



South Carolina

State Policy Report Card 2012

State Rank: 33

OVERALL GRADE



Currently, South Carolina's education policies do not prioritize great teaching, empowering parents with quality choices, or using resources wisely to raise student achievement. Despite lagging student achievement, the state is stagnant when it comes to critical education reforms. South Carolina has adopted an evaluation framework, but student growth is not 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. The state has also adopted an A-F school report card that will provide parents with more meaningful information regarding school performance. The state should focus on expanding quality options available to parents through stronger charter accountability and access to comparable resources and facilities for public charter schools and by establishing an opportunity scholarship program for low-income students. Finally, the state should enable mayors to take control in low-performing districts.

Elevate Teaching

State Rank: 42



Empower Parents

State Rank: 11



Spend Wisely & Govern Well

State Rank: 18



South Carolina lags behind the rest of the country when it comes to ensuring effective teachers and principals are identified, retained, and rewarded by districts. South Carolina does not require districts to evaluate educators meaningfully. Student academic growth does not play a significant role in evaluations, and there are no consequences for ineffectiveness. Seniority is permitted to drive personnel decisions, allowing other states to pass South Carolina by in efforts to elevate the teaching profession. If South Carolina wants to strengthen its teaching corps, it must treat them like the professionals they are by establishing meaningful evaluations tied significantly to student growth, and requiring districts to use teacher effectiveness as the driving factor in recruitment, placement, layoff, tenure, and compensation decisions. The state should also improve the selectivity and quality of its alternative certification pathways.

Every family should be able to choose among quality schools, and no student should be forced to attend a low-performing school or be taught by an ineffective teacher. To this end, South Carolina has recently established a school letter-grading system that empowers parents with critical information. South Carolina should continue this momentum by allowing parents to access teacher evaluation information and notifying parents when students are placed with an ineffective teacher. South Carolina has taken a first step in creating high-quality school options by allowing for public charter schools. The state should require that charters enter into performance-based contracts limited to five-year terms. South Carolina should also consider creating a publicly funded scholarship program that allows students in failing public schools to attend private schools.

South Carolina allows the State Department of Education to declare a state of emergency, replace the schools' principal, and assume management of certain low performing schools. To further ensure resources are spent wisely and districts are focused on improving student achievement, the state should allow for mayoral control of poor-performing districts, and other governance changes at districts that mismanage resources. South Carolina should relax class-size limits that restrict staffing flexibility and permit districts to utilize management alternatives to achieve cost efficiencies. South Carolina should also require districts to link financial data to measures of academic achievement so it can measure a return-on-investment. The state also needs to establish a portable retirement plan that will provide career flexibility and retirement security for all teachers.

South Carolina Fast Facts¹

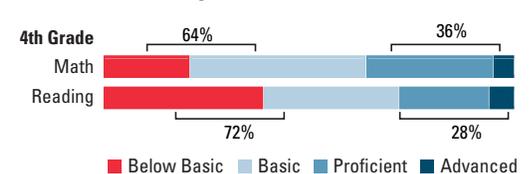
Stats, 2010-11

STUDENTS	725,838
SCHOOL DISTRICTS	105
SCHOOLS	1,214
PUBLIC CHARTERS	44

NAEP Scale Score Rank, 2011

4TH GRADE	MATH	38	40
	READING		
8TH GRADE	MATH	34	38
	READING		

NAEP Proficiency, 2011





Elevate Teaching

Momentum Builder: State has made recent progress in this policy area.

Anchor Objective: Foundational policy for meaningful education reform.

Gold Standard: Exemplar state policies that prioritize bold reform and put students first.

Comprehensive Evaluation

A B C D **F**
GPA **0.29**

Strong evaluation systems are foundational to improving teacher and principal quality; evaluations recognize excellence, support development, and address ineffectiveness. Unfortunately, South Carolina's teacher and principal evaluations do not substantively assess educator quality. The state's evaluations lack critical components, including a four-tier rating of effectiveness, objective measures of student growth, and for principal evaluations, annual frequency. South Carolina must invest in its educators by evaluating teachers and principals according to a framework that significantly weighs student growth and links to professional development, and that incorporates multiple measures. These should include classroom observations and student feedback in teacher evaluations, and effective management of teachers in principal evaluations. Additionally, the state's evaluation criteria should not be subject to contract negotiations, ensuring these systems will be subject to change based on student interests alone.

Objective	Score (0-4)
Teacher Evaluations	0
Principal Evaluations	0
Evaluations & Contracts	2

Use Evaluations for Personnel Decisions

A B C D **F**
GPA **0.43**

Basing personnel decisions on performance is critical to building schools that retain effective teachers and make student achievement paramount. South Carolina is behind in this area; specifically, the state does not use performance to drive decisions around teacher assignment, layoffs, and tenure. Schools do not have the authority to build and maintain an effective instructional team, including having the ultimate say in hiring decisions and the dismissal of ineffective teachers. Furthermore, when forced to lay off teachers during a budget-related reduction in force, state law is silent regarding the criteria for layoffs. Districts are permitted to prioritize seniority over performance, placing effective teachers at risk. Teachers receive tenure status after serving a short two-year probationary period. Attainment and revocation of tenure are not tied to performance. Prioritizing students and great teachers means that performance, evident through strong evaluations, is the driving influence for all personnel decisions.

Objective	Score (0-4)
Ending Forced Placement	0
Staffing Decision	1
Tenure Attainment & Maintenance	0

Value Effective Teachers

A B C **D+** F
GPA **1.50**

To encourage a high-quality, diverse workforce, professional pay should be based on performance, rather than other non-classroom factors such as seniority or degrees held. South Carolina sets a minimum salary schedule for teachers based on years of experience and the attainment of advanced degrees. The state has established a performance-based accountability system, but it does not require districts to align teacher compensation to this system. The state has also implemented an awards program to recognize and financially reward schools for increased academic achievement and for closing the achievement gap. To strengthen compensation systems across the state, South Carolina should eliminate automatic pay increases for master's degrees alone and require all districts to implement pay for performance systems that prioritize student outcomes.

Objective	Score (0-4)
Reward Performance with Pay	2
Reform Salary Schedules	0

Alternative Teacher Certification

A B C **D-** F
GPA **0.75**

South Carolina permits two alternative routes, the Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE) and American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE). Both programs are operated by the state and require content exam mastery and a bachelor's degree. PACE mandates that the degree be in a critical shortage area, and ABCTE only licenses selected subjects. To strengthen alternative certification pipelines, South Carolina should allow alternative certification programs to license all subjects, expand providers of alternative pathway programs beyond the state-run programs, and increase selectivity criteria, such as requiring a 3.0 undergraduate GPA, or 2.5 GPA with five years of experience. The state evaluation system reporting includes ABCTE and PACE candidates. To hold alternative certification programs to a higher standard, South Carolina should require a clear authorizing and evaluation process for programs and establish a process for decommissioning those that do not produce effective educators as measured from student growth.

Objective	Score (0-4)
Teacher Certification Pathways	1
Teacher Certification Accountability	0



Empower Parents



Momentum Builder: State has made recent progress in this policy area.



Anchor Objective: Foundational policy for meaningful education reform.



Gold Standard: Exemplar state policies that prioritize bold reform and put students first.

Empower Parents with Information



South Carolina has recently established a school letter-grading system that empowers parents with the information they need to make informed decisions for their children. This system gives each school an annual A-F letter grade that reflects students achievement. South Carolina must continue this momentum around providing parents with information by allowing for parental access to teacher evaluation information upon request and requiring parental notification when students are placed with an ineffective teacher. Additionally, the state should require that districts obtain parental consent in order to place a student with an ineffective teacher. Finally, South Carolina should empower parents by establishing a parent trigger law that allows a majority of parents to band together at the grassroots level and petition to turnaround a low-performing school throughout the state.



Objective	Score (0-4)
School Letter Grading	4
Parent Notification	0
Parent Trigger	0

Increase Quality Choices



South Carolina must ensure its students are not trapped in a failing school by increasing the number of high quality school choice options for parents. The state does not restrict the growth of public charter schools, yet should establish a fast-track process for authorizing high-performing charters. Additionally, the state could strengthen its charter accountability policies by requiring charters enter into performance-based contracts limited to five-year terms and provide stronger authorizer accountability. South Carolina should also consider creating a publicly funded scholarship program that allows low-income student in chronically failing public schools to attend private schools that meets certain accountability standards.



Objective	Score (0-4)
Opportunity Scholarship	0
Charter Establishment & Expansion	3
Charter Accountability	0

Provide Comparable Resources for All Public Options



Children stuck in chronically failing schools should have an option to attend another school of their choice without being punished by the state through reduced funding. South Carolina law states that locally authorized charter schools should receive generally equal funding from their school district, but the actual per-pupil amount is based on prior year expenditures. South Carolina provides state funding to other charter schools based on a separate appropriation from traditional public schools. It also does not give them local tax revenues, and allows authorizers to keep up to two percent of operating funds. South Carolina should provide comparable operational funding to all public charter schools and ensure that "skimming" is prohibited. South Carolina should also provide a per-pupil facilities allowance, in addition to the revolving loan program enacted in May 2012.



Objective	Score (0-4)
Fund Fairly	0
Enable Equitable Access to Facilities	2
Charter Facilities Financing	1

Methodology

State policies were analyzed and assigned an individual score from 0 to 4, with 4 representing the strongest lever for reform and the most common sense policy for students. Anchor policies were assigned a 3x weight. Grade point averages (GPAs) were calculated based on grouping policies by category. For the full methodology, evaluation rubric, and detailed analysis of each policy, please visit the website at reportcard.studentsfirst.org.

¹ State statistics obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics — Common Core of Data for 2010–11.

GPA Sample Calculations

	Score		Weight		Subtotal
✗ Objective 1	3	x	3	=	9
✗ Objective 2	2	x	3	=	6
Objective 3	4	x	1	=	4
			7		19

GPA = Subtotal ÷ Total Weight
GPA = 19 ÷ 7 = 2.71



Spend Wisely & Govern Well



Momentum Builder: State has made recent progress in this policy area.



Anchor Objective: Foundational policy for meaningful education reform.



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Promote Governance Structures that Streamline Accountability

A	B	C	D	F
GPA 2.00				

The ability to turn around failing schools is often hampered by bureaucratic red tape and politics. South Carolina allows for governance flexibility on the state level but not on the local level. For schools that continue to struggle after a plan for intervention has been implemented, South Carolina law allows the State Department of Education to declare a state of emergency, replace the schools' principal, and assume management of the school. To strengthen accountability and options for intervention on the local level, South Carolina should allow for full mayoral control of low-performing school districts.

Objective	Score (0-4)
 Mayoral & State Control	2

Spend Taxpayer Resources Wisely to Improve Outcomes for Students

A	B	C	D	F
GPA 1.00				

Given the limited resources available for public education, states must ensure that districts spend as many dollars as possible in the classroom rather than in bureaucracy and that the dollars invested drive the greatest change. South Carolina imposes ineffective regulations on class-size and has student-to-staff ratios for non-teaching positions. South Carolina should provide greater staffing and spending flexibility to school districts by removing these ratios and maximums for students above the third grade and by removing other restrictions that limit districts' ability to allocate resources to their greatest needs. Moreover, South Carolina should empower data-driven decision making by improving the financial data it collects and linking spending to academic achievement. The law should enable the state to initiate governance changes at school districts when resources are mismanaged.

Objective	Score (0-4)
Fiscal Transparency	2
Management Alternatives	1
Class Size	0

Make Teacher Pensions Portable and Fair

A	B	C	D	F
GPA 2.00				

Attracting a high-quality workforce will require a competitive retirement plan. Portable retirement options - like 401(k) plans - are an essential component of compensation packages and make the teaching profession more competitive. It is a classic win-win for teachers and districts. Under current policy, South Carolina provides two employer-sponsored retirement options for employees of traditional schools and conversion public charter schools: a defined benefit plan and a portable, defined contribution plan, referred to as the Optional Retirement Program. South Carolina has made progress; however, to provide teachers with the most flexibility and to ensure sustainability of the existing system, the state should require all traditional school employees to participate in its Optional Retirement Program and permit employees of all public charter schools to opt out of the system.

Objective	Score (0-4)
 Pension Reform	2



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StudentsFirst is a bipartisan grassroots movement of more than 1 million members nationwide, working to focus our education system on what's best for students. Today, too many of America's children are not getting the quality education they need and deserve. StudentsFirst is helping to change that with common sense reforms that help make sure all students have great schools and great teachers. We are working to ensure educators are valued for the critical role they play in kids' lives, families have high-quality school choices and a real say in their child's education, and our tax dollars are spent wisely on what works for kids. Launched by former Washington D.C. Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee in December 2010, StudentsFirst has successfully helped pass more than 70 student-centered policies in 17 states, and our movement continues to grow.