



# REACHING HIGHER LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT IN READING

Report to the Education Oversight Committee  
September 23, 2010

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## Executive Summary

In May 2010, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released a report, *Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, in which the foundation authors stated

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade (as measured by NAEP at the beginning of fourth grade) can be a make-or-break benchmark in a child's educational development. Up until the end of third grade, most children are *learning to read*. Beginning in fourth grade, however, they are *reading to learn*, using their skills to gain more information in subjects such as math and science, to solve problems, to think critically about what they are learning, and to act upon and share that knowledge in the world around them. Up to half of the printed fourth-grade curriculum is incomprehensible to students who read below that grade level, according to the Children's Reading Foundation. And three quarters of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school, according to researchers at Yale University. Not surprisingly, students with relatively low literacy achievement tend to have more behavioral and social problems in subsequent grades and higher rates of retention in grade. The National Research Council asserts that "academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone's reading skill at the end of third grade. A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from high school."<sup>1</sup>

This statement affirms the findings of countless other studies on student proficiency in reading the degree to which reading skills influence later school and life achievements. The Education Oversight Committee has reported repeatedly on the need for higher performance on state and national measures. Despite gains in other academic areas, reading achievement has remained relatively flat for the last twelve years.

During 2009 and 2010 the Education Oversight Committee analyzed school performance on the reading and research subtest of the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT) in order to identify schools that could be categorized as High Achieving, Low Achieving, High Improvement and Low Improvement. The highest and lowest ranked twenty-five schools in each of the 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 PACT testing cycles were chosen to be the focus of further study. The further study intended to identify differences in leadership, teacher characteristics and school practices. High Achieving schools, not surprisingly, enrolled fewer minority students and fewer students of poverty. Those schools also had limited access to Title One and technical assistance funding. Educators in those schools tended not to turn over as rapidly as those in Low Achieving Schools. Although the Low Achieving Schools had different resources (e.g., Title One allocations, technical assistance funding) their student bodies were more likely to be composed of students in poverty and with lower performance histories which contribute to the schools' eligibility for those funds. High Improvement Schools tended to be relentless in their work with young people. High Improvement schools often were identified as Low Achieving. When principals were asked about the reading program, there were not startling differences in programs or strategies among the groups of schools. In fact, the differences in student population and the similarities in reading strategies and emphasis suggest that more differentiation in teaching should be considered.

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<sup>1</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. *Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*. (Baltimore, Maryland, 2008.)

The three agencies are recipients of a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to develop policy and promote higher achievement -- SC Department of Education through its *LiteracySC* initiative, SC Kids Count through its work on early reading proficiency and the Education Oversight Committee through its evaluation and accountability functions.

This document presents the findings of the research study undertaken by the EOC and offers preliminary recommendations. Those recommendations follow:

1. Continue the focus on the five critical reading elements through teaching and learning emphasizing acquisition, intervention and acceleration in practice, policy and research;
2. Convene a statewide, high-level reading policy panel to address child physical health, language development and school learning policies, practices and funding;
3. Conduct longitudinal studies to identify patterns in resources, processes and performance that are linked to higher achievement; and
4. Support the continued collaborative and complementary work of the three agencies and expand this work to include the SC State Library, professionals working with child health and well-being, institutions of higher education with responsibility for teacher preparation and renewal, early childhood, elementary and middle school educators, and parents.

## Introduction

Portions of this report were published in a July 24, 2009 memorandum to the members of the Education Oversight Committee.

*“Which schools are achieving success in teaching young people to read?”* Over the last several years, South Carolina’s policy makers repeatedly have asked this question. The State has invested heavily in improving student reading proficiency through a variety of resources and/or initiatives to include: professional development on the standards (funded either through Education Improvement Act or lottery appropriations), formative assessments, the South Carolina Reading Initiative (SCRI), etc. Yet our schools, the services that support them and our young people have not achieved the level of performance critical for twenty-first century success.

Studies of student achievement and success after school are replete with examples and exhibits of how the capacity to read with understanding and comprehension undergird performance in other endeavors.

In May 2010, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released a report, *Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, in which the foundation authors stated

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade (as measured by NAEP at the beginning of fourth grade) can be a make-or-break benchmark in a child’s educational development. Up until the end of third grade, most children are *learning to read*. Beginning in fourth grade, however, they are *reading to learn*, using their skills to gain more information in subjects such as math and science, to solve problems, to think critically about what they are learning, and to act upon and share that knowledge in the world around them. Up to half of the printed fourth-grade curriculum is incomprehensible to students who read below that grade level, according to the Children’s Reading Foundation. And three quarters of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school, according to researchers at Yale University. Not surprisingly, students with relatively low literacy achievement tend to have more behavioral and social problems in subsequent grades and higher rates of retention in grade. The National Research Council asserts that “academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone’s reading skill at the end of third grade. A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from high school.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2008 ACT reported that only “one in five 2008 high school graduates [nationally] is prepared for entry-level college courses in English Composition, College Algebra, social science and Biology, while 1 in 4 is not prepared for college-level coursework in any of the four subject areas.”<sup>3</sup> Achieve, an organization affiliated with both the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA), indicates that “most high school graduates need remedial help in college. More than 70 percent of graduates quickly take the next step into two- and four-year colleges, but at least 28 percent of those students immediately take remedial English or math courses. Transcripts show that during their college careers, 53

<sup>2</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. *Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*. (Baltimore, Maryland, 2008.)

<sup>3</sup> ACT, *Measuring College Readiness: The national graduating class of 2008* (Iowa City, Iowa: 2008).

percent of students take at least one remedial English or math class.”<sup>4</sup> The American Management Association (AMA) indicates that 38 percent of job applicants lack necessary reading skills.<sup>5</sup> The American Federation of Teachers cites research indicating that “children who are poor readers at the end of first grade are never likely to acquire the reading skills they need to successfully complete elementary school, unless these students are identified early in their school career and given intensive, systematic, intervention.”<sup>6</sup> The recently published *Putting Middle Grades Students on the Graduation Path* documents that sixth graders who failed English had only 10 percent to 20 percent chance of graduating on time.<sup>7</sup>

Studies and examinations of the critical nature of reading for South Carolina’s students confirm the national conclusions. In 2002 Miley and Associates, under contract to the EOC, found that students not scoring proficient on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT) in grade eight had only a 50 percent chance of graduating from high school.<sup>8</sup> In the 2009 stakeholder group interviews, surveys and focus groups conducted by Clemson University in partnership with the EOC, the priority South Carolinians placed on reading was apparent.<sup>9</sup>

Table One

Question: “I’m going to list a set of skills that may be important for young people leaving school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How would you rate those skills in terms of importance?”

Percent of respondents

Skill	Critical	Very Important	Important	Total (Columns left to right)
Reading	82.4	15.0	2.4	99.8
Math	68.2	24.7	6.8	99.7
Writing	64.6	26.6	8.3	99.5
Skills to Succeed in the Workplace	68.3	23.8	7.0	99.1
Knowledgeable Citizen	59.0	30.1	10	99.1
Science	38.5	36.4	21.9	96.8

<sup>4</sup> Achieve. *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts* (Washington, D. C.: 2004).

<sup>5</sup> AMA, *US Corporations Find Prospective Employees Lack Basic Skills* (Washington, D. C.: American Management Association, 2001) 1.

<sup>6</sup> American Federation of Teachers, *Charting the Course: The AFT’s Education Agenda to Read All Children* (Washington, D. C.: June 2007) 4.

<sup>7</sup> National Middle School Association, *Putting Middle Grades Students on the Graduation Path: A Policy and Practice Brief*. (Westerville, Ohio: 2009) 4.

<sup>8</sup> Miley and Associates, *The Relationship between Reading Proficiency and High School Graduation Rates* (Columbia, SC: Education Oversight Committee, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Clemson University, *South Carolinians Speak Out on Education* (Columbia, SC: Education Oversight Committee, June 8, 2009) 6.

The General Assembly has indicated the priority that is to be placed on reading through the statements in §59-18-300 which provide

The State Board of Education is directed to adopt grade specific performance-oriented educational standards in the core academic areas of mathematics, English/language arts, social studies (history, government, economics, and geography), and science for kindergarten through twelfth grade and for grades nine through twelve adopt specific academic standards for high school credit courses in mathematics, English/language arts, social studies, and science. The standards are to promote the goals of providing every student with the competencies to:

- (1) read, view, and listen to complex information in the English language;
- (2) write and speak effectively in the English language;
- (3) solve problems by applying mathematics;
- (4) conduct research and communicate findings;
- (5) understand and apply scientific concepts;
- (6) obtain a working knowledge of world, United States, and South Carolina history, government, economics, and geography; and
- (7) use information to make decisions.

The standards must be reflective of the highest level of academic skills with the rigor necessary to improve the curriculum and instruction in South Carolina's schools so that students are encouraged to learn at unprecedented levels and must be reflective of the highest level of academic skills at each grade level.

SC continues to invest heavily in academic instruction. For example, Fiscal Year 2011 state appropriations provided the following:

- \$1.0 billion for the state portion of the Education Finance Act for instruction in the core academic disciplines (a significant portion of expenditures are attributed to instruction in English language arts);
- \$6.5 million in Education Improvement Act funds with provisions that 50 percent of funds be allocated to school districts on a weighted pupil formula and 50 percent be provided to the SCDE to support professional development including instructional coaches;
- \$47 million lottery funds (spread across four core academic disciplines) for elementary schools and \$2 million for middle schools;
- \$6.5 million in professional development funds spread through the disciplines, 75 percent of which is allocated to school districts and 25 percent to the South Carolina Department of Education;
- \$57 million in state technical assistance allocations to underperforming schools, again with priority emphasis on English language arts and mathematics; and
- \$26.6 million in gifted & talented program allocations (Note: this includes a 12 percent set-aside for the arts) with priority emphasis on English language arts and mathematics.

The purpose of this report, including its predecessor, the July 24, 2009 memorandum to EOC members, is to outline the status of reading achievement in our elementary and middle schools, to examine high achieving and high improvement performance in our elementary and middle public schools and to identify the constellation of factors that may impact performance in

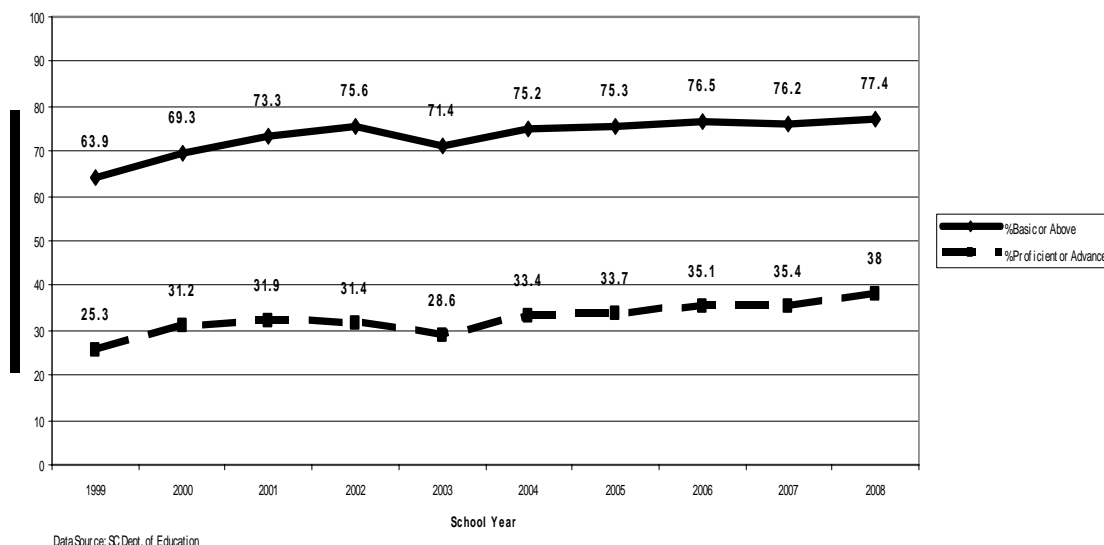


reading. The information and data presented in the report are intended to lay a foundation upon which a state level reading initiative can be built, to form the basis for studies of school leadership and instructional practices and to inform policy and practice.

### Reading Achievement in SC Elementary and Middle Schools

Between 1999 and 2008 the reading performance of elementary and middle school students in South Carolina was assessed using PACT. As indicated in the chart below, SC students improved generally on PACT between 2005 and 2008.

Chart One  
1999-2008 PACT ELA % of Students Scoring Basic and Above and % Scoring Proficient or Advanced, Grades 3-8  
(Does not include students tested off-level or with PACT-Alternate)  
1999-2008 PACT ELA % Basic or Above and % Proficient or Advanced, Grades 3-8 (Does Not Include Students Tested Off Level or With PACT-Alt)



While some improvements are seen, the percentage of students (statewide, across all grades) scoring Basic and above improved by less than two points since 2002. At the proficient and advanced levels more gains are evident; however, performance has been relatively flat since 2005. Explorations of data published on the SC Department of Education website and/or studies published by the EOC indicate the following:

- The highest level of performance, greatest growth in cohort scores and highest percentage of students scoring Advanced over the 1999-2008 PACT years has occurred at grade three<sup>10</sup>;
- Gaps between the performance of groups of students disaggregated by ethnicity, income, disability status and English language learner status persist over the PACT years;<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> SC Department of Education. Retrieved from [www.ed.sc.gov](http://www.ed.sc.gov), June 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

- Studies of advanced scores indicate that, in any given year, the percentage of students scoring Advanced ranged from 1 to 12 percent and that students were consistently less likely to score advanced in grade five<sup>12</sup>.

Changes in performance on PACT of English Language Arts varied between 2005 and 2008. As data in Table Two below indicate when the performance of successive groups of third graders is examined, there were gains at grade three, insignificant changes in performance at grades four and five, large gains at grade six, slight gains at grade seven and losses at grade eight.

Table Two  
PACT – English Language Arts Performance  
Comparison of 2005 with 2008  
Percentages of Students Scoring Basic and above

Tested Year	Grade 3			Grade 4			Grade 5			Grade 6			Grade 7			Grade 8		
	All	AA	F/R	All	AA	F/R	All	AA	F/R	All	AA	F/R	All	AA	F/R	All	AA	F/R
2008	86.7	80	80.8	80.8	70.4	72.3	77.6	66.2	67.5	74.8	61.2	63.5	73	60.6	61.9	71	56.6	58.4
2005	81.1	80.5	81.1	79.6	69.4	71.1	76.8	63.9	66.7	63.5	47.3	49.7	71.5	57.7	59.7	74.7	61.5	63.3
Change	5.6	-0.5	-0.3	1.2	1	1.2	0.8	2.3	0.8	11.3	13.9	13.8	1.5	2.9	2.2	-3.7	-4.9	-4.9

The growth in the middle grades is encouraging. A previously published EOC study, *Longitudinal Analysis of Six Years of PACT Achievement Data, 2000-2005*, reported that, when followed longitudinally (i.e., using data matched at the individual student level) performance declined over the six years studied, most notably at the middle school grades.<sup>13</sup> The study highlighted the intractability of performance noting that two-thirds of students who scored Below Basic in 2000 also scored Below Basic in 2005. In contrast 58.1 percent of the students who performed at the Proficient or Advanced levels in grade 3 in 2000 also scored Proficient or Advanced in 2005.

Beginning with the 2009 assessment cycle, South Carolina measured student achievement in grades three through eight with the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS). The design of PASS differed from PACT in that there are separate reports for reading and research and writing. The linkage between the two assessments was documented.<sup>14</sup> The student performance levels for PASS were set within the policy framework that Basic on PACT would equate to Met on PASS (the equating was accomplished using the 2009 performance).

The 2009 and 2010 reading and research performance across the state is shown in Table Three. While strong gains are made in the upper performance categories, at grades four, five and eight more students scored Not Met.

<sup>12</sup> SC Education Oversight Committee, May 2007 Academic Standards and Assessments Subcommittee Meeting Materials. Retrieved from EOC Files, June 2009.

<sup>13</sup> SC Education Oversight Committee, *Longitudinal Analysis of Six Years of PACT Achievement Data, 2000-2005*. (Columbia, S. C. October 2006) 11.

<sup>14</sup> PASS Standard Setting Technical Report <http://www.eoc.sc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/06B20863-D516-4549-BC12-C5A6AA34A041/33625/EOCstdstgtechrptdocFeb3Final1.pdf> and SC Standard Setting Study 4: Linking Study <http://www.eoc.sc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/06B20863-D516-4549-BC12-C5A6AA34A041/32760/SCStandardSettingStudy4LinkingStudy1.pdf>

Table Three  
2009 and 2010 PASS Performance on the Reading and Research Test  
Percentage of Students Scoring at Each Level

Grade Level	2009 NOT MET	2010 NOT MET	2009 MET	2010 MET	2009 EXEMPLARY	2010 EXEMPLARY
3	22	19.3	31.6	26.8	46.4	53.9
4	22.4	23.5	39.2	38.8	36.5	37.7
5	20	21.9	44.8	41.4	35.2	36.7
6	28.3	27.8	39.7	36.9	32	35.3
7	31.3	30.8	38.1	32.5	30.6	36.6
8	32.5	36.3	38.9	30.4	28.6	33.3

As with PACT, higher proportions of students score below grade level as they move into and through middle school.

Much attention has been paid to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) because of its utility in comparing state performance at grades four, eight and twelve (SC does not participate in grade twelve testing). While the scale scores for both the state and nation have not risen significantly, SC has risen in rankings among the states at grade four. In 1998 53 percent of SC students scored at or above Basic in comparison to 59 percent nationally; by 2008 the percentages are 62 and 67 respectively. At grade eight, SC came closer to the nation by increasing the percentage of students scoring at or above Basic from 66 to 68 across the 1998-2009 time period while the nation grew from 71 to 73 percent.

A recent analysis of state NAEP achievement at all performance levels by the Center on Education Policy indicated that for the period 2002-2008 SC accomplished slight increases (<1.0 percentage point per year) in elementary reading at the basic and above and at the advanced levels and moderate to large increases ( $\geq 1.0$  percentage point per year) at the proficient and above levels. For grade eight NAEP reading, SC gains were deemed slight at all performance levels.<sup>15</sup>

As stated in the 2010 Annie E. Casey Foundation report, "The fact is that the low-income fourth-graders who cannot meet NAEP's proficient level in reading today are all too likely to become our nation's lowest-income, least-skilled, least productive, and most costly citizens tomorrow."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Center for Education Policy, *Is the Emphasis on "Proficiency" Shortchanging Higher- and Lower-Achieving Students?* (Washington, D. C., June 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, p. 7.

Chart Two  
South Carolina's NAEP Performance over Time  
Reading

Year	Scale Score	Percent Scoring Basic & Above	Ranking Among States and Territories
<b>Grade 4</b>			
1998			28 <sup>th</sup> among 40 entities
SC	209	53	
US	215	59	
2002			31 <sup>st</sup> among 43 entities
SC	214	58	
US	219	64	
2003			36 <sup>th</sup> among 51 entities
SC	215	59	
US	218	63	
2005			41 <sup>st</sup> among 51 entities
SC	213	57	
US	219	64	
2007			42 <sup>nd</sup> among 51 entities
SC	214	59	
US	221	67	
2009			39 <sup>th</sup> among 51 entities
SC	216	62	
US	221	67	
<b>Grade 8</b>			
1998			29 <sup>th</sup> among 37 entities
SC	255	66	
US	261	72	
2002			32 <sup>nd</sup> among 42 entities
SC	258	68	
US	263	74	
2003			37 <sup>th</sup> among 51 entities
SC	258	69	
US	261	72	
2005			39 <sup>th</sup> among 51 entities
SC	257	67	
US	260	71	
2007			41 <sup>st</sup> among 51 entities
SC	257	67	
US	261	73	
2009			42 <sup>nd</sup> among 51 entities
SC	257	68	
US	262	74	

Performance on PASS is more similar to NAEP performance at grade eight than at grade four as demonstrated in Table Four on the next page. Although Grade four performance is higher than NAEP, the gaps among students differing on race/ethnicity are higher.

Table Four  
Comparison of 2009 PASS and 2009 NAEP Performance on Reading  
Percentage of Students Scoring Met and Above (PASS) Compared to Percentage of Students  
Scoring Basic and Above (NAEP)

Reading Measure	2009 Actual	Reading Measure:	2009 Actual
<b>PASS, grade 4</b>	<b>75.6</b>	<b>NAEP, grade 4</b>	<b>62</b>
Target: African-American	62.5	Target: African-American	53
Hispanic	60.9	Hispanic	49
White	85.4	White	74
Non-Subsidized	88.3	Non-Subsidized	77
Subsidized Meals	65.5	Subsidized Meals	49
With disabilities	42.9	With disabilities	34
Without disabilities	79.4	Without disabilities	65
<b>PASS, grade 8</b>	<b>67.5</b>	<b>NAEP, grade 8</b>	<b>69</b>
Target: African-American	52.9	Target: African-American	52
Hispanic	59.9	Hispanic	70
White	78.1	White	79
Non-Subsidized	80.8	Non-Subsidized	81
Subsidized Meals	55.2	Subsidized Meals	56
With disabilities	24.9	With disabilities	34
Without disabilities	73.7	Without disabilities	71

#### Language Development and Performance in Reading

Much has been written about the relationship between poverty and language development. Regardless of the assessment, students from middle class environments, with educated mothers and who are exposed to stimulating life experiences, score better than students without those assets. While poverty does not determine success, a number of studies document the relationship between early language development and lifelong language experiences to school performance generally and reading performance specifically. Berliner summarizes a number of studies (including the landmark work of Hart and Risley) in his work on out-of-school factors, noting the differences shown below by family income group:<sup>17</sup> This work suggests the need for support to and interventions with families and children before they reach school age.

#### Chart Three Comparative Language Development in Young Children

##### Vocabulary by age 3:

- Welfare families 525 words
- Working families 749
- Professional families 1116

##### Cumulative language exposure by age 4:

- Welfare families 13 million words
- Working families 26 million words
- Professional families 45 million words

##### Ratio of communications: encouragement v. discouragement

- Welfare families 5:11
- Working families 12:7
- Professional families 32:5

<sup>17</sup> Berliner, David C. *Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success* (East Lansing, Michigan: The Great Lakes Center for Education Research & Practice. 2009).

The SC Kids Count report on reading affirms that “while some students come to school already reading or with knowledge and skills enabling them to become proficient readers quickly, many other children are quite unexposed to and unskilled in foundational literacy knowledge skills and interest. When the SC Readiness Assessment (SCRA) was used, teachers rated one quarter of kindergarten and first grade students in reading and writing and one-third in their communication skills as *not consistently ready*. The report further points out that DIAL screening assessments indicate that 19 percent of SC four-year-olds in public pre-school score at or below the 5<sup>th</sup> national percentile, 30 percent score at or below the 10<sup>th</sup> national percentile and 50 percent score at or below the 25<sup>th</sup> national percentile.<sup>18</sup> Although these data are discouraging, comparisons to NAEP performance at grade four indicate the results of intensive support. Gains are being achieved; however, the level of gains does not yet match the extent of need.

As part of the continuing efforts to improve the school performance of young people living in poverty, the General Assembly has funded the Child Development Education Pilot Program in districts that were plaintiffs in the Abbeville v. The State of South Carolina suit. CDEPP provides a full-day pre-kindergarten program to four-year-olds who are eligible for either the federal free/reduced price lunch program or Medicaid. Since 2006 the Education Oversight Committee has conducted an evaluation of the implementation and progress of the program. The initial cohort of four-year-olds enters the third grade in fall 2010. Because there is no state mandated standardized testing of students prior to grade three, the CDEPP evaluation relies upon students’ scores on the DIAL-3 to identify differences in performance among public school students participating in CDEPP compared to students enrolled in non-CDEPP public school 4-year-old pre-kindergarten programs in 2008-2009. Early studies of participants indicate that CDEPP students enter the programs with a lower level of skill; however, they make stronger gains than non-CDEPP participating students.

### Elementary and Middle School Performance

Which schools are experiencing success and with which students? What can we learn from these schools that is transferable to schools not demonstrating the same level of success?

To answer these questions, Dr. Garrett Mandeville examined the relative success of schools on reading as a status measure, on gains in reading performance from one year to the next and on success (either single year achievement or improvement) with students as an aggregate group and for those students historically at risk for under-achievement. For the purposes of this study the at-risk focus was limited to African-American ethnicity and those students participating in the free/reduced price meal program. Schools included in the study were those elementary schools with grades 3, 4, and 5 (n=516) and middle schools with grades 6, 7, and 8 (n=205). A minimum of ten students was required for each grade level for each year. The researchers implemented a methodology which extracted the scale scores on reading items from PACT English Language Arts (ELA) scores from the 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 administrations. School mean scale scores for reading across the four years were ranked by grade and across grades (i.e., grade 3, grade 4, grade 5 and across grades 3-5 for elementary schools and grade 6, grade 7, grade 8 and across grades 6-8 for middle schools). The top 25 schools in each year were identified and compared to the other three years to produce an unduplicated listing of high performing schools. A similar strategy was used to identify High Improvement schools. To confirm the scale score methodology, a separate analysis of the data was conducted using z scores. The correlations between the ranks, using the two methodologies, were .98 (Pearson) and .99 (Spearman). Thus, the two approaches produced similar results.

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<sup>18</sup> SC Kids Count, May 18 release.

Table Five displays the number of unduplicated schools, hereafter referred to as Reading Study Schools, within each study group.

Table Five  
Unduplicated Count of Reading Study Schools by Group

School Level	High Achieving	Low Achieving	High Improvement	Low Improvement
Elementary	34	41	71	75
Middle	32	34	64	62

School ratings and profile data were examined to determine factors that the schools may hold in common. The 2008 absolute ratings of the schools affirm the pattern of absolute ratings designations seen in the annual school and district report cards over time. The distribution of improvement/growth ratings is more varied than reviews of all school ratings.

Table Six  
How Are the Reading Study Schools Rated?  
2008 Absolute Ratings<sup>19</sup>

	Excellent	Good	Average	Below Average	At-Risk
High Achieving Elementary	25	9	6	7	7
Low Achieving Elementary				7	34
High Improvement Elementary	7	18	21	16	7*
Low Improvement Elementary	2	5	20	31	17
High Achieving Middle	3	15	14		
Low Achieving Middle				2	32
High Improvement Middle	3	8	19	22	12
Low Improvement Middle		4	13	20	25

\*Missing data on two schools

Analyses of the school profile data for 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 (the data presented in Tables Seven and Eight below are means across the four years) identified majority-minority enrollment proportions and participation rates in the free/reduced price lunch program as the major differences between High and Low Achieving Reading Study schools.<sup>20</sup> At the elementary level the High Achieving Reading Study schools had mean minority enrollments of 18 percent at the elementary level and 24.6 percent at the middle school level. For Low Achieving Reading Study schools the mean minority enrollment was 86.7 percent at the elementary level and 80.4 percent at the middle school level. Minority status correlated with Reading Study group assignment (based upon rank of reading achievement) at a .7 level, consistently at each grade

<sup>19</sup> South Carolina Department of Education. Annual School and District Report Cards. 2008, <http://www.ed.sc.gov/topics/researchandstats/schoolreportcard/2008/default.cfm>

<sup>20</sup> Annual School and District Report Cards, 2005-2008. Retrieved from SC Department of Education, [www.ed.sc.gov](http://www.ed.sc.gov), June 2009.

level and across grades. The mean free/reduced price lunch participation for High Achieving elementary schools (20.9 percent) and Low Achieving schools (91.7 percent) varied significantly. For middle schools High Achieving schools had a mean participation rate of 29.1 percent, compared to 83.9 percent for Low Achieving schools. Lunch status correlated at the .8 level consistently across each grade level and across grades.

Neither minority status nor poverty correlated with assignment to a High Improvement group for elementary or middle schools.

On other published profile factors, the variability was such that no one factor could be considered deterministic. In fact, the variability suggests opportunity for changes in instruction and school experience to enhance reading performance. These, with ranges noted, include:

**Table Seven**  
**DESCRIPTIONS OF THE READING STUDY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**  
**Mean Values across Four Years, 2005-2008**  
**(Minimum - Maximum)**

	Percentage of Students			Percentage of Educators				Resources			ELA Scores
	Dis-abled	Gifted & Talented	Prime Instructional Time*	Advanced Degree	Returning From the previous year	Attendance Rate	Principals' Years at School	S:T Ratio	\$/student	% on inst.	Percentage scoring ELA Basic & Above 2008
High Achieving	5.5 (2-10.4)	30.9 (0-75.9)	90.9 (88.2-96.3)	60.7 (26-80.6)	83.2 (60.7-92.2)	95.1 (91-98)	7.1 (1.3-24.5)	20.1 (167.6-23.6)	\$6339 (\$4657-\$8459)	70.7 (56.1-78.4)	94 (77.6-99.9)
Low Achieving	7.6 (3.7-13.8)	2.9 (0-11.5)	87.9 (84.2-92.7)	50.2 (25.8-78)	84 (64.7-96.5)	94.6 (89.7-98.7)	3.9 (1.3-12.5)	16.3 (13.3-19.3)	\$7986 (\$5356-12306)	68.5 (55.1-81.4)	59.7 (48.7-73.3)
High Improvement	7.1 (2.7-14.3)	13.5 (0.7-47.2)	89.5 (85.6-93.9)	54.2 (20.9-80.9)	86.1 (66.7-97.4)	95 (89.8-99.1)	4.9 (1.5-17.3)	18.2 (12.1-23.3)	\$7073 (\$3940-11486)	68.2 (56.98-1.6)	81.9 (54.1-98)
Low Improvement	8.3 (2.3-17.6)	10.5 (0-37.9)	89.4 (84.4-93)	54.1 (23.4-76.7)	85.1 (63.1-97.7)	94.4 (89.3-94.8)	7.3 (0.6-xx)**	17.7 (10.9-21.5)	\$7468 (\$5364-23939)	69.3 (58.8-90.9)	73.6 (49.1-95.6)

\*Prime instructional time is an aggregation of teacher and student attendance; therefore, the factor is shown as applying to both students and teachers.

\*\*Data set includes erroneous values.

**Table Eight**  
**DESCRIPTIONS OF THE READING STUDY MIDDLE SCHOOLS**  
**Mean Values across Four Years, 2005-2008**  
**(Minimum - Maximum)**

	Students			Educators				Resources			ELA Scores
	Dis-abled	Gifted & Talented	Prime Instructional Time*	Adv. Degree	Returning	Attendance	Principals' Years at School	S:T Ratio	\$/student	% on inst.	ELA Basic & Above 2008
High Achieving	9.5 (1-16.5)	32.8 (15.3-75.9)	90.1 (88.2-92.6)	55.9 (35.3-78.2)	80.4 (58-94.7)	95 (91.6-97.9)	5.6 (1.3-15.5)	22.4 (17.8-25.9)	\$6094 (\$4724-8304)	65.7 (53.6-75.6)	85.7 (78-99.9)
Low Achieving	13.7 (4.9-22.1)	7.5 (0.7-12.6)	87.4 (84.1-90.4)	50.7 (36.3-67.5)	81.9 (62.3-93.6)	94.6 (87.6-98.3)	2.7 (0.9-9.5)	18.2 (13.3-23.7)	\$7873 (\$5193-12429)	64.2 (52-72.7)	52.8 (32.5-71.2)
High	11.8	18.7	89.1	53.1	81.6	94.9	4.2	20.7	\$6593	64.5	74



	Students			Educators				Resources			ELA Scores
	Dis-abled	Gifted & Talented	Prime Instructional Time*	Adv. Degree	Returning	Attendance	Principals' Years at School	S:T Ratio	\$/student	% on inst.	ELA Basic & Above 2008
Improve ment	(0.8-26.7)	(3-75.9)	(83.2-93.7)	(20-78.2)	(57.8-94.5)	(89.3-99.1)	(1-15.5)	(13.2-28.5)	(\$4945-9174)	(52.1-77.6)	(46-99.9)
Low Improve ment	12.9 (4.9-19)	15.8 (0.7-34.6)	88.7 (84.1-92.3)	51.5 (36.4-73.1)	82.6 (58.5-94.6)	95.1 (88.3-99)	4.4 (1.3-19)	20.5 (13.3-26.3)	\$6760 (\$4886-\$12429)	65. (505.-73.8)	65.1 (32.5-87.1)

\*Prime instructional time is an aggregation of teacher and student attendance; therefore, the factor is shown as applying to both students and teachers.

### Are there Reading Study schools that achieved both a High Achieving rank and a High Improvement rank or Low Achieving and High Improvement?

When examined for the performance of all students, seven elementary schools are identified as both High Achieving and High Improvement schools. Eleven middle schools achieved the High Achieving-High Improvement designation. Seven elementary and six middle schools were identified as both Low Achieving and High Improvement schools.

### Are the schools affiliated with a particular program or initiative?

Early reviews of the schools indicate that they are not identified with a particular reading initiative. Over the 2000-2008 academic years the SC Department of Education implemented three reading initiatives: SC Reading Initiative; SC Reads and SC Reading First. Four hundred forty-eight (448) primary, elementary, middle and high schools participated in one or more initiative. Of the schools in this study, only 16 of the 99 (unduplicated count of schools) High Achieving or High Improvement elementary schools participated in one of the initiatives. Therefore, there are insufficient data and/or experiences in the Reading Study schools to make inferences or draw conclusions about these initiatives.

The Low Achieving elementary and middle schools are and have been receiving technical assistance funding for at least three years. Those achieving high levels of improvement have experienced increases in the school's absolute index as the index is linked to performance on the PACT (although it should be noted that indices reflect performance across the four major content disciplines and therefore gains in the index cannot be attributed to reading alone). None of the Low Achieving – High Improvement middle schools is a Palmetto Priority School.

### Are these schools successful with groups of students who historically have under-achieved?

The procedures used to identify elementary and middle schools for the Reading Study were repeated using criteria specific to historically underachieving populations. For African-American student progress, schools enrolling at least 30 African-American students (i.e., ten students per grade per year) were included and a second analysis was conducted based upon participation in the free/reduced price lunch program. Again, schools were ranked and unduplicated schools added to the count. For elementary schools identified as High Achieving schools, there is minimal overlap with schools reaching High Achieving status with African-American students or students participating in the free/reduced price lunch program. Data presented earlier in this memorandum demonstrate that that High Achieving schools enroll significantly lower numbers of African-American students and/or students in poverty. There is considerable overlap among the groupings of Low Achieving-High Improvement schools, with three elementary schools leading in every analysis. The same data patterns emerge for middle schools.

### What do the school leaders say is working?

As a précis to the survey of principals, interviews were conducted with leaders in three Low Achieving-High Improvement elementary schools. The three schools are identified as outstanding in all three analyses (all students, African-American students and free/reduced lunch program students). While we should not generalize their experiences to all of the successful schools, the interviews suggest topics to be explored with other school leaders.

Each of the leaders described the work with students as “explicit”, “direct” and “relentless.” Similarities in their approaches emerged from the conversations:

(a) Language Development: Each of the three schools has made efforts to strengthen the kindergarten through grade two experiences. The schools are located in two districts; each of which has funded full-day pre-kindergarten programs for four-year-olds through a combination of federal, EIA and state funds. Emphasis is placed on core reading words (i.e., vocabulary.) One principal elaborated on this strategy, indicating that the school could not assume that a student arrived at school with a basic vocabulary or that the student would acquire that vocabulary through informal experience. The students must be taught vocabulary, including meanings and utilization. Teachers use extensive conversation and encourage writing to expand student facility with language. As one principal described, “the children come to us with minimal language development. Not only do we have to teach them the meaning and use of words, we have to build their confidence and their security in expressing ideas.”

(b) Instruction differentiated at the individual student level: Each of the three schools uses the *Measures of Academic Progress* (MAPs) formative assessment program to place students in small groups to supplement classroom instruction. At the primary grades *Domini* is used by two of the schools. Two of the three schools use small groups extensively and organize those groups based upon students’ knowledge and skill rather than grade assignment. To elaborate, students receive initial instruction from their primary teacher (who is held responsible for their learning) and receive supplementary instruction from another certified teacher. This coordination requires extensive collaboration among teachers. Class sizes are generally small in all three schools (18-20 students) with supplementary small groups limited to six students. In each of the schools English language arts was provided a minimum of 120 minutes; notably each principal indicated that reading is emphasized in science and social studies. One school is using single gender groupings for instruction in some content areas.

(c) Embedded collaborative professional growth: Two of the principals suggested that teachers in the upper elementary grades required professional development and support to prescribe and implement strategies for struggling readers. At least one of the schools brought in a Reading Recovery master teacher to provide professional development. Two school leaders indicate that they have reallocated the time in three of the four monthly faculty meetings from administrative issues to professional development and teacher collaboration. All schools have restructured schedules to permit lengthier planning periods for teachers.

(d) Extended learning time: School leaders reach out to their communities for support and for providing extended learning time. Boys and Girls Clubs programs after school and in the summer, use of City Year volunteers or teacher retirees are examples of other learning time extensions.

(e) Fidelity to the student, not the program: There are no *silver bullets*. When asked about federal or state initiatives, each leader expressed support for the framework, structure and wealth of professional development and technical assistance available; however, they agreed

that the challenge “when your school is on everyone’s radar” is to blend the assistance into one coherent school plan. The circumstances of the students’ lives and in the school are so complex that a single program cannot be the answer. The educators must diagnose, prescribe and implement strategies that are faithful to the needs and potential of the student.

#### Survey of Elementary Principals in Schools Designated High Achieving, Low Achieving, High Improvement, and Low Improvement

To determine the components of the school instructional program in reading, the scope of reading instruction, the integration of reading across the instructional program and the impact of the principal on the quality of reading instruction as well as differences among schools designated as High Achieving, Low Achieving, High Improvement and Low Improvement a web-based survey was provided to 221 elementary principals in January 2010. One hundred twenty one principals responded (55 percent); 112 responses (51 percent) provided complete answers for use in the analysis of the data. Of the 112 responses, all but four were completed by the principal. Only one responding principal noted assignment to a primary school; that is, a school enrolling students in grades kindergarten through grade three only. Principals were asked to respond in accordance with the reading program offered in the school between 2005 and 2008, the years used in the analyses of student achievement.

There were differences in the experience, ethnicity and education of the principals. Most notably, principals in Low Achieving schools tended to have fewer years experience as a principal, either generally or in the schools of their current assignment.

Table Nine  
Experience and Education of Principals in  
High Achieving, Low Achieving, High Improvement and Low Improvement Elementary Schools

Characteristic	High Achieving n=25	Low Achieving n=19	High Improvement n=45	Low Improvement n=23
Race/Ethnicity	4 % African-American 96% White	50 % African-American 50 % White	27 % African-American 73 % White	26 % African-American 74% White
Level of Education	56 % Masters 44 % Ed. S or Doctoral	50 % Masters 50 % Ed. S or Doctoral	45 % Masters 53 % Ed S or Doctoral 2 % no response	4 % Bachelors 48 % Masters 48 % Ed. S or Doctoral
Years as a Principal	9.8	6.4	9.3	10.1
Years as a Principal in this school	7.6	3.5	5.1	7.0

Data in Table Ten indicate that High Achieving schools enroll more students, serve a suburban community in which fewer students are poor and fewer students are African-American. This sharply differs from Low Achieving schools and affirms the differences in schools by ratings group evident in the annual school and district report card releases.<sup>21</sup> Although similar on many characteristics, Low Achieving schools enrolled a much larger percentage of students in poverty and had lower total enrollment.

<sup>21</sup> Education Oversight Committee. *School and District Report Cards: Discussion Points*. Retrieved from <http://eoc.sc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/005CF7BA-A43F-421B-AB04-72B8B8B6E4A3/34856/DiscussionPts200941910.pdf> May 2010.

Table Ten  
Characteristics of Schools by Status and Improvement Designation

Characteristic	High Achieving n=25	Low Achieving n=19	High Improvement n=45	Low Improvement n=23
Student Body	68 % greater than 750 students	89 % with less than 500 students	100 % between 251 and 750 students	78 % between 251 and 750 students
Poverty Level	92 % with less than 50 % of students in poverty	100 % with 75 % or more of students in poverty	62 % with greater than 50 % of students in poverty	50 % with greater than 75 % of students in poverty
Race/Ethnicity of Students	20 % African-American 79 .7 % white	81 % African-American 17 % white	38.2 %African-American 54.8 % white	46 % African-American 52% white
Community Type	20 % small town/rural 72% suburban 4 % urban 4 % no response	47 % small town/rural  53 % urban	49 % small town/rural 31% suburban 17 % urban 3 % no response	43 % small town/rural 43% suburban 14% urban
Number of Teachers	44	29.9	30	38.2

Schools regardless of group provide similar instructional programs and strategies. The similarities are striking, particularly when the differences in student population are considered. When asked about the principal's role in the reading program schools indicated the following ranking among actions a principals would assume:

Priority Rankings for Principal Leadership in Reading Instruction

	<u>High Achieving</u>	<u>Low Achieving</u>
Participate in training on how to teach reading	3	3
Conducts professional development on reading	4	4
Includes reading as a major leadership focus	2	1
Prioritizes resources to improve reading	1	2
	<u>High Improvement</u>	<u>Low Improvement</u>
Participate in training on how to teach reading	3	3
Conducts professional development on reading	4	4
Includes reading as a major leadership focus	1	1
Prioritizes resources to improve reading	2	2

When asked about the opportunities for teachers, coaches and instructional leaders to work together, there were no differences among the four groups. Each group reported developing curricula based on the academic standards, using a variety of materials, and planning for individual student needs. Furthermore each group reported that weekly grade-level planning time was provided, that vertical content area planning supported the reading program and that there were weekly and other professional development opportunities for teachers to improve their reading instruction. Reading instruction consistently was integrated into the writing curriculum and other content areas, including home room. Schools overwhelmingly (50 percent or more within each group) provided between 90 and 120 minutes of reading instruction daily; the next largest amount of time was between 60 and 89 minutes (ranking second for each group).

When shaping the reading program, the groups differed slightly. High achieving schools reported foci on struggling readers, small groups for students not initially mastering the standards and strong initial instruction. As we might expect, low achieving schools focused on struggling readers, small groups for students not initially mastering the standards and early childhood or family literacy. Both High Improvement and Low Improvement schools focused on struggling readers, small groups for students not initially mastering the standards and strong initial instruction.

When asked about the resources used, all four groups said they used the *Measures of Academic Progress* (MAPs), district and/or state instructional support documents (including pacing guides) and Accelerated Reader programs.

None of the High Achieving schools participated in the Reading First grants in contrast to 11 of the 19 Low Achieving schools. (NOTE: Only high poverty schools were eligible for Reading First grants.) Only six of the 45 High Improvement schools and 5 of the 23 Low Improvement schools participated in Reading First. Half of the respondents indicated their school used Reading Recovery as an important initiative: 11 of 25 High Achieving schools, 12 of 19 Low Achieving schools, 21 of 45 High Improvement and 12 of 23 Low Improvement schools. Thirty-two responding schools had participated in the SC Reading Initiative. Less than one-third of the schools in each group participated in the SC Reading Initiative.

Each of the schools received funding in excess of the base student funding. The sources of these funds included Act 135/Students at Risk allocations from the state, Education Accountability Act (EAA) Technical Assistance, Title One/Elementary Secondary Education Act and district special or supplemental allocations. When asked to rank order (from the most frequently used (1) to the least (5) the source of funding for the reading program schools responded in the following manner:

	High Achieving	Low Achieving	High Improvement	Low Improvement
Act 135/Students At Risk	1	1	2	4
District special Funds	2		3	2
EAA Technical Assistance	4	2	4	3
Lottery	3		4	3
Title One	5	1	1	1

The use of Title One funds was the revenue source identified most frequently in three of the four groups corresponds to the poverty level of students in the school. The low level of student poverty in the High Achieving Schools sharply restricts their access to Title One funds.

When asked how these funds were spent to support reading instruction High Achieving schools spent their funds to lower class sizes, to provide small group instruction, and to employ coaches and instructional assistants. Low Achieving schools also invested in class size reductions across the core academic disciplines and supported early childhood interventions, including pre-

kindergarten for four-year-olds. The High Improvement schools invested in coaches, lower class sizes and computer-assisted instruction. The Low Improvement schools were more likely to invest in coaches, early childhood interventions and computer-assisted instruction.

Table Eleven  
Nature of the Reading Program in Responding Elementary Schools  
Responses 1-5  
1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Usually, 4=Very Frequently, 5=Always  
Mean Response

	High Achieving n=25	Low Achieving N=19	High Improvement n=45	Low Improvement n=23
Our school provides independent reading time provided (e.g. DEAR or Sustained Silent Reading)	4.5	4.1	4.2	4.3
Most teachers. . .				
a. Have access to individual student data the beginning of the school year	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.7
b. Have time scheduled for prior and current year teachers to discuss the students	3.4	3.6	3.5	3.6
c. Administer diagnostic assessments	4.5	4.8	4.6	4.7
d. Learn how to construct and use classroom assessments	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.4
e. Communicate assessment information to all audiences	4.3	4.2	4.1	4.4
f. Use assessments to enhance instruction	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.7
g. Group students different for initial and follow-up teaching	4.0	4.3	4.3	4.3
h. Disaggregate data by key student characteristics and reading components	4.1	4.3	4.3	4.3
i. Systematically observe children's classroom reading	4.4	4.2	4.2	4.5
At our school we				
a. Work with before and afterschool care providers to integrate reading into their program	2.6	4.1	3.0	3.0
b. Work with summer program providers to integrate reading into their program	2.1	3.8	2.7	2.9
c. Utilize a community volunteer or mentor program for students	3.2	3.7	3.1	3.1
d. Engage parents in support of their child's reading	4.6	4.4	4.6	4.6
e. Offer parent activities so that parents can work with their children to build reading skills	4.1	4.4	4.4	4.4

As evident in the data presented in Table Eleven the practices employed within the schools are very similar across the groups of schools with less than a .5 variation on the majority of items. Schools identified as Low Achieving reported a significantly higher rate of working with outside groups and/or using time outside of the school day. This group of schools very frequently worked with before and after school providers, with summer program providers and with community groups.

While there are few differences among the four groups of schools with respect to the reading program, there are differences in the nature of student teaching-learning needs. Using the five elements of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension), students in Low Achieving Schools are perceived as having more intense instructional needs than any other group.

When asked if “Students in this school struggle with the following reading elements” the responses by school group, using the five point scale from Never (1) to Always (5), were the following:

	High Achieving	Low Achieving	High Improvement	Low Improvement
Phonemic Awareness	2.5	3.8	3.1	3.3
Phonics	2.5	3.6	3.1	3.2
Fluency	2.8	3.8	2.9	3.3
Vocabulary	2.9	4.2	3.4	3.6
Comprehension	3.0	4.5	3.4	3.6

Teacher knowledge and professional development are core resources to improve student performance. As the data in Table Twelve indicate, principals express a great deal of confidence in the individuals teaching in their schools. Some exceptions are found. Principals of Low Improvement schools are not as confident in teacher capacity to address individual student learning needs or for teachers in non-ELA content areas to routinely integrate reading skills and comprehension in their instruction. Schools, regardless of group, rarely involved tutors in their professional development programs. Few mentioned including strategies for English language learners in their professional development, although this may be a natural consequence of the incidence of English language learners in many SC schools. When asked about teacher knowledge and professional development, respondents provided the information below:

Table Twelve  
Nature of the Reading Program in Responding Elementary Schools  
Responses 1-5  
1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Usually, 4=Very Frequently, 5=Always  
Mean Response

	High Achieving n=25	Low Achieving N=19	High Improvement n=45	Low Improvement n=23
Teachers serving as primary instructors in reading:				
a. Know the subject matter	5.0	4.3	4.7	4.7
b. Know content specific	4.8	4.2	4.5	4.7

	High Achieving n=25	Low Achieving N=19	High Improvement n=45	Low Improvement n=23
pedagogy				
c. Know the appropriate SC academic standards	4.9	4.4	4.8	4.8
d. Have adequate knowledge of learning styles	4.5	4.1	4.4	4.3
e. Create a supportive learning environment	4.8	4.3	4.7	4.6
f. Establish high expectations for all students	4.9	4.3	4.7	4.3
g. Address individual student learning needs	4.5	4.2	4.4	3.8
Teachers in content areas other than English language arts				
a. Are able to diagnose student reading needs with classroom observation and assessment tools	3.7	3.9	3.8	4.2
b. Have knowledge of instructional strategies to build reading skills	3.9	3.9	4.0	4.2
c. Routinely integrate reading skills and comprehension in their instruction	4.0	4.0	4.3	3.0
Our school requires the following to participate in professional development on reading				
a. Instructional coaches	4.0	4.4	4.5	4.5
b. Mentors	3.0	3.6	3.8	3.4
c. Peer observers or evaluators	3.3	3.6	4.1	3.7
d. Outside consultants	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.6
e. ELA teachers	4.9	4.4	4.8	4.8
f. Teachers in other disciplines	4.4	4.3	4.3	4.6
g. Teachers in related arts	3.8	3.9	3.9	4.2
h. Instructional assistants	3.5	3.7	3.5	3.8
i. Tutors	2.6	2.3	2.9	2.6
The content of professional development includes the following:				
a. Essential elements of reading	4.4	4.6	4.2	4.5
b. Assessment or diagnosis of reading problems	4.1	4.6	4.2	4.3
c. Scientifically-based reading research	4.2	4.7	4.4	4.7
d. Strategies for striving readers	4.0	4.1	4.0	4.0
e. Strategies for struggling readers	4.3	4.6	4.4	4.4
f. Strategies for students with disabilities	4.0	4.1	3.7	4.0
g. Strategies for English language learners	3.1	3.5	3.3	3.5

As we look across the data, we see small differences in school practices by group. Does this mean that educators have strong consensus around best practices and have implemented them



consistently or does it mean that we are failing to identify and respond to differences in student needs?

#### Actions to Develop Policies and Practices to Enhance Achievement in Reading

The South Carolina Department of Education has initiated a *LiteracySC* framework. The framework provides a comprehensive pre-kindergarten through grade twelve approach. Continuing the focus on early reading and writing skills serves as the central element. The framework addresses five tasks: acquisition, intervention, acceleration, support and innovation. These tasks are defined below:<sup>22</sup>

- Acquisition refers to the possession of new knowledge, new skills and new dispositions. All participants in the system must be part of the “acquisition.” The system must acquire new ways to accomplish its work; district and building administrators, as well as teachers must learn improved ways of working with their students. Students, in their turn, gain new knowledge, skills and habits of mind;
- Intervention occurs when acquisition is not complete. There will be some action on the part of the school/teacher. The goal of all professional and student learning is to have increased capacity that addresses more complex problems and tasks. A feedback system ensures appropriate opportunities that lead to desired capacity;
- Acceleration occurs when acquisition is complete. Learning opportunities will be available for both students and teachers to help them gain capacity more rapidly or in greater depth;
- Support addresses the redundancies and strategies needed to repair or to provide information for participants so that they can be successful;
- Innovation means that organizations must be flexible so that new and better strategies can come to the forefront. One year’s innovation becomes next year’s milestone.

The elements of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) remain central in each of the five tasks mentioned above. These five elements also are the focus of the Early Reading Proficiency grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to SC Kids Count, in collaboration with SCDE and the EOC. Within the function of the Casey grant, the three agencies are working to complement one another. SC Kids Count is leading through a series of dialogues among stakeholder groups. The dialogues are intended to gain understanding of each group’s knowledge of and work with the five reading elements, to map differences and gaps in utilization and to recommend policies and practices which enhance early literacy.

Several years ago the Education Oversight Committee identified reading as a foundation for academic and life success. In 2009 the EOC established the *2020 Vision* which states,

#### *2020 VISION*

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.

The attainment of this goal is to be reported annually using progress toward three-year achievements (i.e., expectations specified for 2011, 2014, 2017 and 2020) including reading

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<sup>22</sup> *LiteracySC* Framework. South Carolina Department of Education, 2009. Retrieved from [http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/documents/LiteracyPlan\\_October6.doc](http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/documents/LiteracyPlan_October6.doc)

proficiency, high school graduation, preparedness for post-high school success and schools rated at-risk.

Attainment of the 2020 Vision is measured in the following manner:

Reading Proficiency:

95% of students scoring on grade level at grades 3 and 8 and scoring Basic and above on NAEP at grades 4 and 8, eliminating the achievement gaps.

High School Graduation:

88.3% of students will graduate on-time (NGA/USED) and 95% of young people 21 and over will earn a diploma, GED or SBE-approved occupational certificate for students with severe disabilities. Achievement gaps will be eliminated.

Preparedness for Post-High School Success:

85% of graduates will perform at levels for admission to postsecondary education and/or be employed. A measure of workforce readiness will be developed. Achievement gaps will be eliminated.

Schools At Risk:

There will be no school in this category.

In other work to promote reading proficiency the EOC continues its evaluation of the CDEPP. In the next fiscal year the evaluation is to link CDEPP participation and program elements to third grade scores on the 2011 PASS reading & research. The linkage initiates the longitudinal phase in which early childhood development is linked to performance on standardized assessments over time.

Finally, in the calculation of elementary and middle school ratings under the provisions of the Education Accountability Act, the EOC weights reading more heavily than writing in the value of the English language arts score.

### Recommendations

Considering the research on schools and student performance and the complementary work underway by the SC Department of Education, SC Kids Count and the Education Oversight Committee, the following preliminary recommendations are offered:

1. Continue the focus on the five critical reading elements through teaching and learning emphasizing acquisition, intervention and acceleration in practice, policy and research;
2. Convene a statewide, high-level reading policy panel to address child physical health, language development and school learning policies, practices and funding;
3. Conduct longitudinal studies to identify patterns in resources, processes and performance that are linked to higher achievement; and
4. Support the continued collaborative and complementary work of the three agencies and expand this work to include the SC State Library, professionals working with child health and well-being, institutions of higher education with responsibility for teacher preparation and renewal, early childhood, elementary and middle school educators, and parents.

## Supplementary Materials

### Web Access

- A. SC Kids Count: Challenges and Solutions for Early Reading Proficiency, May 2010  
<http://www.sckidscount.org/reading.php>
- B. SC Department of Education: *LiteracySC*: Framework, September 2009  
[http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/documents/LiteracyPlan\\_October6.doc](http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/documents/LiteracyPlan_October6.doc)
- C. SC Education Oversight Committee: Achieving the Vision: Summary of Comments and Recommendations, July 2010  
<http://www.eoc.sc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/208A35F3-8AE5-4CA8-B62A-E505F8006A29/36378/RetreatPacket80910.pdf>