

TO: School District Public Information Officers, SC Education Organizations

FROM: Harold Stowe, Education Oversight Committee Chairman *Harold Stowe*

RE: Superintendent Rex's Recommendations Regarding Testing and Accountability

As you are aware, on May 17, Superintendent Jim Rex announced plans for changes to the testing and accountability systems in South Carolina. Since the work of the Education Oversight Committee includes assessment and accountability, individuals in the education and business communities have expressed interest in the committee's views on the superintendent's proposals.

To help clarify the Education Oversight Committee's position and current activity, I have prepared the attached statement regarding Dr. Rex's proposals and the committee's intent to study and debate them. We have shared this statement with the editorial page editors of South Carolina's daily newspapers, as well as current and former committee members. As district public information officers and leaders of education organizations in the state, I ask you to pass this information on within your districts and organizations.

We look forward to working with the Superintendent and task force members to determine the impact the proposals have on quality teaching and learning and overall student success. Ultimately, we remain committed to reporting the facts, measuring change, and promoting progress.

I encourage you to follow the work of the task forces, which are scheduled to convene early this summer. It is critical that leaders from business, legislative, and educational communities let their voices be heard throughout this process.

Thank you and please feel free to contact me if you have questions.

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As the school year ends, students, families, educators and policymakers are exploring ideas to continue the dramatic progress South Carolina's students and schools have accomplished over the last several years. The Education Oversight Committee salutes that progress. On most measures of academic performance--SAT, Advanced Placement (AP) participation and performance, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), South Carolina ranks as one of the five fastest improving states in the nation. On NAEP mathematics and AP, South Carolina's performance ranks among the top half of states. But we still have large numbers of students performing below expectations and failing to graduate from high school.

Our State Superintendent of Education, Jim Rex, recently announced several ideas regarding the state testing and accountability system. Dr. Rex proposes interim tests, testing writing earlier in the school year and increasing teacher knowledge of good classroom assessments. He also proposed eliminating the end-of-grade tests in social studies for all grades and end-of-grade tests in science for all but two grades, exploring ways to improve the accountability system, and utilizing a regional service delivery approach. Members of the Education Oversight Committee are serving on the task forces Dr. Rex has established to explore these ideas.

Our teachers want to know how to help each student succeed. Instructional time is scarce. Testing that does not foster good teaching and learning is time wasted. The Education Oversight Committee consistently supports improvements in the testing program as put forth by the 2005 Testing Task Force which include funding district-selected formative tests. From its first set of budget recommendations to its most recent, our members call for professional development, instructional tools and targeted responses to meet the needs of all students.

Because the Education Oversight Committee's work includes assessment and accountability, many have been curious as to our response to Supt. Rex's recommendations. Put very simply, the Education Oversight Committee is studying the ideas and debating them. There are seventeen committee members, each with a different perspective. Over the summer we are developing a consensus statement on the improvements we determine most beneficial to teaching and learning. That process includes consideration of the following:

- How do these proposals contribute to the achievement of the 2010 goal for our schools and growth in the South Carolina per capita income?
- What impact do these recommendations have on the improvement of SC's high school graduation rate?
- Which recommendations are most essential to improving teaching and learning and have the greatest impact on student success?
- How can we use computer-based and computer-adaptive systems to gauge student progress?
- Does eliminating testing in social studies and restricting testing in science narrow the curriculum or provide more opportunity for broader experiences?
- Can a new testing program provide the information we desire to measure student growth and school change from one year to the next?
- How do we broaden our understanding of school progress beyond end-of-year test scores?
- What is the best way to use limited fiscal resources for maximum support of teaching and learning?
- How can we keep the business, legislative and educational communities engaged with young people and their families?
- Do the recommendations strengthen the system or make us vulnerable to lowered expectations for the system and our state?
- Are these recommendations necessary and logical adjustments to continue improvements or do they move us in another direction?

The Education Oversight Committee remains committed to reporting the facts, measuring change, and promoting progress. To promote progress we support good teaching through informative assessments, meaningful professional development, and targeted assistance. We commit to hearing from others, understanding different perspectives and determining the impact of various proposals. Our measures of impact are the improvement of student knowledge and skills, our students' success in life and the economic well-being of South Carolina. We must not step away from our responsibilities to the future regardless of how uncomfortable they may be in the present.