



from the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
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2009 report card release shows challenges statewide

Editor's Note: The release of the 2009 school and district report cards will be at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, April 16, 2010. Embargoed access to report card data is available from the SC Department of Education.

Columbia – Today's release of the 2009 School and District Report Cards provides little evidence that improved student academic performance in South Carolina schools is occurring at an acceptable rate. While 373 (32 percent) of schools earned an Absolute rating of *Excellent* or *Good* in 2009, much of the results in the release are troubling.

- ***Average student performance, as measured by indexes (which determine a school's rating), declined from 2008 to 2009 among elementary, middle, high schools, and school districts.***

Student performance drives the calculation of a school's index, and the index determines a school's ratings based upon a 5-point scale. For example, the average Absolute index for elementary schools in 2008 was 3.15. The index for those schools in 2009 is 3.01. The data also suggest an erosion in 2009 high school performance, as on-time graduation rate, first-attempt HSAP performance, and end-of-course test performance declined from 2008.

"The flat and declining performance among young people is a call to action as we strive for continuous improvement," stated Neil Robinson, Jr., Chairman of the Education Oversight Committee (EOC). "Economic recovery depends upon a strong, educated workforce that is self-sufficient and independent."

In September 2009, the EOC established the 2020 Vision, which states that by 2020, "all students will graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete successfully in the global economy, participate in a democratic society and contribute positively as members of families and communities." Measures of performance that frame the goal include reading proficiency, high school graduation, preparedness for high school success, and schools rated *At-Risk*. During the December 2009 release of SC's status toward reaching the 2020 Vision, EOC officials warned against addressing challenges by "making excuses and worse yet, accepting mediocrity or failure." The release of the 2009 report cards also found:

- ***Significant gaps in achievement continue to exist between students of different demographic groups and socioeconomic status***

A comparison of 2009 PASS performance in all tested subject areas among white students, African American students, Hispanic students, students who qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch, and pay-lunch students illustrates that statewide improvement will not occur unless these gaps are closed.

Similarly, achievement gaps exist among these student groups when analyzing performance by school Absolute rating. The following table shows the gaps as measured by the percent of students scoring Met or above in an elementary or middle school rated *Average*. The most significant gap observed is 23 percentage points, between white and African American student performance in Science.

	Percent of students scoring <i>Met or above</i> in an Elem/Middle school rated <i>Average</i>								
	All students	White students	African American students	White /AA Gap	Hispanic students	White /Hisp. Gap	Pay-lunch students	Free- or reduced price lunch students	Lunch status gap
Reading & Research	73%	81%	64%	17 %pts	65%	16 %pts	84%	66%	18 %pts
Math	69%	78%	58%	20 %pts	67%	11 %pts	81%	62%	19 %pts
Science	65%	75%	52%	23 %pts	62%	13 %pts	78%	57%	21 %pts
Social Studies	71%	78%	63%	15 %pts	68%	10 %pts	82%	65%	17 %pts
Writing	68%	74%	59%	15 %pts	63%	11 %pts	79%	61%	18 %pts

“These gaps cannot be ignored if we are to reach the goals we have set for our state,” said Robinson. “They require significant attention, educational investment in doing things differently, and a relentless commitment.”

The number of schools serving students in high poverty increased this year. Yet, some schools serving a significant number of students in poverty are excelling. Twelve of the 295 (4 percent) elementary schools with a poverty index of 80 percent or greater earned an Absolute rating of *Excellent* or *Good*.

Gadsden Elementary in Richland School District One, for example, earned Absolute and Growth ratings of *Excellent*. The school serves a population of 96.3% poverty (measured by free- and reduced-price lunch or Medicaid eligibility.) School officials point out the extra effort they make to develop stronger connections between content standards, instruction, and assessments. They also analyze results of assessments to “inform teachers about next steps in the instructional process.”

“It is important to note that some schools in South Carolina are proving that poverty is not an excuse preventing high achievement,” said Robinson. “Schools like Gadsden Elementary are putting forth that extra effort resulting in higher student achievement. We must learn from their successes.”

Robinson called on educators, parents, and community members to commit to the young people of South Carolina and their futures.

“Although we face economic challenges, we owe it to the young people of this state to dig in and work together toward realizing a vision for this state by 2020,” said Robinson.

The SC Education Oversight Committee is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected leaders. Created in 1998, the committee is dedicated to reporting facts, measuring change, and promoting progress within South Carolina’s education system.