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Release of School and District Report Cards – Tale of Two Extremes

Columbia – State and district report cards were issued today, and the results show two extremes. There were more schools and school districts in 2011 with an absolute rating of Excellent. But, unfortunately more districts received an absolute rating of At Risk in 2011, and there was no decline in the number of At Risk schools.

On one end, there were 76 additional schools with an Excellent report card rating in 2011 than in 2010. More elementary, middle and high schools earned the absolute rating of Excellent. Overall, 226 schools with report cards, or 19%, improved their absolute rating from 2010 to 2011.

The number of school districts with an absolute rating of Excellent also improved from six in 2010 to 11 in 2011. Among the school districts joining the ranks of the state's best are Abbeville, Darlington, Florence 5, Spartanburg 1, and Spartanburg 6.   These districts join York 4, Lexington 5, Anderson 1, Lexington 1, Greenwood 52, and York 2 who were Excellent in 2010 and in 2011. And, the number of districts with an absolute rating of Excellent or Good increased from 18 in 2010 to 33 in 2011.

Dr. Rainey Knight, Superintendent of the Darlington County School District, who led her district from a rating of Below Average in 2006 to Excellent in 2011, was asked about her district's accomplishments.   Dr. Knight responded, "We are very pleased with our report card results this year. It has taken a great deal of work and a great deal of blood, sweat and tears to get to this point. It has been a team effort: Board members, teachers, bus drivers, administrators, and custodians.   Everyone has played a part in raising the level of academic achievement in our district. In addition, we are very fortunate to have high quality, dedicated teachers who truly believe every child is important. We have tried to provide more focus on meeting the individual academic needs of our children."

Looking to the future, Dr. Knight commented, "While we are celebrating today, we also recognize we still have much to do and we still have a great deal of improvement to make. I am confident our district can continue to improve and continue to provide our children with an excellent education."

Similarly, Spartanburg 6, which was rated Average in 2010, improved to Excellent in 2011. According to Dr. Darryl Owings, Superintendent of Spartanburg 6, "We are fortunate in our district to have an outstanding Board of Trustees, a faculty and staff who are dedicated, outstanding professionals, supportive parents, and students who are among the brightest and most talented in the nation. The Excellent rating for our district affirms our belief that when you put students first and have an entire school community striving for continuous improvement and excellence in the areas of academics, arts, and athletics, all students are challenged and inspired."

Neil J. Robinson, Chairman of the Education Oversight Committee (EOC), had this observation. "Clearly, where districts and schools are being led by innovative, results-driven superintendents and principals who are addressing the academic needs of their students with high quality teachers, parental support and community engagement, students are performing at high levels."

At the other extreme, the number of At Risk schools remained at 69 in 2011. In fact, there have been 37 schools receiving At Risk report cards for each of the past three years. "While only 4% of the state's public school students are enrolled in these schools, these students represent 100 percent of the children those families entrust to the public schools," said Mr. Robinson. Even more troubling is the fact that the number of At Risk school districts increased from 6 in 2010 to 9 in 2011.

In looking ahead, Mr. Robinson believes that reading proficiency must improve. "Less than half of the children in the At Risk elementary and middle schools of our state are reading on grade level. The national research shows that 1 in 6 children who are not reading on grade level in 3rd grade do not graduate on time, a rate four times that of proficient readers." Furthermore, Robinson proposed a more holistic approach to address the societal issues in our chronic At Risk schools, one that has cross-agency intervention aimed at adult education, improved access to social and health services, economic development and quality early childhood education.

As in previous years, the EOC looked at the impact of poverty on student achievement. The poverty index is an indicator of the relative poverty of students in a school or district and includes the number of students eligible for the free or reduced-price Federal lunch program and/or Medicaid. The poverty index of public schools in 2011 was 68.50, up from 67.74 in 2010. According to Mr. Robinson, "We know that children in poverty are more likely to experience geographic isolation from transportation, health care and community services. However, there is nothing in our data or in data from national studies to indicate that children of poverty cannot achieve at the highest level. In fact, the district with the 5th highest absolute index in the state, Darlington County, has a poverty index of 82."

Four schools in our state had a poverty index of 90 or greater but earned an Excellent rating in 2011: John C. Calhoun Elementary in Abbeville; Blackville-Hilda High in Barnwell 19; Military Magnet Academy in Charleston; and Socastee Elementary in Horry. Another nine schools with a poverty index of 90 or greater earned a Good absolute rating in 2011: Calhoun County High in Calhoun; Stono Park Elementary and Charleston Development Academy Charter School in Charleston; South Conway Elementary in Horry; Waterloo Elementary in Laurens 55; Bethune-Bowman High School, Rivelon Elementary, and Whittaker Elementary in Orangeburg 5; and South Kilbourne Elementary in Richland 1.

The EOC staff has begun to analyze the data in the report cards. However, according to Mr. Robinson, "one statistic stands out above the rest. When you see districts and schools improving consistently and dramatically, you see the positive results of our state's accountability system." Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education for the United State Department of Education recently addressed teachers and administrators in Rhode Island. Secretary Duncan remarked that "the only side in education that matters to me and to our country is the side of students." Mr. Robinson notes, "The successful schools in our state are siding with students."

Additional Background and Information: State law establishes a formal process by which schools and school districts are annually evaluated and the results made public. Schools and districts receive two ratings: an absolute performance rating and a growth rating. The 2011 school ratings are determined by the percentage of students meeting standard on the state's standards-based assessments including the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) in grades 3 through 8 in Reading & Research, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science and Writing; passage rates on end-of-course assessments in Algebra 1/Math for the Technologies 2; English 1; US History and the Constitution; and Biology 1/Applied Biology 2 or Physical Science; and student passage rates on the exit exam, the High School Assessment Program (HSAP). High school ratings also reflect the on-time graduation rate and 5-year graduation rate. District ratings are aggregated student-level data that reflect student performance on PASS, SC-Alt (which is an alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities), end-of-course assessments, and HSAP as well as on-time graduation and five-year graduation rates. The following charts provide information on the absolute ratings across the past three years for schools and districts. Additional analysis is posted online at www.eoc.sc.gov.

ABSOLUTE Ratings for Schools

Accountability Rating	2011	2010	2009
Excellent	**318 (27%)** Primary: 27 Elementary: 166 Middle: 53 High: 72	**242 (21%)** Primary: 32 Elementary: 134 Middle: 36 High: 40	**188 (16%)** Primary: 26 Elementary: 111 Middle: 26 High: 25
Good	**211 (18%)** Primary: 3 Elementary: 129 Middle: 51 High: 28	**209 (18%)** Primary: 0 Elementary: 119 Middle: 46 High: 44	**185 (16%)** Primary: 3 Elementary: 105 Middle: 41 High: 36
Average	**462 (39%)** Primary: 1 Elementary: 259 Middle: 125 High: 77	**510 (44%)** Primary: 0 Elementary: 289 Middle: 136 High: 85	**537 (46%)** Primary: 0 Elementary: 301 Middle: 143 High: 93
Below Average	**120 (10%)** Primary: 0 Elementary: 66 Middle: 42 High: 12	**136 (12%)** Primary: 0 Elementary: 72 Middle: 52 High: 12	**170 (15%)** Primary: 0 Elementary: 86 Middle: 62 High: 22
At Risk	**69 (6%)** Primary: 0 Elementary: 23 Middle: 29 High: 17	**69 (6%)** Primary: 0 Elementary: 24 Middle: 27 High: 18	**83 (7%)** Primary: 0 Elementary: 33 Middle: 29 High: 21
Number of Report Cards	1,180	1,166	1,163

The above table includes all charter schools but does not include ratings for career and technology centers.

ABSOLUTE Ratings for School Districts

Accountability Rating	2011	2010	2009
Excellent	**11 (12.8%)**	6 (7.0%)	1 (1.2%)
Good	**22 (25.6%)**	12 (14.0%)	0
Average	**35 (40.7%)**	48 (55.8%)	24 (28.2%)
Below Average	**9 (10.5%)**	14 (16.3%)	39 (45.9%)
At Risk	**9 (10.5%)**	6 (7.0%)	21 (24.7%)
Number of Districts	86	86	85

Note: The SC Public Charter School District started receiving ratings in 2010.

The SC Education Oversight Committee is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected leaders. Created in 1998, the committee is dedicated to reporting facts, measuring change, and promoting progress within South Carolina's education system.

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