

EMPOWERING

CHARTER VIRTUAL PRIVATE HOME

STUDENTS



EDUCATION OPTIONS FOR SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILIES

EDUCATION OPTIONS FOR SOUTH CAROLINA STUDENTS VIRTUAL CHARTER PRIVATE HOME OPPORTUNITIES



EDUCATION OPTIONS FOR SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILIES



palmetto policy FORUM



Dear Palmetto State Family,

All children deserve the chance for a great education that includes challenging, safe, and innovative instruction. But each child is unique, and not every neighborhood school can offer exactly what they need.

Children learn differently, and while one child may excel in science, another may love literature. Some children need extra help while others are ready to move on to advanced courses. Some children do better in a self-paced classroom, while others benefit from a teacher who helps to keep them on track.

Fortunately, South Carolina families have more options in education today than ever before. Whether choosing between traditional public and private schools, public charter schools, online virtual schools, or homeschooling, more and more South Carolina parents are being empowered to control and customize their child's education.

But we can't stop now. In states around the country—including our neighbors in Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina, along with western states like Arizona and Utah—parents have even more choices than currently exist in the Palmetto State. Whether it's private school scholarships, tax credits for tuition expenses or innovative education savings accounts, South Carolina families should be as empowered as those parents in states next door or from the other side of the country.

The proven results of these options? Stronger, better performing schools with students who are prepared to succeed in work and life. Empowered parents, freed to make decisions about what is best for their child and new emphasis placed on the incredible value of teachers.

That is why Palmetto Policy Forum is so excited to offer you this guide. In it, we outline currently available education options and share important information about how to navigate these various opportunities.

Whether you live in the Upstate, Midlands, Lowcountry, Pee Dee—or anywhere in between—we hope this guide will help more South Carolina families take advantage of the choices available to them. And we hope it will also inspire state and local lawmakers with information about how, through proven policy ideas, we can help parents create opportunities to unleash the potential of every South Carolina child.

Sincerely,


Ellen Weaver

President, Palmetto Policy Forum

OPPORTUNITIES **CHARTER** VIRTUAL PRIVATE HOME

DID YOU KNOW?

**LAST YEAR, 20,186
SOUTH CAROLINA
STUDENTS ATTENDED
CHARTER SCHOOLS.**

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter schools are tuition-free public schools created by parents, teachers, and community leaders. Some public school districts operate charter schools that enroll children living in their district. But all South Carolina children are eligible to enroll in charter schools operated by the state-wide South Carolina Public Charter School District.

Beth Richardson did her homework so that her children could find a high-quality school. "I visited every single school that was available to us in Columbia," she says. Not satisfied with their assigned public school, Beth enrolled her son, Jed, in East Point Academy, one of the only Chinese immersion charter schools in the U.S. Jed and other East Point students are learning Chinese along with traditional subjects like math and reading. "They are definitely absorbing the language both verbally and in writing," says Beth.

East Point is a public charter school and does not charge tuition. The school has been in operation for three years. "I think they are teaching first grade at a second grade level—they are teaching one grade ahead as far as the state standards go. They are providing third grade opportunities if your child is at a second grade level," says Beth.

All of the families sending their children to East Point are involved in the school culture and activities, Beth says, and she has seen for herself that her child has a safe, productive classroom. She continues, "The ability to provide this in South Carolina is so wonderful, it is exactly what our kids need. I feel very fortunate to be able to live in Columbia and to be able to take advantage of this opportunity."

What to do:

- To find a charter school in South Carolina, visit the South Carolina Department of Education's "School Directory" at **www.ed.sc.gov/schools** and select "Charter Schools." You can also find a list of charter schools authorized by the South Carolina Public Charter School District at **www.sccharter.org** (the "Our Schools" tab) or by calling (803) 734-8322.
- Compare schools on **www.greatschools.org** or by comparing school report cards on the charter school district's web site at **www.sccharter.org** (click on "Departments" tab and then on "Accountability"). You may also visit **www.ed.sc.gov/data/esea/2013/index.cfm** to view South Carolina's new "A-F" accountability grading system for traditional, charter and virtual public schools.
- Contact your charter school. Some charter schools enroll children throughout the year, while others may have a waiting list. Call or visit your school of choice to find out more.
- Check with the school office to learn how to register. Some charter school enrollment periods begin as early as the fall prior to the school year in which you want to enroll your child.



The Richardson family appreciates the academic challenge that East Point Academy, a free public charter school in West Columbia, provides for their children.

OPPORTUNITIES CHARTER VIRTUAL PRIVATE HOME

DID YOU KNOW?

IN 2011-12, 20,580

SOUTH CAROLINA K-12

STUDENTS WERE ENROLLED

IN-STATE VIRTUAL SCHOOLS.

VIRTUAL SCHOOLS

Tuition-free online public school programs come in different shapes and sizes and some schools will assist families in buying the hardware and software needed to support online learning. The South Carolina Department of Education operates the statewide South Carolina Virtual School Program, and the South Carolina Public Charter School District has authorized seven online charter schools. South Carolina students can even use virtual classes offered in other states, like Florida's Virtual School (www.flvs.net).

Morgan Faucett started her education at a private school. But her mom, Pam, felt the school was too small and didn't have enough to offer Morgan. In second grade, Morgan moved to a public school and excelled there.

"Morgan was always in the gifted and talented classes," Pam says, "and she picked up on things very quickly. She loves to learn."

Morgan enjoyed reading and became a skilled artist and poet. In 5th grade, Pam noticed Morgan's poems became darker and dealt with



serious subjects, and, after some investigation, Pam found that Morgan was being bullied at school. “The school did not call it bullying,” she says, and, as a result, Pam didn’t learn about the issue until it had been happening for two years.

“Morgan got to point where she hated school,” Pam says.

Morgan transferred to one of South Carolina’s virtual charter schools, Connections Academy. In addition to seeking a safe place for her daughter, Pam says, “I wanted a teacher who was going to challenge my daughter.” At Connections, Pam discovered the teachers were involved in every lesson and were always available on the phone or through email. “They are right there all the time,” Pam says, “and for me, that meant a lot.”

Pam says the virtual school is a great fit for her daughter. “This is the best decision I have ever made as a parent,” she says. “There are no dramatic personality issues between students and no distractions. When she needs the teachers, they are right there.”

What to do:

- Learn more about virtual schools in South Carolina by visiting the South Carolina Virtual School Program’s web site at <https://scvspconnect.ed.sc.gov> or by contacting the South Carolina Public Charter School District at www.sccharter.org or calling (803) 734-8322. Seven virtual charter schools operate under the Public Charter School District. These schools do not charge tuition.
- Contact your online school to learn more about how to enroll and transfer credits between schools.
- To learn more about virtual programs outside of South Carolina and available to all children, anywhere in the country. See “A Custom Education for Every Child: The Promise of Online Learning and Education Savings Accounts,” available at www.goldwaterinstitute.org/onlineschool.

Other Public School Options

Parents may also wish to explore the opportunities offered by our two public “residential” high schools, The South Carolina Governor’s School for Science & Math in Hartsville www.scgssm.org and the Governor’s School for Arts & Humanities in Greenville www.scgsah.org.

Connections Academy, a free online public charter school, helped Morgan Faucett escape bullying and thrive academically as a poet and artist.

OPPORTUNITIESCHARTERVIRTUAL**PRIVATE**HOME

DID YOU KNOW?

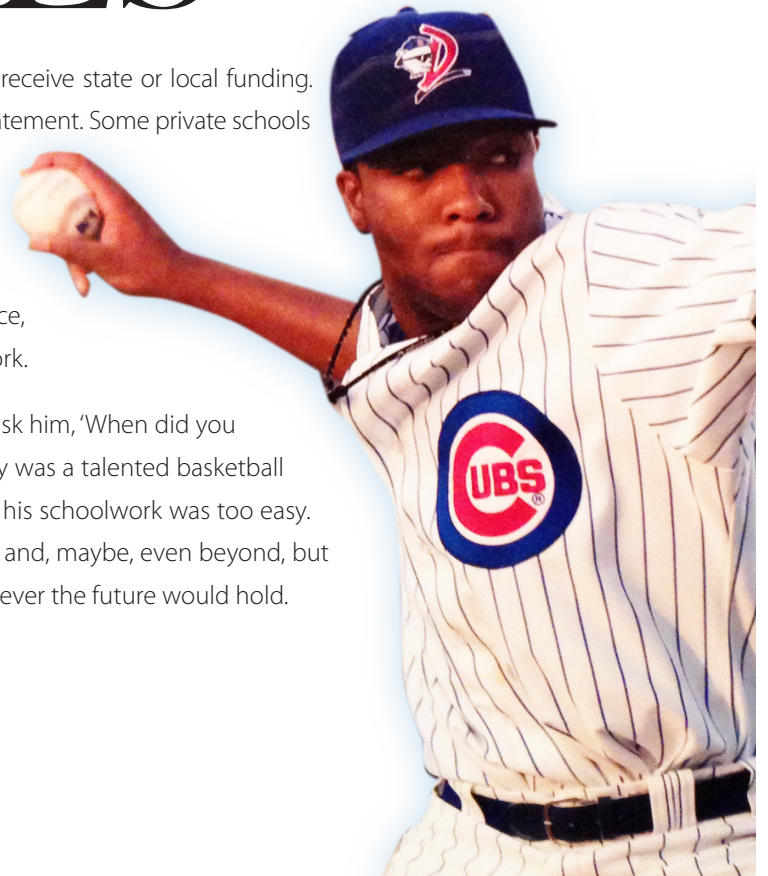
**THERE ARE 433 PRIVATE
SCHOOLS IN SOUTH
CAROLINA, SERVING
69,433 STUDENTS.**

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Private schools may be traditional or online schools that do not receive state or local funding. Private schools may charge tuition and have a religious mission statement. Some private schools offer families assistance with tuition payments.

Jay Jackson liked his local public school and did well on his report cards. He even enrolled in some of the advanced classes that his school offered. However, Jay's parents, Randy and Janice, noticed something peculiar: They never saw Jay do any homework.

"Jay never brought a book home to study," Randy says. "I would ask him, 'When did you do your homework?'" and Jay would say he finished it in class." Jay was a talented basketball and baseball player, and Randy and Janice started to worry that his schoolwork was too easy. They knew Jay had the potential to be a great athlete in college and, maybe, even beyond, but they also wanted their son to be academically prepared for whatever the future would hold.



"We didn't feel like the public school system was giving him that challenge that he would need," Randy says. "He needed to be challenged a little bit more academically, especially going from high school to college."

The Jacksons enrolled Jay in Christ Church Episcopal School, where Jay earned an academic scholarship. "The scholarship helped a good deal," Randy says. Jay blossomed as a student-athlete and earned a scholarship to Furman University, where he became a starting pitcher for the Paladins. Because Furman was close to home, Jay's sisters Jasmine, who struggles with Down syndrome, and Kiyana, could watch him play every week. In 2008, Jay was the top pitcher in the Southern Conference, and Jay now plays for the New Orleans Zephyrs, a minor league team in Louisiana.

"If I didn't go to Christ Church, I don't think I would have been able to handle Furman as well," Jay says, explaining that Furman's academic rigor was a lot to handle while playing baseball. "That whole base [of challenging classes at Christ Church] helped me excel to think more critically than if I had gone to a public school."

Randy explains that he knew Christ Church would be a long-term investment for Jay. "If we had to do it all over again and enroll Jay in a private school, we would do the same thing," Randy says.

What to do:

To find a private or religious school in South Carolina, visit the South Carolina Independent Schools Association (SCISA) at www.scisa.org/about/member-school-listing-by-county, the South Carolina Association of Christian Schools (SCACS) at www.christianeducation.org/member-schools, or the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) at www.acsiglobal.org/member-search.

An academic scholarship to a private school prepared Greenville-native Jay Jackson well for his future, allowing him to excel at his studies and athletics.

OPPORTUNITIESCHARTERVIRTUALPRIVATEHOME

DID YOU KNOW?

**APPROXIMATELY
30,000 STUDENTS
ARE HOME-
SCHOOLED IN
SOUTH CAROLINA.**

HOME SCHOOLS

Under South Carolina's homeschool law, children can learn at home and do not have to enroll full-time in a traditional public, public charter, or private school. Children can take online classes, use home-based instruction, or attend K-12 or college classes in many different settings. Homeschool groups operate around the state to help families find great opportunities for their children. South Carolina homeschool law provides parents with three (3) accountability options to choose from.

Kimberly Diveley was fortunate to have a Blue Ribbon public school just down the street. But despite the school's accolades, her sons, Noah and Taylor, just didn't fit in. "They were in an advanced program," Kimberly says, and her boys had always performed well on tests.

"But I didn't like that they didn't enjoy school," she says. "I thought they were way too young and way too smart to not love learning."

Kimberly and her husband chose to homeschool Noah and Taylor along with their younger brother, Joshua, and younger sister, Courtney Hope. "I think it's the hardest thing I've ever done but it's the best thing I've ever done," she says.

Kimberly is pleased with how hard her children work and how active they are in the community. "They are more social

today than they were in school because our schedule is so flexible." Noah, Taylor, and Joshua are heavily involved in sports, and all four children are active in theater productions.

Kimberly explains that she has been able to find subjects her children enjoy learning about and can focus on their interests. "I try to fashion their assignments so that I can steer them to the things they like to write about," she says. "There are certain things we have to do, but they have time, if they plan properly, they can pour themselves into other things like music," Kimberly says.

She explains that discovering what her children are passionate about is rewarding: "You just have to find out their passion and then you can creatively make it click. We are very thankful for the chance to do that."

Home Schools continued next page



Kimberly Diveley loves how homeschooling has helped her develop her children's unique passions and calls it the hardest but best thing she's ever done.

What to do:

- Choose the accountability option that is best for your family: local school district oversight, membership in the South Carolina Association of Independent Home Schools (SCAIHS), or participation in a local “third option” association. An explanation of the three options and a list of South Carolina homeschool associations is available from the South Carolina Department of Education at www.ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/125/documents/HSAOption3List2014.pdf, or Palmetto Family Council at www.palmettofamily.org/homeschool.
- Get more information on teaching materials, local and national conferences and how to get started homeschooling in South Carolina by visiting the Home School Legal Defense Association’s Web site at www.hsllda.org or by calling (520) 338-5600. More information is also available from SCAIHS at www.scaihs.org or (803) 454-0427. Visit the HSLDA “You Can Homeschool” page at www.hsllda.org/earlyyears/StartHere.asp or the SCAIHS “Getting Started” page at www.schomeschool.accountsupport.com/conferences-workshops.

South Carolina homeschool students are not required to take state tests (PASS, End of Course Tests, or HSAP) unless the homeschool operates under district oversight. Contact the South Carolina Home Educators Association or the Home School Legal Defense Association for more information.

South Carolina homeschool, charter and Governor’s School students are allowed to participate in extracurricular activities at their local public school. These activities include sports like soccer and volleyball, as well as student organizations such as the German Club and Photography Club.

OPPORTUNITIES CHARTER VIRTUAL PRIVATE HOME

DID YOU KNOW?

**INDIVIDUALS & MARRIED COUPLES
MAY RECEIVE A TAX CREDIT FOR
DONATIONS TO SCHOLARSHIP
GRANTING ORGANIZATIONS.**

NEW OPPORTUNITY

Tax-Credit Scholarships for South Carolina's Exceptional Needs Children

Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, individuals and married couples will receive a tax credit for donations to K-12 private school scholarship organization's up to 60% of their tax liability. These scholarship organizations must provide scholarships to special needs students in the state. Donors will receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit based on their contributions. The scholarship awards cannot exceed \$10,000 or the cost of private school tuition, whichever is less.

The tax credits are limited to \$8 million statewide, which means approximately 800 students can take advantage of the scholarships. Participating students must take a national norm-referenced test or the state test each year.

TO LEARN MORE, call the Education Oversight Committee at (803) 734-6148 or visit them at www.eoc.sc.gov/educredit4exceptionalneeds. More information is also available from Access Opportunity SC at www.independented.org.





NORTH CAROLINA GEORGIA FLORIDA ARIZONA

EVERY CHILD

DESERVES A GREAT EDUCATION: **EDUCATION OPTIONS AROUND THE COUNTRY**

South Carolina families do not have to look far to find states that offer children even more quality choices in education.

North Carolina

In 2013, North Carolina lawmakers enacted an Opportunity Scholarship law. Students from low-income families will be eligible for scholarships worth up to \$4,200 beginning in the 2014-15 school year. The Tar Heel State's scholarships are limited to the first 2,300 students that apply.

North Carolina families of special needs students can also apply for scholarships worth up to \$3,000 per semester for private school tuition.

NORTH CAROLINA GEORGIA **FLORIDA** ARIZONA

DID YOU KNOW?
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
IN FLORIDA PUBLIC
SCHOOLS SIGNIFICANTLY
IMPROVED AS MORE
CHILDREN USED A
SCHOLARSHIP TO
ATTEND A PRIVATE
SCHOOL OF CHOICE.

Florida

Florida has some of the nation's oldest school voucher and tax credit scholarship programs. With the John M. McKay Scholarship Program, children with special needs can receive a scholarship to attend a private school that meets their needs. The McKay program is 14 years old, and last year, 25,366 children attended a school that specifically met their needs using a McKay scholarship.

Florida's tax credit scholarships also give low income families more choices in education. Corporations and businesses receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for donations to scholarship organizations that award scholarships to low income children. Over 50,000 scholarships were awarded in 2012.



Laura Howard, the 2011 South Carolina Charter School District Teacher of the Year, is a virtual school science teaching dynamo! Public charter and virtual school teachers are trained and licensed just like teachers in traditional public schools. But many choose to teach in these alternative public school settings because they are attracted to the greater academic freedom and creativity they allow.

EVERYCHILD *continued*

NORTH CAROLINA **GEORGIA** FLORIDA ARIZONA

Georgia

More than 11,000 Georgia children in K-12 are using private school scholarships funded through donations to scholarship organizations. Individuals/married couples and businesses donate money to Student Scholarship Organizations (SSOs), and these organizations award the scholarships to families. Donors receive a dollar-for-dollar credit on their taxes for their contribution, up to certain limits (\$1,000 for donations from individuals and \$2,500 for donations from married couples, while businesses can contribute a sum worth up to 75 percent of their tax liability). In 2011, \$51 million in scholarships were awarded to Georgia students.



*Need caption for
Charter Field Day kids.*

NORTH CAROLINA GEORGIA FLORIDA ARIZONA

DID YOU KNOW?

TWO OF THE TOP FIVE
HIGHEST ACHIEVING
SCHOOLS IN THE U.S.
ARE ARIZONA
CHARTER SCHOOLS.

Arizona

Grand Canyon State families have more choices in education than any state in the country:

- **Education savings accounts:** Arizona enacted the nation's most innovative education solution in 2011: Education saving accounts. Parents have access to 90 percent of their child's funding from the school funding formula. The state deposits these funds in a private bank account, and parents can buy textbooks, pay for online classes, hire a tutor, and pay for private school tuition. Parents can even rollover funds from year to year and save for college—or pay college tuition. Children with special needs or in failing schools, along with children in active-duty military families or adopted from the state foster care system are eligible. Incoming kindergarten students who meet the existing eligibility requirement are automatically eligible for an account.
- **Open enrollment:** Parents can choose any public school in the state for their child, subject to space. Called "open enrollment," this education solution is the most widely used option among Arizona families.
- **Charter schools:** Arizona has 535 charter schools, and these public schools of choice account for 13 percent of state enrollment.
- **Tax credit scholarships:** Arizona has three tax credit scholarship programs. These K-12 scholarships help low-income children and children with special needs choose a private school.
- **Homeschool and Virtual school options:** Arizona also has a flexible homeschool law, and more than 30,000 children use online schools either full- or part-time.



PALMETTO POLICY FORUM

WHO WE ARE

The Palmetto Policy Forum is an independent, nonpartisan educational foundation committed to policy entrepreneurship, consensus-building and transformative solutions to South Carolina's policy challenges. Nothing written here is to be considered an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any specific legislation. The Palmetto Policy Forum is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Donations are tax deductible.

LET US HEAR FROM YOU

Was this catalogue helpful? Does your family have an education story to share? Join the conversation and stay informed by visiting www.palmettopolicy.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Butcher serves as Education Director for the Goldwater Institute, headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona. He has researched education policy and school choice programs at both the state and national level. Prior to joining Goldwater, Jonathan was the Director of Accountability for the South Carolina Public Charter School District, South Carolina's only statewide charter school authorizer. Jonathan studied education policy at the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas and worked with the School Choice Demonstration Project, the research team that evaluated voucher programs in Washington, D.C. and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Jonathan studied education and family policy at The Heritage Foundation, a research institute in Washington, D.C. His research has appeared in journals such as Education Next and the Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy. He has appeared on local and national TV outlets, including interviews on Fox News. He has been a guest on many radio programs, and his commentary has appeared in newspapers around the country. He holds a B.A. in English from Furman University and an M.A. in economics from the University of Arkansas.

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