular reference to South Carolina and with respect to educational issues beyond our State's borders. A brief and not-nearly-complete bibliography is an Appendix to this Report. In the increasingly outmoded category of hard-copy information, among the most significant sources were *Reallocating Resources, How to Boost Student Achievement Without Asking for More*, Allan Odden and Sarah Archibald; "Rethinking the Allocation of Teaching Resources: Some Lessons From High-Performing Schools," Karen Hawley Miles and Linda Darling-Hammond, in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*," Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 1998) (also at <http://www.jstor.org>) ; *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work*, Linda Darling-Hammond; *The Teaching Gap*, James W. Stigler and James Hiebert; *The Learning Gap*, Harold W. Stevenson and James W. Stigler; and *School Accountability*, Williamson M. Evers and Herbert J. Walberg, eds. As reflected in several recommendations of the Council, much relevant information is in digital form on the Internet, making that resource a valuable vehicle for educating this Council and, we believe, for educating South Carolina's students and otherwise enabling significant cost-effective improvement of South Carolina's schools. In undertaking this review of current digitally-accessible research and data, we have barely scratched the surface of the available information; and more is added every day. The organizations and their websites that have been most useful are, in alphabetical order: Center for Education Reform, <http://www.edreform.com>; Consortium for Policy Research in Education, <http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/cpre>; Edison Schools, <http://www.edisonschools.com>; Education Trust, <http://www2.edtrust.org>; Educational Testing Service, <http://www.ets.org>; Gates Foundation, <http://www.gatesfoundation.org>; k12, <http://www.k12.com>; National Assessment of Educational Progress/National Assessment Governing Board, <http://www.nagb.org>; National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov>; National Center on Education and the Economy, <http://www.ncee.org>; National Education Technology Plan, <http://www.NatEdTechPlan.org>; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, <http://www.nga.org/center>; National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis/National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, <http://www.higheredinfo.org>; Northwest Regional Education Laboratory <http://www.nwrel.org>; South Carolina Department of Education, <http://www.myschools.com>; South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, <http://www.sceoc.com>; South Carolina Policy Council, <http://www.scpolicycouncil.com>; Southern Regional Education Board, <http://www.sreb.org>; and United States Department of Education, <http://www.ed.gov>. In addition to materials addressed specifically to education, we have found observations of relevance and importance in business management literature, including *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, Jim

Collins and Jerry I. Porras; *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*, Jim Collins; *Good to Great and the Social Sectors: A Monograph to Accompany Good to Great*, Jim Collins; *Managing the Professional Service Firm*, David H. Maister; *True Professionalism*, David H. Maister; and *First Among Equals: How to Manage a Group of Professionals*, Patrick J. McKenna and David H. Maister; in sociological work, notably *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida; and in the so-called “soft skills” literature, including *Skills for Life: The Skills You Need to Succeed*, Mike Jarvis and Education Reform Council member Jonathan Peck. Also helpful was the recent opinion of Judge Thomas W. Cooper, Jr., in *Abbeville County School District, et al. v. The State of South Carolina, et seq.* Although we are very deeply indebted to these sources and many others, we have not consistently attempted to cite our recommendations to supporting materials.

To all those who have assisted us in this process, and to Governor Sanford for allowing us to participate in this most important area of public policy facing this State, the members of the Council are profoundly grateful.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is organized under a series of rubrics related to the particular concerns that each recommendation addresses: District Structure and Funding; Overcoming Constraints by Sharing and Leveraging Resources and Resource Reallocation; Dynamic School Leadership; Excellent Teachers and Excellent Teaching; Raising Student Achievement Levels; Expanded Options for Educational Paths; Improving Graduation Rates; Improving Accountability; and Culture and Attitude. There is naturally considerable overlap in the content of these categories.

There are also different levels of specificity in the recommendations, with the more specific recommendations being at the level controlled directly by State governmental action (for example, reform of charter school legislation), and the less specific being at the more granular levels of the discussion (for example, collaborative teacher planning). The Council does not by this disparity intend any suggestion that the more specific recommendations are more urgent or more likely to be conducive to desired results than are the less specific, or vice versa. Rather, the Council recognizes that education occurs for the most part in the classroom in the experience between a teacher and a student; and all of the recommendations are intended to affect, more or less directly, the quality of that experience. The farther a system component is removed from the classroom and the teacher-student relationship, the more that component's role is to enable, support and not encumber.

The Council's primary recommendations are as follows.

- Foster the motivation and model the interpersonal skills that students need in order to take advantage of a well-delivered, high-content education and of other opportunities throughout later life.
- Emphasize quite heavily reading (both skills and comprehension) in the early years, along with basic computational skills and writing.
- Base the start of school and advancement in the curriculum on carefully evaluated readiness and subject-matter mastery, rather than on chronological age and time-in-class.
- Establish uniform rigorous assignments to establish high expectations levels, in addition to the strong standards already in place.
- Maximize uninterrupted classroom time between teachers and students, and reduce demands on teacher time other than classroom and planning time (both individual and collaborative).
- Utilize and make uniformly available individual student tracking and real time subject matter diagnostics testing in order to improve accountability processes and to enable appropriate intervention, including flexible remediation and credit recovery options.
- Facilitate the creation of multiple options for educational paths in recognition of different student/parent interests and needs.

- Institute merit pay based on improvement in student academic levels, tracked individually, on a collaborative basis.
- Emphasize management, motivational and team-building skills in selection of principals and superintendents and in training of principals and superintendents in recognition of the high impact of dynamic leadership on educational outcomes.
- Provide superintendents and principals with flexibility for funding, program-offering and personnel, to allow them to develop and implement responses to educational needs.
- Utilize and make uniformly available technology for implementing a number of recommendations made here, and especially to leverage existing resources (for example, master teachers, training opportunities) across barriers of time and distance.
- Allocate resources to education providers (schools and districts) based on the cost of that provider's particular needs and mission rather than on its proximity to valuable properties.
- Eliminate structures that cause duplications of expenses, and create structures that allow for cost sharing and cost reduction.

The Council makes these recommendations with two primary caveats. One is to be realistic in expectations of the timing and scope of improvement that various reforms might promise. No reform will cure all ills, nor even cure very many ills quickly. It is critically necessary to evaluate carefully whether reforms are being implemented in classrooms and if so what results are being obtained in educational outcomes before abandoning efforts. The second caveat is to recognize the natural tension between data sets related to certain goals. For example, if South Carolina is successful in keeping more potential dropouts in school (students who are most often at the lower end of student achievement), then aggregate performance indicators (for example, pass rates on end-of-course or exit exams) may well decline. Consequently, as is recommended in several contexts in this Report, focus should be maintained on how many students are improving on an individual basis and what is the rate of individual improvement.

DISTRICT STRUCTURE AND FUNDING

Issues:

- South Carolina has 85 districts of varying sizes and populations that often cut across community or county lines. Although this number is a far cry from the 1,220 districts in existence in 1950, it still entails a significant degree of needlessly duplicated functions and costs. Prior and current attempts to either consolidate or break up existing districts for reasons of educational policy have been opposed for reasons of local political concern and/or by legislative, regulatory or judicial roadblocks.
- The districts' levels of fiscal autonomy are uneven; and their levels of access to various financing mechanisms are constrained by that disparity as well as by historical accidents such as grandfathering provisions in legislation affecting those mechanisms.
- There are gaps among districts in the assessed values of their taxable property. Those assessed values constitute the primary index of local ability to support education, especially with respect to physical infrastructure and facilities that rely most heavily on local support. The gaps are unrelated to the districts' educational needs. To generate \$1,000 in local school funds for each schoolchild in South Carolina's poorest district (measured by taxable property values per student) requires a pre-credit tax of \$642 on a \$100,000 home and a tax of \$1,685 on a \$100,000 industrial property. In the wealthiest district, that same level of local funding requires a pre-credit tax of \$78 on a \$100,000 home and a tax of \$206 on a \$100,000 industrial property. (This example uses 2003-2004 figures.) The comparatively greater burden on poorer districts' taxpayers makes those districts less attractive to the very new business investment and economic activity that might help close the gap. Conversely, wealthier districts are better able to utilize State-sponsored economic development incentives, funded by all taxpayers in all districts, for new or expanding business enterprises, thereby maintaining or even increasing the gap.
- In addition to the gaps in funding ability, there is also among districts a disparity in the level of funding needs. Such needs are related to the incidence within a district of special student demographic characteristics that may require additional funding; *e.g.*, students with various handicaps or learning disabilities; homebound students; gifted students and accelerated learners; students in poverty; *etc.*
- The State to its credit has for a number of years attempted to offset the disparity in tax burdens created by differences in wealth among districts (*e.g.*, Education Finance Act, S.C. Code § 59-20-40(e)) and to offset the disparity in needs arising with respect to differences in student characteristics among districts (*e.g.*, Education Finance Act, S.C. Code § 59-20-40(d)). The offsets, however, are not uniformly applicable to all programs. For example, the offsets for student demographics under the Education Finance Act do not include poverty levels as a consideration, whereas the offsets under

the Early Childhood Development and Academic Assistance Act, S.C. Code § 59-139-10 *et seq.*, do take poverty into account.

- The State has also in the past decade undertaken to aid in financing instructional school facilities. The Public School Facilities Assistance Act of 1996, S.C. Code § 59-144-10 *et seq.*, allocates approximately \$10 to \$20 million annually to school districts pursuant to a formula that includes the level of taxable property assessments along with other factors. In 1999, the State School Facilities Bond Act, S.C. Code § 59-146-10 *et seq.*, authorized, for the first time in more than two decades, State bonds to finance instructional school facilities. Bond proceeds, authorized in the maximum amount of \$750,000,000, were allocated by the formula set out by the Public School Facilities Assistance Act. Although these efforts take taxpaying ability into account, that ability is a secondary factor; and its impact is diluted by the consideration not only of whether a particular district currently provides its own fair share for its facilities, but also whether it has been doing so for the previous five years. The amounts involved in these efforts are, in the aggregate, about equal to the current building needs of only one of the State's largest school districts.
- The various sources of funds provided to districts are tied to specific programs. Such restrictions prevent flexible responses by a district to the needs of its students at any given time. They also preclude the utilization of savings from a cost-effective and educationally successful initiative to address other unresolved issues. The State has for the past three budget cycles suspended these restrictions. South Carolina Act No. 371, 2002; South Carolina Act No. 102, 2003; South Carolina Act No. 91, 2003, Part IB, §§ 1.63, 1A. 49; South Carolina Act No. 248, 2004, Part IB, §§ 1.61, 1A. 47; South Carolina Act No. 115, 2005, Part IB, §§ 1.47, 1A. 57.
- Administrative functions and positions tie up a very substantial proportion of the resources made available from various sources for education, primarily at district offices but also at the school level. This problem is not endemic only to South Carolina. It is shared across the United States, as compared to educational systems in other countries.
- Addressing the concerns outlined above at this time is complicated but by no means obviated by the pending lawsuit and recent trial court decision regarding school funding equity (*Abbeville County School District, et al. v. The State of South Carolina, et al.*) and by the several pending proposals to modify significantly the State's and local governments' various mechanisms for raising revenue.

Recommendations:

- Establish a State commission similar to the federal Base Re-alignment and Closure Commission to review existing district lines and to propose modifications to existing lines, including consolidations and breakups, where warranted by sound educational and economic policy (taking into account such local factors as population density or total land area), with a limited power of rejection retained by the General Assembly and Governor. It will be important in implementing this recommendation to insure that there are adequate mechanisms for the commission to be informed of local aspects and issues of

school district organization so that changes do not impair the level of community involvement in and support of the schools. The Council recognizes in other recommendations the importance of that involvement and support in several ways.

- Where districts are constrained by consent decrees from the era when those districts were being desegregated, review the districts to determine whether they are eligible to be declared unitary and released from court or other federal supervision, and, if so, assist them in seeking that declaration. Such releases would allow reforms in district configuration and structure and in school attendance zones to be undertaken with a sole concern for educational quality and would avoid a wasteful development of reform plans that are then blocked by outdated restrictions.
- Eliminate multiple layers of school district control. Make each school district board an elected body and grant to it fiscal autonomy over the sources of revenue and the areas of expenditure that are left to school districts by broader funding equity and tax system reforms.
- Establish a task force of government finance professionals to review proposals for tax system reform or school funding equity to assess their impact, both in transition and over the longer term, on school funding and operation. That task force should report to the Governor and General Assembly with respect to each such proposal, in order to prevent to the maximum extent possible unintended consequences or serious disruption in transition from one system to another or negative impacts on the holders of existing school district financing instruments. The Council recognizes that there are several legislative committees and a host of other groups examining the policy aspects of various reform proposals, and we do not recommend duplicating that effort. This recommendation is to address issues of transition from the current system to any reformed system.
- To the extent that broader reforms leave property taxes as a major component of school funding (especially in categories like school building financing where equitable State funding counterbalances are less significant than they are with regard to, say, operational “foundation programs” under the Education Finance Act, S.C. Code of Laws § 59-20-10, *et seq.*), make non-residential real property and other commercial property subject to uniform school taxation at the State level. Receipts from this State-wide tax would be distributed to school districts based on their needs under standardized cost allowances (similar to that described in S.C. Code § 59-144-120), with a required local effort pegged to local taxpaying ability. The Council recognizes that the trial court in the pending school funding litigation has determined that the current system is constitutionally adequate in this context; and we do not make this recommendation to address legal concerns. Rather, the purposes of this recommendation are to remove the barrier to economic development posed by millage rates in poorer districts that are significantly higher than such rates in wealthier districts; to provide greater funding to poorer districts; to recognize that much of economic development is State induced and therefore funded by citizens beyond the school district where the business is located; and to recognize that the workforce and customer base of businesses who need the educational services being funded by the property taxes are often located beyond the school district where the

businesses themselves happen to be situated. This recommendation is limited to the educational arena and does not suggest changing the imposition or distribution of taxes on business property for other local services such as fire protection, police protection, *etc.* This recommendation is also not intended to limit a school district's ability to set its own level of education property taxation on residential property in order to fund its program priorities.

- Modify and make uniform across all districts the mechanisms for imposition of local option school district sales taxes so that, as with county local option sales taxes, a portion of the proceeds go to districts where the level of retail economic activity is not as robust. The purposes of this recommendation are similar to those stated for the modification of the educational component of the business property tax system described above.
- Permit all school districts to impose impact fees on new residential developments as a means of raising funds for necessary infrastructure. The purposes of this recommendation are to provide a funding mechanism that is peculiarly appropriate to those districts most in need of funds to accommodate growth, and to offset in part the negative impact that the recommendations for sharing business property taxes and local option sales taxes might have on some wealthier, fast-growing districts.
- Reduce the complexity and confusion in the State funding formulas by utilizing a single weighting formula for all State funding pegged to uniformly assessed needs, taxpaying abilities and a required local effort, but without penalizing any district for going, at its own expense, above and beyond the State standard. The purpose of this recommendation is to provide an equitable distribution of State resources for the education of all children in the State. Moreover, in tandem with the immediately following recommendation, this recommendation will encourage a reduction in districts' accounting and finance staffs and a redirection of those resources away from administrative purposes and into classrooms.
- Make permanent the suspension of restrictions on how funds from particular State programs are spent, and enlist the assistance of the State's congressional delegation to eliminate such restrictions on the utilization of federal funding sources. The purpose of this recommendation is to permit schools and districts to reallocate resources to address the more intractable, funding-intensive issues, as those schools and districts develop more cost effective ways to perform other functions or to address other issues, without requiring a greater total allotment of resources to education. Current research indicates that substantial improvements in student achievement are being made by significant reallocations of existing resources. See, for example, *Reallocating Resources, How to Boost Student Achievement Without Asking for More*, Allan Odden and Sarah Archibald; "Rethinking the Allocation of Teaching Resources: Some Lessons From High-Performing Schools," Karen Hawley Miles and Linda Darling-Hammond, in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 1998) (also at <http://www.jstor.org>); *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work* (esp. chapters 5 and 6), Linda Darling-Hammond; and "Class Size and Students at Risk: What Is Known? What Is Next?" (esp. under "Issue 5: Assessing the Costs of a Small-

Class Initiative”), Jeremy Finn (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The promise of such reallocations cannot be realized, however, without great flexibility in the use of available funds.

- Direct as much as possible of State funding to schools rather than to districts, in order to encourage a greater flow of available resources to the classroom.

IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY

Issues:

- In 1998, South Carolina adopted its nationally acclaimed Education Accountability Act, S.C. Code § 59-18-100 *et seq.* (“EAA”); and in 2001, Congress enacted the similarly intended No Child Left Behind Act, P.L. 107-110 (“NCLB”). Both acts require steady, measurable progress toward defined goals. Some of those goals are process or system oriented (for example, required credential levels for teachers) and others are outcome oriented (for example, student test scores in subject matter testing according to state standards). Both acts utilize carrot-and-stick incentives to coax or goad schools and districts to achieve the goals. NCLB sets minimum standards, and requires states to set their own standards either at or above that minimum. South Carolina’s standards, adopted before NCLB, significantly exceed the NCLB minimum. Federal accountability is measured by progress toward the state-developed standards and goals. As a consequence, because South Carolina’s goals are set at a higher level than other states, its accountable rate of progress toward those goals may, under the federal measure, appear lower than other states, even though its absolute level or absolute rate of progress may be higher than those other states.
- For the most part, accountability within the State under the EAA is measured in the aggregate at the school or district level, on an annual basis. Schools and districts receive passing or failing grades depending on what happens overall to certain test scores within the school or district, both absolutely and year over year. The scores and accountability grades are received in the first half of an academic year, based on tests taken near the end of the prior academic year. While such gross data may be useful to some extent to measure trends over time, they do not explain exactly what is or is not working in the educational delivery process, only that something is or is not working. Meanwhile, students are losing years of their educational careers while such trends develop; and both the students and quite probably the teachers and school and district leaders who are affected by or responsible for the trends will be gone
- The annual standards tests take a random, un-prioritized measure of students’ knowledge of the course standards. For example, allowable testing time may allow testing of only fifteen of a course’s forty standards. The fifteen tested are chosen somewhat randomly, and are not necessarily what one would consider the fifteen most important. Consequently, teachers must cover an entire set of course standards, with little or no emphasis based on relative importance, to make certain that students are at least introduced to a large number of standards each of which is equally likely to be tested.

Recommendations:

- Provide the tools for teachers and their principals to see their results in time to adjust and modify their methods if they are not achieving the appropriate results, not just in the aggregate but student by student. The point of accountability systems is to measure and

reward performance (or penalize failure) in order to bring about improvement. Improvement is possible only if the personnel whose performance is to be improved have adequate tools to monitor regularly their own performances. It is a basic management principle that regular and immediate feedback, rather than an annual review, is best calculated to improve performance. Annual testing at a point where it is too late to adjust is of little use. There are now available diagnostic tests, already adopted by some districts in South Carolina, that provide on a practically real-time basis, specific information on each student as to what parts of the course elements the student has mastered or is struggling with. Such testing was one of the most frequently mentioned recommendations of the districts who responded to the Council's inquiry. The State should make available and require the use of such tests in all districts.

- Take advantage of newly available data sets to make accountability more precise and more effective. In particular, thanks to a unique student identifier system for this purpose, the State will be able to track individual students' performances during their time in school. Previous measures could track only the performances of grade cohorts, the actual makeup of which can shift dramatically year-to-year. With this new information, teachers, principals, superintendents, school boards, state educational boards and the public can see what effect a teacher, school or district is currently having on the students actually in that class, school or district in a given year.
- Using the data developed by the real-time diagnostic testing and the precise information tracked through the unique student identifier system described above, institute regular sequenced reviews up the chain of command. Each teacher would meet with the principal to review student results in that teacher's classroom; each principal would meet with the district superintendent to review student results in that principal's school; each superintendent would meet with the district school board and with the State Department of Education to review student results in that district.
- In addition to providing the data for self-monitoring and improvement as the first level of an accountability program, grant the flexibility to make adjustments and improvements. It makes no managerial sense to hold personnel accountable for reaching assigned goals and yet to prescribe how they must attempt to reach those goals. The removal of funding restrictions discussed under "District Structure and Funding" is again recommended here, as is much greater flexibility in granting exemptions from regulations (or cutting back on those regulations altogether). The EAA recognizes that exemption from regulation has the promise of both maintaining pedagogical success in high-performing schools (S.C. Code § 59-18-1110) and of prompting such success in low-performing schools (S.C. Code § 59-18-1120). It is therefore hard to see why the same promises should not be afforded to the bulk of schools in between.
- Develop merit-based pay components for teachers so that compensation is tied to student centered measures (again, utilizing measures of improvement in a defined group of students, as provided by the data sets described in the first two recommendations of this section) rather than to teacher credential/training/experience measures. Since the goal is to provide a better, more effective educational delivery to all students, merit-based pay components must be designed to foster mutual support and collaboration. Consequently,

such a system should include one or both of two components. First, it should be based on absolute measures of achievement rather than on comparative rankings. Second, at least a part of such merit-based pay should be shared school-wide in order to foster a community of interest among every employee there in elevating student achievement.

- Hold methods accountable as well as personnel. One thing that was painfully apparent in the course of the Council's work is that the field of education is rife with reform trends, with new ones being advocated all the time. Little can be gained and much can be lost by jumping from one method to another. Avoid the error of abandoning a reform and jumping to another if results don't improve immediately and dramatically. First, be realistic in expectations of the timing and scope of improvement. Where reforms are instituted, investigate (a) whether the announced reforms are really being implemented in the classroom and (b) if so, what results are achieved. The most important changes for student achievement, changes in the way that teaching and learning occur in the classroom, are best explored at the teacher level, with peer consultation, planning and review. In this way, South Carolina can through its own teachers engage in the research and development of methods for improving instruction and student achievement.
- Allow student transfers to other schools and districts (obviously, constrained by capacity); and, where accountability mechanisms indicate that schools or districts are not performing at high levels, require prompt changes in school or district personnel and leadership. The primary mechanisms of accountability in most other contexts, and they are mechanisms that work, are the customer's option of voting with his feet, and the owner's option of replacing underperformers. Those should be the primary mechanisms here also. The Council recognizes that not all students in underperforming schools would be willing or able to transfer, but does not consider this a reason for depriving others who would of that option. The Council also recognizes that changes in personnel and leadership will be difficult for those involved; but it would be incalculably more difficult for the students involved to spend a significant portion of their school careers with an inadequate educational delivery system.
- Engage South Carolina's congressional delegation to eliminate the disconnect between higher South Carolina standards and the minimum federal standards, so that eligibility for federal support and comparisons to other states depend on whether each state has met uniform standards, not whether it has met the higher standards it has set for itself. As noted in the "Issues" above, South Carolina may have better absolute improvement and better absolute levels of performance, but rank below other states because it is farther from its self-imposed higher goals than other states are from theirs. Although this is technically a problem of perception, it has two real, detrimental consequences. One is psychological. Success tends to breed success, by fostering the energy and enthusiasm that further success requires. Thus, continued improvement is made easier if the perception of current improvement is not artificially diminished. What is needed is a balanced public discussion that both commends without complacency the improvements made so far and critiques constructively the continuing shortcomings that require attention and reform. The second detrimental consequence of a misperception of performance levels is economic. As global competition continues to force South Carolina's plans for economic development away from manufacturing based on our

eroding low labor cost comparative advantage, the perceived quality of our educational system becomes dramatically more important. While it is possible to explain the misperception created by disparate standards, the posture of correcting a negative impression is not the most favorable posture for attracting either new investment or the sort of people who create wealth in the new economy. In the context of this recommendation, although the Council is aware of the option of realigning South Carolina's standards, the Council credits the State for having set high standards and opposes lowering them.

- Prioritize standards within a course, and match testing to those priorities, rather than randomly testing items of varying degrees of importance. This recommendation will allow teachers to focus on what is of most importance in a class, to provide depth rather than merely breadth. It will also provide students a chance to learn the process and feel the satisfaction of mastering and more fully understanding the key aspects of a course, rather than merely hearing and hopefully remembering its peculiar argot. This recommendation is not intended to be inconsistent with retaining a small portion of random questions on lower priority standards, to minimize any incentive to “teach to the test.”

OVERCOMING CONSTRAINTS BY SHARING, LEVERAGING AND REALLOCATING RESOURCES

Issue:

- Every enterprise, no matter how noble its aims, must confront the issue of constraints, of limits on necessary inputs. For K-12 education in South Carolina, those constraints are primarily limited funds, limited teaching capacity, and limited student-teacher time. Limited teaching capacity is of particular concern in smaller and rural schools, and includes among other limits those caused by uneven geographic distribution of teaching talent and of student demand and by shifts in that geographic availability and demand from year to year. Recommendations addressing the limited teaching capacity are stated here and in the section “Excellent Teachers and Excellent Teaching.” The Council’s recommendations in this section are directed toward maximizing the utilization rate of and the return on the inputs that are available.

Recommendations:

- Establish a desk at the State Department of Education to facilitate the centralization of non-educational (*i.e.*, administrative) functions at the highest feasible level. This may be either at the level of several schools acting together, of the district, of a regional consortium of districts, or at the State level. For example, a small school must pay to train an administrative employee to handle certain functions in accordance with state and federal regulations, regardless of whether those functions require all or only a portion of that employee’s time. If several schools or districts share a single employee for that purpose, three benefits accrue. First, they incur the cost of training only one rather than multiple employees. Second, that employee becomes more proficient at the task by devoting more of his/her time to it. Third, more time of the principal or district personnel is freed for re-direction to educational tasks. In the case of centralizing/sharing procurement functions, an additional benefit is the greater buying power enjoyed by larger purchasers. Some centralizing/sharing goes on already, especially among several regional district cooperatives that have formed, but there appears to be significant opportunity for more; and there needs to be a mechanism for seeking and facilitating the exploitation of those opportunities.
- Inventory as soon as possible videoconferencing/distance learning technology at all schools, beginning with those that, due to size or location, are least able to offer a full complement of course offerings, and fill any gaps that appear from that inventory. This process should recognize that smaller and more rural schools may need more of such technology on a per-student basis than larger, more urban schools that can find and afford in-person teachers. Some districts, even some poorer ones, have already made this investment with their own funds or with grant moneys. This technology offers the best, most cost-effective way to overcome the disparity in course offerings and teachers available in small, poor or rural schools as compared to larger, wealthier or urban schools. For example, a high school that has sufficient student demand for one physics or Chinese language class and that is not close enough to another high school to share a

teacher must either (1) not offer the class; (2) use a teacher who is not fully qualified in the field or (3) hire a fully qualified teacher and make suboptimal use of his/her talents during much of the school day. A school that does not have enough student demand to make up even one class has only the first option. With currently available technology, however, one teacher who is expert in the field can cover a wide geographic area and several schools; and each of those schools can contribute its proportionate share to his/her cost.

- Focus available resources, both funds and school-day time, on education. Unless we are prepared to lengthen the school-day or school-year in order to accommodate new missions that we may wish to impose on the schools, regardless of how well-intentioned such new missions are, each added responsibility diminishes the amount of time spent between teacher and student in the school's core function, that of instruction in the basic curriculum. Since the level of such prime instructional time is one of the key indicators of student achievement, the result of diminishing that time is all too predictable. This recommendation is addressed in more detail under "Raising Student Achievement Levels."
- Provide a structure and regulatory authorization for districts and schools to analyze and utilize community resources that are available at little or no cost, rather than duplicating those resources. This applies both to facilities and to personnel. For example, where sufficient auditorium or athletic facilities are available, make arrangements to use them. Where safe, convenient space such as church educational buildings are available for rent for such things as early childhood or kindergarten classes, consider renting rather than building new, duplicative space. Where community organizations want to be (or can be recruited to be) involved in schools as tutors or mentors or classroom aids, make arrangements to use the free manpower. Several church-related and other social service organizations help schools in the State in that way already.
- Provide a structure and regulatory authorization for districts and schools to readily share resources developed for school needs with other community organizations or businesses for their needs, when those resources are not being used by the school. Such sharing may be for a fee, in order to help pay for the resource (especially if the shared use is for a commercial purpose), or for in-kind services, or may be for free, to help build community support for the school. For example: a school's computer lab may be used for adult education classes in basic computing; school space when available may be made available for meeting rooms; school athletic facilities may be made available to health clubs; computing capacity on a school's computers may be made available for data processing or for use in grid computing networks or other distributed parallel processing networks.
- As recommended in "District Structure and Funding," eliminate restrictions on fund use and other regulatory impediments in order to permit effective resource reallocation by schools and districts.

DYNAMIC SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Issues:

- In the great majority of instances in which student achievements in a particular school or district have improved significantly, the key has been the leadership from the principal or superintendent. Their role in establishing the way in which the school or district personnel work together, their role in the accountability process, their role in pursuing teacher/teaching excellence, their role in recruiting principals, teachers and other personnel, their role in allocating available resources, and their role in the intangible but nevertheless important matter of teacher, parent, student and community attitude are all crucial. At one remove, the district school board is likewise important for setting goals and for selecting, supporting and holding accountable the superintendent.
- There is a wealth of information on how significant improvement can be achieved and how it has been achieved in various settings, so much in fact that it is made nearly inaccessible by its sheer volume. School leaders don't have the time to sift through it all to find the most promising strategies for their schools or districts.

Recommendations:

- Establish within either the State Department of Education or the Education Oversight Committee an information clearinghouse on best practices that are tied to significant improvement or high student achievement, whether in South Carolina or other states, and provide the data in digested form to principals, superintendents and school boards throughout the State.
- As recommended in other sections of this Report, allow principals and superintendents the regulatory flexibility to lead their schools and districts, especially insofar as it relates to resource allocation. This would include, for example, decisions not to have certain positions in order to increase staffing for other positions. It would also include allowing principals and superintendents a free hand in hiring, assigning and terminating personnel who are not contributing to the schools' mission in the way required by those principals and superintendents. Retention of personnel who for whatever reason are not suited for their positions during lengthy processes for various employment actions is a disservice to the children for whom that year of instruction becomes unrecoverable lost time.
- Focus leadership training for principals and superintendents toward team-building and managing and coaching professionals. Provide the trainee evaluations from such training to school boards or superintendents that employ or are considering hiring the trainee.
- Establish State-level pre-selection criteria for superintendents and principals and a State-level pre-screening process. While the Council does not recommend abrogating local control, it recognizes that local political and personal pressures can occasionally impinge

on sound educational choices. Fixed State standards for such critical hires can help local officials make sound decisions.

- Establish a mandatory training requirement for school board members to insure a minimum level of knowledge of the school system. Strengthen the pool of school board candidates by offering the training to those planning to run for school board seats.

EXCELLENT TEACHERS AND EXCELLENT TEACHING

Issues:

- As is often remarked, teachers are the frontline of education. The critical step in the educational process is in most cases what happens between the teacher and the student in the classroom. Like many if not most states, South Carolina has a shortage of practicing teachers, particularly in rural, smaller and poorer districts (disproportionately, the lower performing districts) and in certain subjects. This shortage affects the ability of the State to deliver a high-quality, broad-content education, although the effect is not geographically uniform.
- Likewise, retention of teachers in those rural, smaller and poorer districts is especially difficult; and the turnover rate exacerbates other problems facing them. For example, those districts have to devote scarce staff and funds to recruiting and replacing teachers, they have to invest again in teacher training, having lost the training investment made in departing teachers; and they lose any connection that may have developed between departing teachers and students.
- Teacher availability is not likely to improve in the short run as higher federal requirements under NCLB take effect.
- Despite the obvious primary importance of teachers in the educational equation, South Carolina like most of the United States has a much smaller proportion of its educational system staff actually teaching (approximately 50%) than do most other developed countries. Recently imposed requirements to increase the proportion of guidance counselors may exacerbate this problem.

Recommendations:

- Continue to support programs such as the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement, and Call Me MISTER that are designed to recruit promising candidates to the teaching profession.
- Encourage and allow regulatory flexibility for school-based or district-based resource reallocation that will permit larger proportions of educational system positions to be held by teachers.
- Continue to require, and expand options for, continued education for teachers in their subject areas. This can be self-instruction monitored by a supervisor and peer review process, as well as more traditional methods. Through utilization of school-centered communities of teacher-learners and/or technologically based digital and distance learning mechanisms, this recommendation can be met with a relatively high degree of cost-effectiveness. The purposes of this recommendation are two. One, obviously, is to insure a highly knowledgeable group of teachers. The second is to reinvigorate a

teacher's interest in and enthusiasm about his or her subject area. The teacher's own sense of excitement about the subject is a critical prerequisite to infecting a student with any similar energy about the course.

- Provide the support (mentors, in-class coaches, peer review, supervisor review, shared planning, opportunities to observe master teachers either in person or remotely) for teachers to improve their pedagogical skills.
- Develop merit-based pay components for teachers, as recommended in the section “Improving Accountability” of this Report.
- Develop subject-area based pay incentives to attract and retain teachers in subject areas where shortages are pronounced. Because teachers with qualifications in certain areas have more options for alternative employment, the laws of supply and demand require this recommendation.
- Allow districts to provide a system of compensation enhancements to attract needed teachers, in the form of forgivable loans. The additional compensation will be provided early in the teacher's tenure; however, if the teacher leaves the district before a certain amount of time, then the additional stipend must be repaid.
- Provide teacher training with a system of forgivable loans: if the trained teacher stays in the State or in the district that funds the training for a certain amount of time, then the cost of the training is forgiven.
- As recommended in the section “Improving Accountability” of this Report, institute State-wide and State-funded diagnostic testing to provide on a practically real-time basis, specific information on each student as to what parts of the course elements the student has mastered or is struggling with, so that teachers and their principals can see their results in time to adjust and modify their methods if they are not achieving the appropriate results, not just in the aggregate but student by student.
- Institute processes that permit teachers to do what attracted them to the profession in the first place – that is, work with and teach students. This recommendation would include:
 - Move clerical, administrative and record-keeping functions out of the classroom. As recommended in “Overcoming Constraints by Sharing, Leveraging and Reallocating Resources” above, centralize such functions into as few staff positions as possible, shared if necessary at a higher level of centralization.
 - Utilize dedicated staff, volunteers or private sector options to remove other non-teaching functions, for example the acquisition and preparation of instructional materials. Several districts in the State are using quite satisfactorily services offered by textbook publishers, by independent entities, and by regional school district consortiums to prepare science and math materials that are delivered to the teacher for use in instruction on a “just in time” basis, and are then retrieved and recycled for re-use. The teacher is then able to use the considerable saved time

for actual instructional planning; the quality of the supporting materials is better and more uniform; and the economies of scale and value of recycling enhance the cost-effectiveness.

- Establish within either the State Department of Education or the Education Oversight Committee an information clearinghouse on best practices that are tied to significant improvement or high student achievement, whether in South Carolina or other states, and provide the data in digested form to teachers, principals, superintendents and school boards throughout the State.
- Promote shared planning time among teachers at a school who share either a subject area or a group of students. A significant body of research from several quarters suggests that such collaborative efforts are a key component in improving instructional methods and in enhancing student achievement. See, for example, *The Teaching Gap*, James W. Stigler and James Hiebert (1999). It has the additional benefit of improving teacher satisfaction in two ways, and thus improving teacher retention rates. First, shared planning eliminates the isolation that marks much of a teacher's day. Second, it allows the teacher to participate directly in research, review, development and refinement of educational methods, thus validating the teacher's status as a true professional contributing to the incremental improvement of his/her profession. This recommendation also encompasses offering teacher training (and training for undergraduates planning teaching careers) in the utilization of collaborative planning.
- Institute processes for collecting and sharing the results of such shared planning time research and development efforts. This effort would be a part of the best practices information clearinghouse recommended above.
- Maintain and enlarge programs for apprenticeship, mentoring, peer review, and in-classroom teacher coaching, including for example the Teacher Advancement Program and the South Carolina Mathematics and Science Unit Coaching Initiative.
- Implement scheduling methods that permit a teacher to stay with one group of students over several years. In addition to the pedagogical value of the bonds created, those same bonds should have a positive effect on teacher retention.
- Provide the necessary technology to permit teacher training and education courses to be delivered via distance learning vehicles.
- As recommended in other sections of this Report, provide the necessary technology to allow teachers to teach classes from remote locations. This recommendation has several benefits. First, it allows students access to teachers and courses that they might otherwise not have. Second, it allows schools and districts to provide that access by sharing costs with other districts. Third, it can be used as a training mechanism for apprentice teachers who may be on site with the students but can observe remotely, along with the students, the skills and methods of a master instructor. It thus allows one highly-skilled teacher to be leveraged in several ways without duplication of costs.

- Provide the necessary regulatory flexibility (and enlist the South Carolina congressional delegation to help seek such flexibility at the federal level) to allow the utilization of volunteers with particular specialized knowledge as content specialists.
- As recommended in other sections of this Report, allow principals and superintendents a free hand in hiring, assigning and terminating personnel who are not contributing to the schools' mission in the way required by those principals and superintendents. Retention of personnel, especially in a classroom setting, who for whatever reason are not suited for their positions (or whose positions are no longer needed) during lengthy processes for various employment actions is a disservice to the children for whom that year of instruction becomes unrecoverable lost time, and is frequently a drain on morale of other personnel. The Council does not expect or intend that any such job action by a principal or superintendent should be a slight to the character or intent of the affected personnel; rather the Council in this recommendation recognizes that from time to time people find themselves in either an occupation or a position for which they are not equipped or for which they no longer have the necessary enthusiasm or which is no longer necessary to the mission, and that it is the role of good management, through observation and the accountability tools discussed elsewhere in this Report, to recognize such situations and to make the necessary changes. The Council notes that taking such action is difficult and procrastination in such situations is easy; consequently, not only should such prompt action be allowed; it is also necessary in this context that principals and superintendents be trained in the necessary management skills and receive support up the chain of command for such actions.

EXPANDED OPTIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Issue:

Different students have different learning abilities and different learning styles. Among students and their parents there is a wide array of preferences for different curricular emphases, instructional styles and materials, faculty makeup, scheduling procedures, school calendars, school culture, and a host of other tangible and intangible characteristics of schools. These students and parents are the clients of South Carolina's schools. While the students are required to participate in the educational process, the school system has no right to the student, no right to force him or her into a particular educational setting. Rather, in order to ensure the maximum level of success in the State's effort to provide all students a high-level education, the State needs to facilitate as many different educational settings and options as it can, so long as the education offered is consistent with the generally applicable standards set by the State.

Recommendations:

- Publicize and provide access to additional choices. In communities where there are magnet schools, charter schools, *etc.*, there does not appear to be significant awareness among all students and parents of the existence of those options.
- Utilize personnel and resources within the State Department of Education or Education Oversight Committee to develop a template for and to assist in the creation of magnet schools, especially at a multi-district regional level. Whereas one district may not have sufficient interest to support a particular magnet offering, several contiguous districts may.
- Subject to space limitations and preferred admission for in-zone or in-district students, allow open enrollment in any public school, not only across attendance zone lines but across district lines as well, with State funding, and the instructional portion of local funding, to follow the student, as recommended under "Improving Accountability" in this Report.
- Create a State-wide licensing board for charter schools, whether new schools or conversion schools. The reason for this recommendation is that there appears to be a reluctance on the part of district boards to authorize charter schools, which is impeding the promise recognized by South Carolina's charter schools enabling legislation. See S.C. Code § 59-40-20. At this time, South Carolina has only about 27 charter schools (of which 7 are less than one year old) serving fewer than 4,700 students. In Arizona, whose school charter law is only 2 years older than South Carolina's, there are nearly 500 charter schools serving more than 86,000 students; and North Carolina, which adopted legislation at the same time as South Carolina, has 97 charter schools serving over 28,000 students. Independent research on the North Carolina experience indicates that the presence of charter schools serves not only the goal of allowing students and parents greater freedom to choose among several educational options, but the goal of improved

student achievement as well – and not just for those students choosing the charter schools but for those remaining in the traditional district schools also. See George M. Holmes, Jeff DeSimone, and Nicholas G. Rupp, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 9683, <http://papers.nber.org/papers/w9683> and <http://www.nber.org/digest/jan04/w9683.html>. To make South Carolina’s charter school legislation more effective, however, other reforms are also needed.

- Amend the enabling legislation, which currently provides that each district is to assist and advise persons who wish to apply to establish a charter school at no expense to the charter school organizers, to place that statutory responsibility on the State Department of Education or the Education Oversight Committee (see S.C. Code § 59-40-140(H)). No one district has had enough experience in this area to be adept at the process, and it would be a wasteful duplication of expenditures for each district to train someone for that purpose, given the limited demand for the assistance in each district.
- Extend the life of a charter beyond the current 5 years (S.C. Code § 59-40-110) to 15 years, and allow contract extension applications at any time after 5 years of operation, with an extension running 15 years from the date that it is granted. A 5 year charter is too short for the charter school to become fully established and is far too short to allow for any sort of facilities financing that may be needed at the front end. Allowing schools to renew their charter for 15 year renewals at various times will allow them to demonstrate to lenders from whom they may seek facilities financing, that they will be around for a sufficient period to repay the financing.
- Charter schools that elect to receive services that the district provides to schools, centrally or otherwise, should be allowed to obtain such services at not more than the cost to the district of providing such services (including allocable overhead), rather than having to negotiate a price with the district. There is no reason why efficiencies and economies of scale in non-educational functions should not be available to charter schools that are assisting the district in its function of educating students. Implementing this recommendation would require an amendment to S.C. Code § 59-40-140(D).
- The formula for distribution of resources of funds to charter schools should include some access to capital funds. Although the current provision, S.C. Code § 59-40-140(A), includes a proportionate share of capital outlay and maintenance expenditures, it excludes from that measure any outlays paid from bond funds and any debt repayment amount. Since bond funds (and the repayment thereof) constitute the bulk of capital outlays, this provision effectively deprives the charter school of any meaningful access to such funds. The Council does not recommend that charter schools receive a straight per student portion of all bond proceeds or debt repayments, since historic factors and maintenance cycles will affect the distribution of such funds among schools in a district, the statute should allow some allocation based on respective minimum needs.

- The ability of charter schools to raise capital on their own (other than by grants and contributions) should be clarified. The statute currently prohibits debt (S.C. Code § 59-40-190(A)), but permits installment purchase agreements (S.C. Code § 59-40-140(I)).
- S.C. Code 59-40-120 should be modified so that certain unrestricted assets obtained by a charter school do not escheat to the district upon dissolution of a school. The licensing entity should not have any financial incentive to revoke or not renew a charter.
- A charter school’s general authority to determine its own faculty, its own resource allocations, and its own policies (S.C. Code § 59-40-60(E)) should not be compromised by any requirement that it continue to employ employees who previously worked at a converted charter school. Consequently, S.C. Code § 59-40-100(D) should be repealed.
- S.C. Code § 59-40-110(E) should be amended to require final action on a request to renew a charter at a point considerably earlier than the last day of classes under its existing charter. Not knowing until late May whether the school will be operational at the beginning of the following August makes planning for the upcoming year, hiring faculty, securing texts and materials, *etc.*, virtually impossible. Moreover, both the charter school students and the regular schools in the district will need to know well in advance of that point whether the charter will be renewed in order to arrange scheduling, plan for a large influx of students, make plans for other educational paths, *etc.* The Council recommends that an application to renew be acted upon within six months of its submission and that such submissions be required not later than 18 months before the last day of classes in the last school year for which the charter school is authorized.
- New charter schools (not including converted charter schools) should be permitted to enroll students regardless of their residence in any particular district, with local, state and federal funding following the student. The preference given to in-district students, set out in S.C. Code § 59-40-145, should be limited to converted schools. The requirement for permission from other districts for their students to enroll in significant numbers, also set out in S.C. Code § 59-40-145, should be eliminated entirely.
- Charter schools with below a specified minimum number of students should be permitted to align themselves with existing district schools for purposes of participating in that school’s athletic and other extracurricular programs. Students at charter schools should be allowed off-hours use of facilities at other schools of the district where they are located, upon payment of appropriate insurance and security costs. S.C. Code § 59-40-50(C)(3) should be modified in this regard.
- Utilize the technology recommended in sections “Overcoming Constraints by Sharing, Leveraging and Reallocating Resources” and “Excellent Teachers and Excellent Teaching” of this Report for remote learning (from sources either within or without South

Carolina, either dynamic or static, real time or archived). Such technology use permits access to educational paths and content that would otherwise be unavailable to most students and permits combinations of educational paths and contents that would otherwise be practically impossible. Several states have already implemented virtual schools and virtual school districts making use of available technology. South Carolina has a good bit of the technology in place and has (for example, SCETV's StreamlineSC, DESC.info and (for teacher training) PBS Teacherline) a good bit of standards-based content available. Such use of technology to overcome issues of time, distance and teacher scarcity offers the following significant advantages:

- Reduce or eliminate scheduling conflicts and significantly enhance scheduling flexibility;
 - Allow instructional access to handicapped, homebound or incarcerated students;
 - Allow self-paced credit recovery and other remediation programs tailored to individual students;
 - Allow self-paced accelerated learning tracks and advanced placement content;
 - Facilitate dual credit programs with secondary and post-secondary institutions;
 - Provide core content tutorials;
 - Provide supplemental content including virtual field trips and guest instructors or speakers;
 - Create much greater degrees of instructional flexibility in classes of students with different learning styles and speeds;
 - Engage students through the now familiar format and interactivity of the Internet.
- Eliminate restrictions that require students and parents to choose one educational path (for example, regular school **or** magnet school **or** charter school **or** dual credit program **or** home school). Permit, through technology and other methods of cooperation among educational delivery methods, parent and student choice of pieces of various methods, such as schools within schools; partial home schooling, combined with magnet school or regular high school; participation in the non-academic life of regular schools by charter school and home school students, *etc.*

RAISING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS

Issues:

- By the most visible measures, aggregate SAT college entrance scores and reported dropout rates, South Carolina lags behind the rest of the nation in student achievement. That fact contributes to a cycle of lowered morale, lowered expectations, and lowered prospects for attracting economic development and entrepreneurial, wealth-creating individuals for whom the educational climate and average educational attainment of South Carolina are critically important.
- That fact also masks some significant progress in South Carolina, for example, in fourth and eighth grade mathematics, both in the general school population and among historically under-achieving groups.
- Although the progress is welcome, maintaining the current level of educational achievement is unacceptable; the progress must be broadened and accelerated; and South Carolina must be put on a level with the most educationally advanced countries in the world. The data linking higher levels of educational attainment with the higher levels of income and quality of life that South Carolinians want are beyond cavil.
- Most recent statistical analyses indicate that the current low level of achievement cannot be ascribed to the usual culprit of the high incidence of impoverished, rural and historically underprivileged groups in South Carolina. The Council considers that good news, because it means that the problem is not as intractable as it may have been considered.
- Because raising student achievement levels is the end-game of all the other reforms described in this Report, the Council believes that each recommendation will contribute to this goal, and some of those are reiterated here. We do not, however, repeat all recommendations under this rubric. While some of these recommendations may require facilitation at the policy level, most require implementation at the school level where the process of actually improving student achievement takes place.

Recommendations:

- Emphasize reading skills, reading comprehension and independent learning skills at appropriate stages of academic development. In particular, emphasize the primacy of reading skills and comprehension and basic computational skills and patterns in the early years, as the foundation for most other later learning, even if this focus requires the postponement of some substantive content. This is a structural recommendation, applicable to the curriculum design for all students. It is not a recommendation directed primarily at remediation programs.
- Utilize all class time for subject matter instruction.

- Eliminate from the time allotted for class such distractions as record-keeping, school announcements, unrelated projects, unrelated reading, free time at the beginning or end of class, teacher planning, assignment grading, *etc.* For most students and in most settings, teacher-student instructional time is the prime ingredient of education, and it must not be abbreviated or compromised.
 - Provide ample planning time for teachers so that the effective utilization of class time can be maximized. Preferably, much of the planning time would be shared time for teachers of the same subject or of the same student group. See the related recommendation in the section “Excellent Teachers and Excellent Teaching” of this Report.
 - Maximize class time, with as few interruptions as possible. Partial days, late starts, and early dismissals (especially mid-week) disrupt the flow of class time, and increase the likelihood of losing time to the fits and starts of such disruptions. Where such breaks are needed for pedagogical reasons, they should be clustered at the beginning or end of the school week.
 - Require prompt makeup of all assignments by students who have to miss class for any reason. Establish mechanisms for as much of the in-class and out-of-class assignments to be conveyed to a student during his/her absence.
 - Establish and enforce clear and limited acceptable excuses for a teacher’s absence from class. Data from some schools suggest that the higher incidence of teacher absences that happen to extend a weekend (*i.e.*, Monday and Friday absences) may be statistically significant. Disallow the scheduling of any school or district meetings that require a teacher to miss a regularly scheduled class.
 - Organize school-provided transportation methods and schedules so that students are in class when class time begins. Too many students arrive late and lose valuable class time. School provided transportation methods must also be organized to accommodate to the maximum extent possible the opportunities for before and after school extra help sessions. The Council was unable to discern a reason why this cannot be accomplished.
 - Organize the opening and the close of the school year so that the school and all teachers are ready to teach from the time the students arrive until the time they leave each academic session. In particular, all instructional materials should be on hand and distributed. The reported incidence of textbooks not being available or distributed to students until well after the start of an academic session is unconscionable.
- Abandon scheduling systems that do not provide continuity throughout the academic year in basic subjects such as language arts, mathematics, and foreign languages.
 - Base grade movements and course completions on subject matter achievement rather than on the student’s age or on the time spent in the grade or class. The Council recognizes

the scheduling and social issues caused by such a shift, as well as the issues related to structure of the existing Carnegie unit system, but recommends that intensive efforts be devoted to solving the problem and targeting subject mastery rather than an accumulation of seat-time. The Council notes that some districts in the State are already moving toward this end.

- In particular, starting kindergarten or first grade should require a level of demonstrated readiness to learn; and that requirement can be instituted without any scheduling difficulties. The Council recognizes that there is a wide range of student readiness at the age of 5 or 6 and believes that delaying a student's entrance into kindergarten or first grade is preferable to initiating a cycle of frustration and failure. Intensive efforts should be made to assist any student not ready to enter kindergarten or first grade at the normal, developmentally appropriate time.
- Provide fast-feedback diagnostic testing throughout the year. Train teachers to analyze the data and to act on it immediately. See the related recommendation in sections "Improving Accountability" and "Excellent Teachers and Excellent Teaching" of this Report.
- Require continued education for teachers in his/her subject area, and provide the support for teachers to constantly improve their pedagogical skills. See the discussion of these recommendations in the section "Excellent Teachers and Excellent Teaching" of this Report.
- Recognize the increasing convergence of the skills and knowledge base needed for college and those needed for the workplace, by pushing all students toward more high-level classes that have traditionally been designated "college preparatory." Data from the United States Department of Education suggest that the best predictor of success in college is the quality and intensity of the high school curriculum. That same rigor of curriculum is also required preparation for the non-college bound.
- Provide teachers not just common curricular standards for each class and grade, but also the sequence in which the standards for that course and grade are to be taught.
- Provide teachers common and rigorous assignments (for example, more demanding essay topics or data interpretation, with higher requirements for stylistic and computational aspects) that require development of analytical skills.. Assignments must be demanding; lower expectations serve no valid goal.
- Focus relentlessly on student achievement. Institute mechanisms of regular accountability reviews for improvement of individual student performance up the chain of command. See the recommendation under section "Improving Accountability" of this Report.
- Utilize instructional technology to help provide remediation and accelerated learning opportunities for students who need them. It not only increases skill levels in an important area; it also interests students through a familiar and lively format, so that the

upper and lower ends (the most likely to lose interest in an ordinary setting) are instead more likely to remain engaged.

- Provide tutoring for struggling students.

IMPROVING GRADUATION RATES

Issues:

- A high school diploma is a key to future success. The data are uniform in correlating completion of a challenging high school curriculum with improved employability and increased income potential. In addition to the individual economic benefit from completing high school, the economic development benefit to the overall community is marked. That economic development potential consists of courting external investments for South Carolina, developing internally innovations that create wealth, and attracting high-wealth, creative individuals to South Carolina. Moreover, there are the no less important benefits of a better-informed and more capable citizenry. Although the data on what the rate of high school completion actually is in South Carolina and on how that rate compares to other states are somewhat divergent (a deficiency that may be overcome with the unique student identifier system discussed earlier), what is nonetheless clear is that the dropout rate is currently too high. What is also clear is that there is no single specific reason why a student would drop out. One key is in raising student achievement levels. Students, like anyone else, will be much less likely to leave an enterprise early if they are enjoying success at it. Consequently, many of the recommendations made in earlier sections of this Report, particularly in “Raising Student Achievement Levels,” are just as critical here. And, conversely, the recommendations here are also important for raising student achievement. Like the recommendations for raising achievement levels, many of these recommendations may require some policy flexibility, but primarily require implementation at the school level.
- Just as the recommendations in “Raising Student Achievement Levels” significantly overlap those for reducing dropout rates, so too do those in the following section, “Culture and Attitude.” The value that a student places on the educational enterprise will reflect in significant part a series of related attitudes that he or she encounters both within and beyond the school system itself.
- An unspoken aspect of each of these recommendations is the critical role of parents. While the Council recognizes and laments the fact that, for many of the students most in danger of dropping out of school, parental interest and involvement are minimal, the importance and effectiveness of any increase in that interest and involvement are equal to or greater than those of most merely institutional efforts.

Recommendations:

- Establish flexible credit recovery programs that address the particular student’s shortcomings in completion of a course. The one-size-fits-all requirement of course repetition would be a significant deterrent to a student attempting to get back on track, especially where the failure in a course resulted from such things as excessive absences, failure to complete particular assignments, or extraordinary difficulty with one particular part of the course curriculum. Such credit recovery offerings could include an intensive

tutoring program in the particular areas of deficiency using public school tutors or private or volunteer tutors who have the necessary proficiency in the curriculum; a self-paced distance learning program; a self-study program under a teacher's direction; an opportunity to complete unfinished projects; demonstration of sufficient mastery of the subject through an end-of-course test; *etc.*

- Establish transition mechanisms (such as the freshman academy being utilized by a number of districts and schools) to provide support and guidance to students at critical junctures. As a part of the transition mechanism, schools (administrators, guidance counselors, teachers) should work with students on individual goals and plans for the upcoming phase (in the case of freshman academy, for high school), and those goals and plans should be regularly reviewed and updated. The idea is that a student is less likely to quit if he or she has committed to and is working toward a goal.
- Develop mechanisms to promote student/teacher ties. At a minimum this should include a program of assigned faculty mentors to at-risk students. Often in the case of potential dropouts, the student's teachers are the only people in the student's life who model the value of an education and care about the student's educational achievement. While teachers cannot substitute for parents, they can during the course of a school day over a school year exert a profound positive influence. Particularly in larger schools, however, it is easy for some students who do not by their behavior demand attention to receive very little of it. The recommended mechanisms should be designed to prevent that, to focus attention on each student, especially where needed and not just where demanded. One aspect of this recommendation involves scheduling issues. The development of relationships of trust and confidence between teachers and students and the development of insights into the personality of individual students take time. Scheduling regimes that have a student in and out of a teacher's life (and vice versa) in just four months are not conducive to such developments. While the Council has not located any data on the effect of block-scheduling versus year-long scheduling on drop-out rates, the Council notes that block scheduling does not promote the ends of this particular recommendation. Also on scheduling, the likelihood of developing ties between students and teachers in the critical high school years will depend in significant part on whether a student formed such ties in earlier grades. For that reason, early year scheduling (and middle and high school scheduling as well, to the extent feasible) may include maintaining the same teacher-student assignments over more than one year.
- Communicate on a regular and frequent basis with parents regarding their child's progress in school and any difficulties that the child may be encountering. With the technology available, this should be required rather than optional. It is possible to advise parents on a daily basis of school attendance and on a weekly basis of class performance.
- Advise all students and parents well in advance of critical dates of options for alternative educational paths that may better suit the student's needs, learning style or intended career path. In particular, in-service or hands-on learning approaches, similar to that being offered by the Greenville Tech Charter School, and apprenticeship programs should be developed and made available to students who are unengaged by more traditional educational settings.

- Where existing investments or other educational priorities are such that large schools are utilized, create within those structures smaller groups or schools-within-schools in order to provide and promote opportunities for students to belong to a more cohesive educational community. In a larger setting, a student's opportunity to receive individual attention is compromised. Interscholastic and intramural athletic teams, extracurricular activities, shared curricula or shared schedules, schools-within-schools, active advisory groups, *etc.*, can make the ties between a student and school (or at least some aspects of school) much stronger and less likely to be lightly broken than can the very attenuated links to a mega-school where the presence or absence of a particular student may go largely unnoticed.
- Focus a significant portion of early-grades reading and social studies (1) on biographical material with particular emphasis on the importance and role of education in the lives of great men and women, and (2) on attractive career possibilities and the educational paths to achieve them. The best chance for the educational system to develop in its charges some effective allegiance to the very idea of education and its worth, if that allegiance is not being developed at home or in the culture at large, is in the early years.

CULTURE AND ATTITUDE

Issue:

- Of significant importance in raising student achievement levels and in lowering dropout rates is the attitude that students have toward the educational enterprise, its worth to them and their place in it. That attitude is reflective of a number of cultural factors that the students meet both in and outside the school environment. Without a readiness on the part of students to accept what the educational system has to offer, no reform will be effective in achieving improvement.
- As a practical matter, school is the primary non-family social setting in which students observe and acquire habits, so-called “soft skills,” that are of critical importance to their chances to succeed socially and economically. An ambivalence or even timidity about normative standards of behavior in the schools affects the development of those habits and, as importantly, affects the quality of the academic learning environment. Not only does inappropriate behavior disrupt the process and divert class time and faculty attention, it also significantly affects the level of professional satisfaction of the faculty and therefore negatively affects the teacher retention rate.

Recommendations:

- Foster publicly and inculcate in students a respect for the importance of educational success, and teach and model skills and habits conducive to success. This recommendation involves not only the schools and educational personnel, not only policymakers, but the community at large. The best educational delivery mechanisms and the highest content standards in the world are bootless if, in the words of a parable, the seed is sown on thorny ground. Students have to want to learn; they have to believe that they can learn. Motivation is crucial; and not just motivation but also the habits and virtues needed for success in school and later. Success in education is based on the quality of interpersonal experiences, as is family, social and economic success in later life. Because the student is one side of the educational interpersonal experience, from the earliest age students need to see modeled, and need to have taught to and required of them, the interpersonal skills needed for them to be part of quality interpersonal experiences with their teachers and fellow students. Such skills would include direct communications skills, work ethic, punctuality, an etiquette of respect, proper physical comportment, manners, diction, appropriate appearance, *etc.* Such skills and habits should be explained, modeled and required. Teachers and administrators should, by their own appearance, dress, behavior and comportment, convey the same respect for the importance of education and the system of which they are a part that they expect from the students. This is not a recommendation that a certain number of minutes be set aside from the already stretched school day, but rather that such skills be taught and modeled throughout the day and throughout the curriculum.

- Support faculty and administration decisions regarding student behavior and discipline. This recommendation is directed not only up the chain of command within schools and districts, but also to parents. While requiring explanations of actions taken is appropriate, undermining a teacher’s authority is not helpful to the overall educational process.
- Celebrate and publicize academic successes at the individual level, both student and teacher, and at the school, district and state levels. This recommendation calls for action by the educational system, through awards, notices, *etc.*, but equally calls for action by the community at large and in particular its organs of public voice, the media. The public attention focused on stellar student academic achievement should be at least as great as that focused on stellar student athletic achievement; on stellar teaching and leadership performance at least as great as that on stellar corporate performance.
- All opinion leaders (politicians, business leaders, community leaders, faith leaders, media, celebrities) should relentlessly focus public attention on the importance of education, and on the vision and plan for improving South Carolina’s competitive position in academic performance.
- Encourage community involvement in the schools, not just in the use of the facilities as recommended earlier in this Report, but in the life of the schools, their activities, programs, and endeavors. Seek commitments from community groups to take a stake in the academic success of the schools by mentoring (not just academically but also in the “soft skills”), tutoring, sponsoring programs, and providing employment opportunities. Especially at the upper grade levels, encourage the students to serve as recruiters for community involvement in the schools. Such activity is good training for the students in the sort of soft skills referred to above and is more likely to achieve the desired level of community involvement than is a general broadcast announcement or invitation from a school bureaucracy.

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