



Potential Options for South Carolina 2013 Policy Advocacy

Currently, South Carolina's education policies do not prioritize great teaching, empowering parents with quality choices, or using resources wisely to raise student achievement.¹ Despite lagging student achievement,¹ the state is stagnant when it comes to critical education reforms. Because of this reality, South Carolina provides ample opportunity for policy change. Key to this decision is the timing, sequencing, and alignment of reform proposals with the legislative window, political momentum, and potential impact of the proposed policy change.

Following are three options, listed in order of preference, for policy advocacy that StudentsFirst could lead in 2013. Common among all three of objectives is the potential for immediate progress while setting the stage for a more comprehensive, aggressive reform effort in 2014 and beyond.

Option 1: Charter School Accountability

South Carolina could greatly increase the number of quality school options available to parents by improving its weak accountability framework for public charter schools. The state should have stronger guidelines in place for how authorizers perform their oversight duties and hold schools accountable, and in turn authorizers must be held accountable for maintaining a portfolio of high performing schools.

Charter school accountability legislation also has a high chance of successful passage. There should be little opposition, particularly from traditional opponents for education reform policies, to holding autonomous schools accountable for student outcomes, particularly when there are clear improvements to be made. By setting a high bar for school performance and holding both schools and authorizers accountable, South Carolina can increase the performance of its charter school sector and ensure that families have high quality options available to them. Specifically, legislation for South Carolina would include:

- Chartering all public charter schools with 5-year performance contracts with clear, measurable objectives related to student achievement and growth
- Requiring authorizers to assess the performance of each school annually and report on the school's performance publicly
- Require authorizers to hold schools accountable for failure to meet the goals and objectives of their performance contracts, including closure of schools that consistently perform at the bottom of all schools in the state
- Designate an oversight body for charter school authorizers, require authorizers to report annually on the performance of the schools in their portfolio, and establish consequences for authorizers that fail to address low-performing schools in their portfolios, including suspension of authorizing powers

Pros: Kick-starts reform without taking on heavy battle with teachers union; allows SF to enter state without taking on teacher-focused policy as first issue; meaningful reform – directly impacts school quality; SF has strong model legislation; strengthens charter sector, which in turn further strengthens the case for charter schools, choice, and reform generally.

Cons: Not necessarily an easy win – will engender pushback from charter community; not as high profile of a policy change; not always popular with Republicans.

¹ In 2009 and 2011, South Carolina's approximately 725,838 students¹ ranked in the bottom third of NAEP scores in fourth-grade and eighth-grade reading and math. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Mathematics Assessments. See http://ed.sc.gov/data/nationalassessments/documents/SC_NAEP_2011.pdf



Option 2: Meaningful Educator Evaluations

Meaningful evaluation policies can serve as anchor policies for state reform efforts; with such a policy in place, other reforms and opportunities, including effective human capital strategies and high-impact school turnaround strategies, have a greater chance of success. South Carolina has adopted an evaluation framework for educators, but it falls short in several key components and does not truly enable districts to identify, reward, develop, and retain effective educators. Both the ADEPT teacher evaluation system² and the new principal evaluation system can be strengthened to prioritize the weighting of student growth in performance determinations and to allow differentiation of effectiveness. Further, if the state must require districts to use evaluations to drive all personnel decisions.

Strengthening evaluations would put South Carolina on the path to eliminating the achievement gap by enabling districts to provide effective teachers for every student and strong leaders in every school. Such legislation is not the first option for 2013, however, as it requires a significantly greater commitment of member resources and political leverage.

Specifically, evaluation legislation would include:

- Requiring objectives measures of student growth to be weighted significantly among multiple factors
- a significant factor and classroom effectiveness does not drive personnel or salary decisions. There are no consequences for ineffectiveness and effective teachers are not protected in layoff determinations. Strengthening the ADEPT teacher evaluation system to include a 4-tiered rating of effectiveness, evaluations based predominately on student growth, and clear linkage to personnel decisions.
- Strengthening the current principal evaluation standards to include the aforementioned components of the teacher evaluation system as well as some accounting for the effective management of teachers.

Pros: Strong, meaningful reform as first issue; educator evaluations are foundational policy for all other teacher quality/human capital reforms; national momentum for evaluation policy reform; SF has strong model legislation and track record in moving evaluation legislation.

Cons: Heavy lift – requires significant commitment of all resources; will be framed as anti-teacher, setting context for SF's entry into state; well-established & funded opposition; reluctance from legislature to take on the hard fight; not popular with Democrats.

Option 3: Fiscal Transparency

Every state in the country faces the perennial challenge of trying to deliver high quality educational opportunities with limited resources. Even in a state like South Carolina, which requires districts to report basic expenditure information, state officials may know where the money is going, but they cannot answer the question of whether it is getting any results for kids.

Robust fiscal transparency is a critical policy lever because it comprises not only specific reporting requirements, but also measures of whether funds are being used efficiently and effectively. This information is provided to the public and policymakers alike in a clear, accessible format, bringing meaningful accountability for the most important public investment. A fiscal transparency bill in South Carolina would include:

- Requiring districts and schools to link expenditures to student achievement
- Establishing a reporting format for this data that is transparent and accessible – ideally a 5-star rating system that could align with and be included as part of school and district report cards

² South Carolina's teacher evaluation system. For more information, see the Department of Education's website at: <https://www.ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/50>.



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- Establishing clear triggers for governance changes, including state-level intervention, when resources are mismanaged

Pros: below-the-radar, meaningful reform; not controversial – everyone likes fiscal responsibility; can be easily amended to existing school report cards; enables state to develop data that will inform future funding & resource discussions; includes accountability measures; strong link to transparency – can also be framed as informing parents & taxpayers.

Cons: somewhat complex to understand impact; not easy to sell as compelling/interesting reform; would not serve well as initial policy initiative that enables SF to establish policy/reform-leader presence in state or to build a coalition around it.