



Caught Between the Lines

South Carolina's Students in the Middle

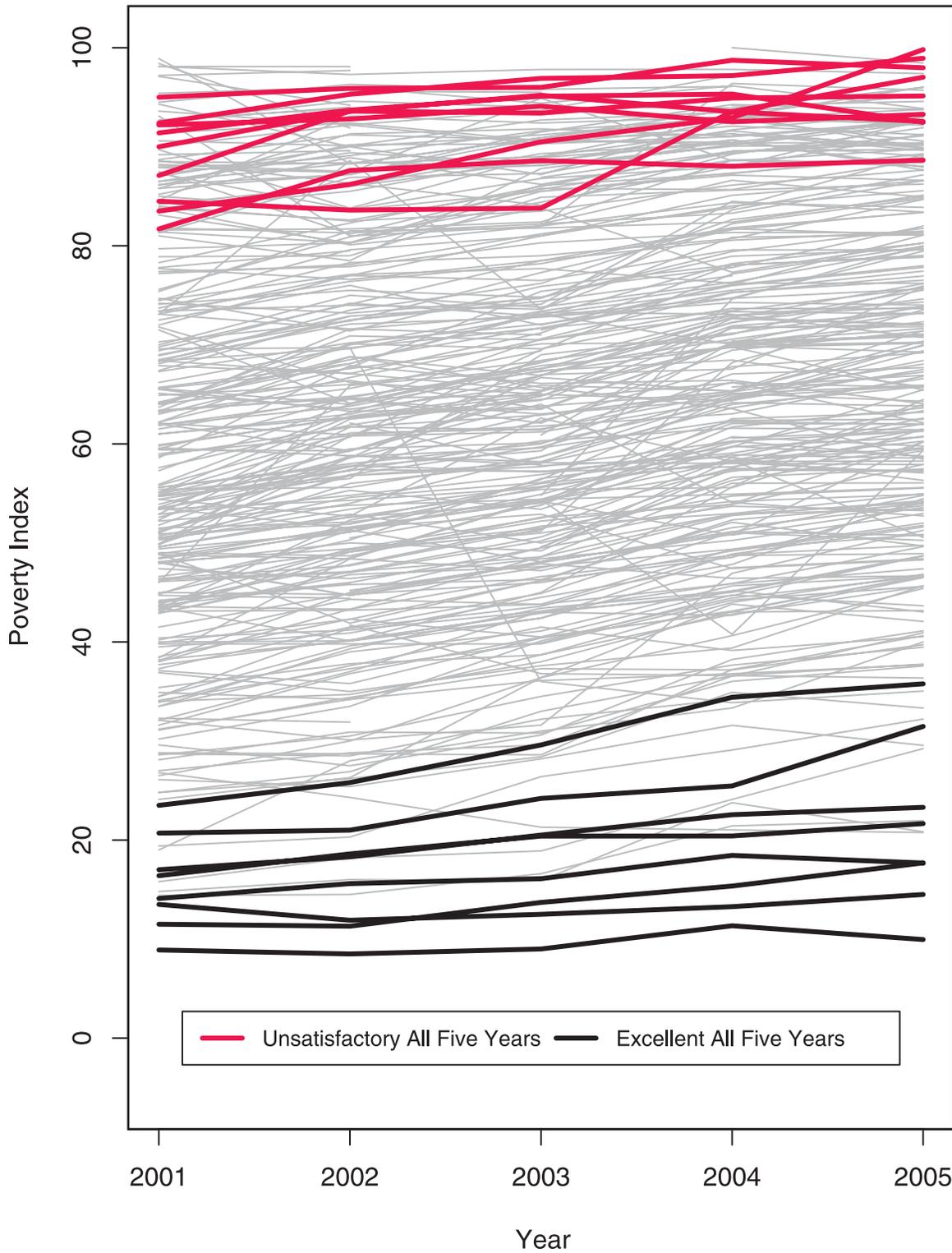


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Poverty Index by School Report Card Absolute Rating Middle Schools, 2001–2005



Colored lines indicate schools with same Absolute Rating for all five years.

The above chart plots a line for each school representing that school's poverty index. Schools which have the same absolute rating for all five report card years (2001-2005) are represented by colored lines. Schools which have absolute ratings which change from year-to-year are represented by gray lines.

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INTRODUCTION

Students in South Carolina middle schools are at the intersection of the state's aspiration for higher levels of educational achievement and its history of under-achievement. Examinations of test performance and risk behaviors suggest decline in student progress during those years. As the curriculum increases in complexity and difficulty, the data suggest that students are not able to maintain the gains achieved in earlier years. Middle schools face the dual challenges of extending the progress evident in students' elementary school performance and retrieving the academic futures of many students who left elementary schools without a robust foundation for long-term school and life success.

In late summer 2004, members of South Carolina's Education Oversight Committee asked its staff to profile students in the middle grades. Little did they (or the staff) realize the overwhelming task ahead. How could the diversity and complexity of families, schools, performance, social pressures and emotional demands be collapsed into a non-technical, reader-friendly overview? Who are the students, what are the issues that propel or retard their growth and development; who teaches them and who protects them from the difficulties of an increasingly mature culture? Are their schools, as a North Carolina publication describes them, "The Last Best Chance?"

Students in the middle grades live between the lines. They are boxed in by the natural changes occurring in their physical and social-emotional development. They are children and adolescents at the same time and cannot predict which developmental stage is going to emerge at any moment. Their lives require them to make more decisions, just at the time that they are most confused. The context of twenty-first century life asks them to make choices about issues and behaviors without sufficient information, understanding or maturity.

Between 1990 and 1999, South Carolina implemented a middle school reform initiative funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Based upon Carnegie work, published in *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the Twenty-First Century*, South Carolina policymakers and educators studied ways to improve the school performance of students in the middle grades. South Carolina implemented such recommendations as including a team approach to parent involvement, individualization and instruction, assignment of school resource officers and the establishment of certification requirements for middle grades teachers. The recently (2005) enacted Education and Economic Development Act furthers attention on students in the middle grades through integration of career planning in the guidance curriculum. Over the years, the Budget and Control Board and State Department of Education collected voluminous data on student attitudes and behaviors. A mere fragment of these data are included in this profile; a comprehensive report will be published on the Education Oversight Committee website (www.sceoc.org) to coincide with the release of this report.

Students in the middle grades live between the lines. They are boxed in by the natural changes occurring in their physical and social-emotional development.

Despite these efforts, too many students in the middle grades are not achieving their potential—and discouragement and under-performance in these grades subsequently leads to disinterest and alienation from the high school curriculum. The schools that serve students in the middle grades are as diverse as the students themselves. There are many school organization patterns which include middle grade students. These schools encompass as many as thirteen grades and as few as one.

During these grades the nature and structure of schooling changes. Instead of one or two teachers, students integrate the demands of six or more teachers. Middle grades students have less access to structured out-of-school activities and, not surprisingly, often are caretakers of younger siblings when school is out. Without a doubt some readers are going to be shocked at the risks these young people face. As children mature during early adolescence, they try new activities, not all of which are positive. Students are rushing toward individuality; all the while being pressured to satisfy a peer group standard.

To provide structure and focus for this profile, four general parameters were applied:

- Grades six through eight are the focus of our interest, although, depending upon the school organization, students in grades five or nine may be incorporated into the data;
- student performance on academic measures administered in grades six, seven and eight are reported although we acknowledge that prior performance and

high school aspirations weigh heavily on results in these grades;

- when examining health, social and family data reported by student age groups, we attempt to limit the data to students between the ages of eleven and fourteen, although there are variations among the sources cited; and
- the profile intends to present a global profile and draws from a variety of reputable sources.

This profile incorporates recent data from a variety of state sources to yield a sober and complex picture of the lives of the exuberant and promising young people. The profile is not intended to present readers with an unsolvable problem, but to document the seriousness of the challenges facing these young people, to demonstrate that there are areas of family, community and school life that can be altered in order to create a more comfortable place in and from which to grow, and to encourage each of us —one on one—to invest our personal, professional and political resources in the students between the lines.

Preadolescents and Teens Ages 10-14

Characteristics of preadolescents and teens:

- ◆ Have high energy and need a great deal of activity
- ◆ Like to achieve and be seen as competent
- ◆ Seem inconsistent in ideas and moods
- ◆ Use logic and reasoning
- ◆ Think beyond the immediate experience
- ◆ Can exchange ideas
- ◆ Seek independence
- ◆ Want voice in decisions
- ◆ Feel awkward and embarrassed in some situations
- ◆ Need praise and approval
- ◆ Identity strongly with peers
- ◆ Interested in experimentation

Source: Afterschool Alliance, 2004

AT A GLANCE

In 2004, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) published *Getting the Mission Right in the Middle Grades*, part of the *Challenge to Lead Series*. The *Challenge to Lead* goal the SREB sets for middle schools states that middle grade students “regardless of their economic status, school location, ethnicity, or gender – will exceed national averages in achievement.”

In the report, SREB asserts that you will know when your state is leading the nation in regards to middle grades when:

- ❑ Middle grade students meet *state* academic standards in reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies.

A third (24-31 percent) of South Carolina's middle grade students are scoring Proficient or Advanced on individual assessments for ELA, Math, Social Studies, and Science.

- ❑ Achievement gaps in meeting *state* standards are closed for all groups of middle grades students.

Although the percentage of schools overall making progress toward closing the achievement gap has increased, South Carolina must raise the achievement of minority groups of students at a faster rate while maintaining or expanding the levels of achievement of other higher-scoring students.

- ❑ Eighth-grade students who score at or above the Basic achievement level in reading, mathematics, and science on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reach 100 percent;

In 2005, 71 percent of South Carolina eighth graders scored Basic or above in Math. Sixty-seven percent of eighth graders scored Basic or above in Reading. On the 2000 Science assessment, 50 percent of middle graders scored Basic or above.

- ❑ Percentages of eighth-grade students who score at or above the Proficient achievement level on NAEP in reading, mathematics, and science meet or exceed the national percentages

South Carolina significantly improved the percentages of students scoring at or above the Proficient level on NAEP

- In 2005, 30 percent of South Carolina eighth graders scored at or above the Proficient level on NAEP in mathematics, compared to 28 percent nationwide.
- In 2005, 25 percent of South Carolina eighth graders scored at or above the Proficient level in on NAEP in reading, compared to 29 percent nationwide.

- ❑ More eighth grade students from all groups successfully complete Algebra I by the end of eighth grade, and all students complete Algebra I by the end of eighth grade.

According to SREB, 70 percent of South Carolina eighth grade students in 2003 were enrolled in pre-algebra or higher. Twenty-seven percent of eighth graders were enrolled in Algebra I or higher.

SOURCES

The sources of data are as follows:

NCHS:	2003 National Survey of Children's Health responses of a random sample of South Carolina parents of 11-14 year olds, http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/da/index/techinfo/H90121.HTM .
SS:	2003/04 Student Survey of all middle grades students, <i>no online source available</i>
PS:	2003/04 Parent Survey of many parents of middle grades students, www.sceoc.org
TS:	2003/04 Teacher Survey of all teachers in middle grades schools, <i>no online source available</i>
CTC:	Communities That Care Survey responses in three counties for middle grades students during 2003 and 2004, <i>no online source available</i>
DAODAS:	2001/02 Survey of Public School/Students Concerning Attitudes and Behaviors Related to the Use of Alcohol, Tobacco, and other Drugs, www.daodas.state.sc.us
ORS:	Office of Research & Statistics of SC Budget & Control Board, www.ors.state.sc.us
EOC:	Education Oversight Committee, www.sceoc.org
SDE:	South Carolina Department of Education, www.myscschools.com
NAEP:	National Assessment of Educational Progress, www.nces.ed.gov
AA:	Afterschool Alliance, www.afterschoolalliance.org

STUDENTS IN THE MIDDLE

Approximately 166,000 students are classified as middle graders in South Carolina schools. What is their world?

The following data are from school report card profile data, 2005, unless otherwise noted.

Are students meeting academic or behavioral expectations?

- ❑ In 2005, fourteen percent of middle grade students met the guidelines for receiving gifted and talented services and 16 percent were enrolled in high school credit courses.
- ❑ In 2005, five percent of middle grade students were more than two years older than the typical age of pupils they attended school with.
- ❑ Fourteen percent of students received programs and services for students with disabilities (excluding students receiving speech services.)
- ❑ In 2005, five percent of middle grade students took the English Language Arts (ELA) portion of PACT at one or more grade levels below their Education Finance Act (EFA) grade designation. Five percent took the math portion of PACT “off grade level.”

Encouraging statistics:

- ❑ On average, 96 percent of middle grade students were present on any given school day in 2005.
- ❑ Only three percent had been retained from the previous year because of poor grades, low test scores, and/or teacher judgment.

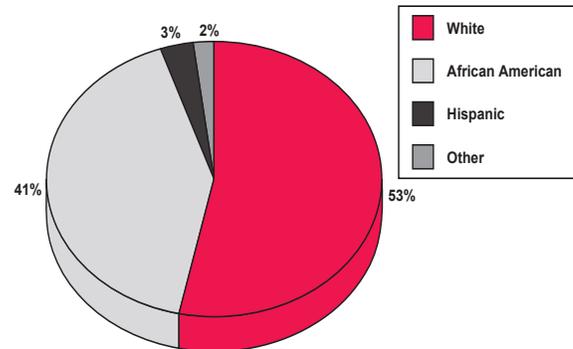
Discouraging statistics:

- ❑ Fourteen percent of students were on academic probation. Thirteen percent of students reported they had been suspended. (DAODAS)
- ❑ One percent were suspended or expelled for violent or criminal acts.

Are students healthy?

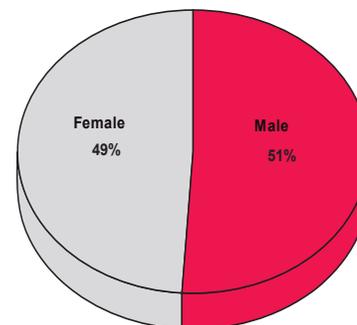
Along with the exertions of independence that accompany the early adolescent years, many students begin to make choices and manage issues surrounding their overall health care. Oftentimes, young adolescents during the middle grade years begin to make their own decisions about sleeping and eating habits, overall

Ethnicity of S.C. Middle Grade Students, 2005



Source: SDE, 2005 precode file, students in grades 6-8

Gender of S.C. Middle Grade Students, 2005



Source: SDE, 2005 precode file

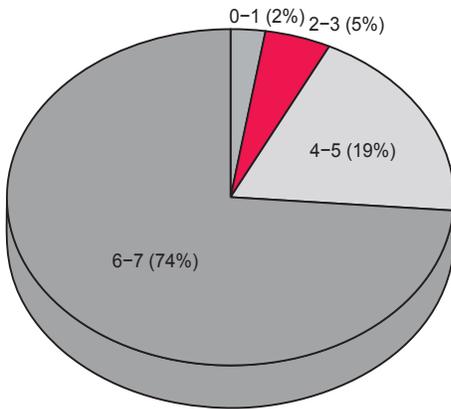
hygiene, and general health. This undertaking is no small task — they are managing a period of rapid growth and physical development. These changes can affect a student’s self-image or confidence levels, which can lead to difficult behaviors, strained relationships with adults and peers, and less focus on school work.

In 2003, the National Survey of Children’s Health released the results of a survey of parents of 11 to 14-year olds. Parents in South Carolina stated of their children:

- ❑ Seventeen percent of students are overweight and another 19 percent at risk of being overweight.
- ❑ Three percent have overall health described by parents as fair or poor.
- ❑ Seven percent are limited in ability to do what youth of same age can do.
- ❑ Five percent are limited by medical, behavioral, or other health conditions that last a year or more.

Are middle grade students sleeping enough?

(# of nights/wk. students report they "got enough sleep.")



Source: NCHS, 2003

- ❑ Five percent are getting special therapy; three percent for medical behavioral conditions that last a year or more.
- ❑ Thirteen percent have been described by a doctor, health professional or teacher as having a learning disability.
- ❑ Three percent have severe health conditions and 16 percent have moderate conditions.
- ❑ Twenty-one percent have an emotional, concentration, or behavior difficulty or are not able to get along with others; two percent have severe problems, nine percent have moderate problems.
- ❑ Fourteen percent went to the emergency room, including three percent more than once during the last year; five percent went because of an accident.
- ❑ Sixteen percent do not have a personal doctor or nurse.
- ❑ Seven percent never or only sometimes got needed care for illness or injury.
- ❑ Thirty-two percent did not visit their personal doctor or nurse for preventive care within the last year.
- ❑ Fourteen percent have ADD/ADHD, eight percent take medication for it.**
- ❑ Five percent have depression or anxiety.**
- ❑ Six percent have behavioral or conduct problems.**

- ❑ Sixteen percent have asthma, seven percent had an asthma attack last year.**

*Children were defined as having special health care needs if they had at least one diagnosis such as mental disorders; respiratory system; endocrine, nutritional, metabolic, immunity, etc., at least once during Calendar years 1999-2001 or if they were a client of Babynet, DHEC-CRS, Vocational Rehabilitation, DDSN, or were flagged as handicapped in the DOE data.

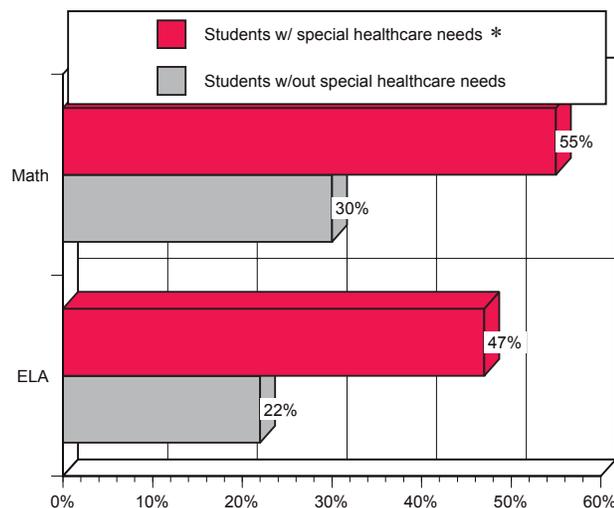
** Parents cite doctor or other health professional as the source of information.

Are students getting the amount of sleep they need?

As seen in the chart to the left, students in the middle grades are often not getting the sleep they need. It is recommended that students in the middle grades receive 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep per night. Seventy-four percent of students state they are getting "enough sleep" at least six nights a week.

There are sources of data on the relationship between health factors and school achievement. A revealing analysis by the Budget and Control Board's Office of Research and Statistics found very high rates of scoring Below Basic in school year 2001-02 for elementary and middle grades students with special health care needs. Students with special health care needs constituted 55 percent of all middle school students scoring Below Basic in math and 47 percent in ELA.

Percentage of Students Grades 6-8 Below Basic, 2001-02 PACT



Source: SC Budget and Control Board, Office of Research and Statistics, 2005

OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

What are the non-instructional influences on middle school students and how do they affect academic achievement?

Despite the enormous emphasis on academic achievement, there has been relatively little investigation in South Carolina of influences other than school that determine the interests, potential, and performance of the students. In national research studies, family and other non-school factors have routinely been shown to correlate with academic performance. Educators and others often attribute poor academic performance to family, community, and cultural circumstances, yet these factors are not systematically addressed with interventions.

One way to understand these influences is to look at some evidence regarding the correlation between external factors and academic performance. The data show that all groups with significant economic, social and health disadvantages had rates of Below Basic PACT performance approaching or more than double the rates of students without disadvantages.

These data suggest that in order for more students to reach state and national goals, South Carolina must address the family, community, cultural, health and other non-school problems that contribute to poor academic performance.

These data correlate with academic performance and suggest that in order for more students to reach state minimum academic standards or the proficiency goal of No Child Left Behind, South Carolina must address the family, community, cultural, health and other non-school problems that contribute to poor academic performance. More succinctly, it is unlikely that improved academic instruction alone will enable low-performing students to reach state and national standards.

An Incomplete Profile of Attitudes, Activities, and Well-Being of Middle Grades Students

There has never been a comprehensive assessment of the attitudes, experiences, and well-being or problems that South Carolina's middle grades students bring with them to school.

Elementary school teachers know each of their students intimately, based on 180 days of face-to-face contact for six or more hours. Middle grade teachers have a less intimate relationship with their students, since they serve 100-150 rather than 20-30. Moreover, the educators know

their customers only as participants in the school environment.

The data presented in this report are indicators of problems associated with poor academic performance. The following data present an imperfect but revealing profile of South Carolina middle grades students during their early adolescent years.

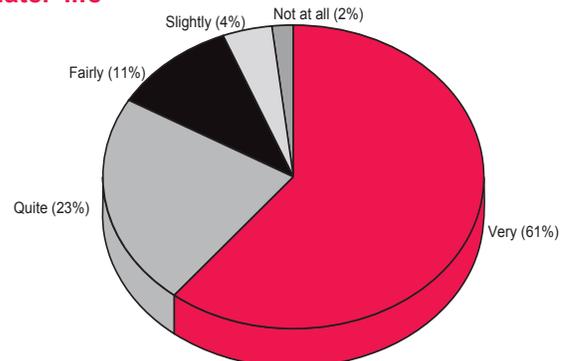
Student Academic Attitudes and Performance

Although they recognize the importance of education, students in the middle grades often do not find their coursework to be interesting or challenging. Some even say they do not even enjoy school. In a student survey given to middle school students statewide in 2003-04, 30 percent of students were dissatisfied with the learning environment in their school.

Discouraging statistics

- ❑ Eighty-four percent of middle school students realize the importance of school to later life; however, 57 percent feel assigned school work is never or seldom meaningful or important. (CTC)
- ❑ Fifteen percent of students do not believe their classes are challenging. (SS)
- ❑ In a 2003-04 three county student survey, 20 percent of students stated that their courses were either "slightly dull" or "very dull." (CTC)
- ❑ Nearly 17 percent of students report they seldom or never enjoy being in school. Twenty-seven percent often or almost always hate being in school. (CTC)

Perceived importance of school learning to later life



Source: SC Budget and Control Board, Communities That Care Survey, 2003-04

Students responded they...	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Enjoy being in school	6.9%	9.9%	35.8%	28.3%	19.2%
Hate being in school	14.7%	24.5%	34.2%	15.9%	10.9%
Try to do your best work in school	0.7%	2.1%	12.7%	26.0%	58.5%
Feel assigned schoolwork is meaningful or important	30.9%	26.3%	30.7%	7.3%	4.8%

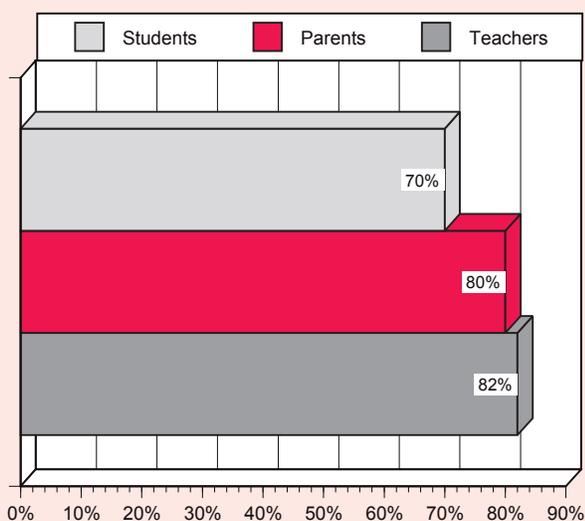
Source: SC Budget and Control Board, Communities That Care Survey, 2003-04

Encouraging statistics

- Seventy-five percent of the students surveyed believed teachers were spending the time necessary to help them learn. (SS)
- Nearly 70 percent of students said that their teachers praise students when they do good work. (SS)

- Ninety-five percent of students said teachers expect students to learn and behave.

Percent Satisfied with the learning environment at school



Source: SDE, 2003-04 Student, Parent, and Teacher Surveys

Other Perspectives...

It is interesting to look at the responses from teachers and parents of middle graders regarding learning environment. Although most have a positive view of the learning environment at their school, teachers are the most satisfied at 82 percent.

Overall, teachers agree that high expectations are held for students in the middle grades and that their schools provide challenging instructional programs for students. However, a quarter of the teachers surveyed agree that students are not challenged or interested in learning.

Satisfaction with the learning environment is lower in high poverty schools

Satisfaction with Learning Environment			
Survey Element	Lower Poverty (50% or Less) Schools (n=60)	Medium Poverty (51% - 79%) Schools (n=134)	Higher Poverty (80% or More) Schools (n=76)
Percent Teachers Satisfied	88.8	84.4	69.1
Percent Parents Satisfied	81.8	76.9	69.9
Percent Students Satisfied	72.5	70.1	63.2

Source: EOC Analysis of 2004 Parent, Student, and Teacher Surveys

Analysis of teacher, parent, and student satisfaction with the learning environment in middle schools having various levels of student poverty suggests that all groups are more satisfied in lower-poverty schools, and least satisfied with higher-poverty schools.

When asked about their satisfaction with the school learning environment, teachers, parents, and students uniformly rated lower-poverty schools better than higher-poverty schools, with gaps in their levels of satisfaction ranging from over nine to almost 20 percentage points.

Other Middle Grades Perspectives...

- ❑ Although 92 percent of parents believed their child's teacher encouraged their child to learn, 20 percent of parents surveyed did not believe their child's teachers provided them with extra help when they needed it. (PS)
- ❑ Thirty percent of teachers said the level of teacher and staff morale at their school is not high. (TS)
- ❑ Twenty-eight percent of teachers stated that students are not motivated and interested in learning. (TS)

School Climate

The social and physical environment of a school impacts achievement. Nearly one quarter of students surveyed do not feel safe at their school before and after the school day. Over half of students say that bad behavior is common and noted by a majority of students. Teachers have a more positive view of behavior and relationships than students and parents.

Behavior and Relationships

Unless otherwise noted, these data come from the 2004 Student, Parent, and Teacher surveys.

- ❑ Sixty-three percent of students state that students at their school misbehave in the hallways, lunchroom, and on school grounds and 61 percent say students misbehave during class.
- ❑ Thirty-eight percent of students state that teachers and students do not get along well with each other at school.
- ❑ Thirty-five percent of students say that students from different backgrounds do not get along well at their school.

Fifty-one percent of middle schoolers believe it is “alright to beat up people if they start a fight.” (CTC)

Safety

- ❑ Although only 15 percent of students disagree that the rules for behavior are enforced at their school, 23 percent of students do not feel safe at their school before and after school hours. Seventeen percent do not feel safe during the school day.

Self-Esteem /Depression Behaviors

- ❑ Fifty-two percent of children say they felt depressed or sad most days, even if “feeling ok sometimes.” Twenty-eight percent of students think “life is not worth it.” (CTC)

Other Perspectives...

Behavior and Relationships

- ❑ Fifty-four percent of parents surveyed stated that students misbehaved at their child’s school.
- ❑ Twenty-five percent of teachers state that students at their school misbehave in the hallways, lunchroom, and on school grounds and 25 percent say that students misbehave during class.
- ❑ Eleven percent of teachers say that students from different backgrounds do not get along well at their school.
- ❑ Only six percent of teachers agree that student/teacher relations are strained.

Safety

- ❑ Fourteen percent of parents said that their child did not feel safe at school.

Self-Esteem /Depression Behaviors

There is a disconnect between the emotional health of middle grade students and their parents’ perceptions of it.

- ❑ Sixty-one percent of parents say their child is never unhappy, sad, or depressed and 83 percent say they are never withdrawn or not involved with others.
- ❑ In a 2003 survey of parents, 20 percent of parents stated they were concerned “a lot” about their child’s depression or anxiety. An additional 22 percent were “a little concerned.” (NCHS)

Student Character and Positive Developmental Outcomes

Little data have been collected about the character development of young adolescents despite ample evidence that good character, values, and habits determine the success of people in work and life pursuits more than mastery of academic standards. A telling reminder of the importance of “who you are” rather than “what you know” was reported by a 1997 State Chamber of Commerce survey of employers. When asked what things they look for in hiring entry-level workers, the employers listed the six top attributes in demand as Integrity/Honesty, Responsibility, Participation as a Team Member, Knowing How to Learn, Listening, and Self-Esteem. In the 2003 survey, 24 percent of employers stated that work ethic and maturity were attributes that high school graduates lacked.

Character and Ethics

Unless otherwise noted, these data come from the 2003-04 Communities That Care survey.

Encouraging Statistics

- ❑ Ninety-one percent think it is wrong or very wrong to stay away from school when parents think you are at school and almost 90 percent of students believe it is wrong to steal something worth more than \$5.
- ❑ Seventy-seven percent think it is important to be honest with parents, even if they become upset and punish you.

Discouraging Statistics

- ❑ Seven percent of students think it is okay to take something without asking “if you can get away with it.”
- ❑ Nineteen percent think it is “okay to cheat sometimes in school.”
- ❑ Twenty-two percent of students state they “ignore rules to get my way.”
- ❑ Twenty percent do the opposite of what people tell them “just to get them mad.”
- ❑ Over 20 percent of students report that they do what “makes me feel good, no matter what” more than monthly.
- ❑ Sixteen percent have done something dangerous in the last year “because someone dared me to.”

Family relationships

The survey data suggest that even as peer groups become more important in the middle grades, students continue to have strong bonds with their parents.

40 percent of middle graders are the only child in their family. (NCHS)

Encouraging Statistics

- ❑ Eighty-six percent of students in the middle grades report they feel very close to their mothers and 71 percent share thoughts and feelings with their mothers.
- ❑ Eighty-two percent of students said they could ask their mom or dad for help if they had a personal problem.
- ❑ Seventy-nine percent say their parents give them “lots of chances to do fun things with them.”
- ❑ Seventy-two percent of students say their parents always or often notice when they are doing a good job and let them know about it. Seventy-three percent say their parents tell them they are proud of them all of the time or often.
- ❑ Eighty-seven percent say that when they are not at home, one of their parents knows where they are and who they are with.
- ❑ Sixty-five percent say that if they drank beer, wine, or liquor without their parents’ permission, they would be caught by their parents.
- ❑ Seventy-five percent state their parents would catch them if they skipped school.

Parental Perspective on Family Relationships...

- ❑ Eighty-six percent of parents report their relationship with their child is very close and 74 percent state that they share ideas very well and talk about things that matter.
- ❑ Eighty percent of parents say they have met all or most of their child's friends.
- ❑ Nearly 70 percent of parents say they have attended events that their child or friends participated in during the past year.
- ❑ Seventy five percent of parents say that in the past week, their family ate at least four meals together.

Source: NSCH

Mobility

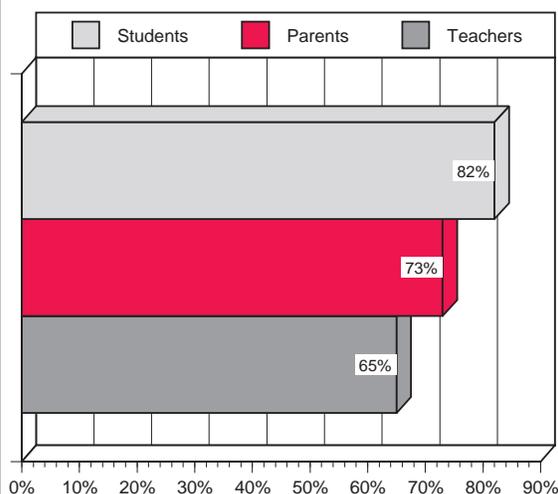
Any move from familiar surroundings requires time for transition. Students who change schools or districts often have more adjustments to make than students who never or seldom move. In the middle grades, these transitions can be especially difficult and the mobility of students can provide some insights into student achievement.

In October 2005, the EOC released an "Analysis of the Five-Year PACT Longitudinal Data: Student Mobility, Student Retention in Grade and PACT Achievement over Time." Although the study did not study middle school students specifically, it did examine students in grades 3-8 over a five-year period.

Some interesting findings in the report include:

- ❑ Ten percent of the students moved from one district to another during the five-year study period.
- ❑ Approximately two percent of the students attended three different districts in five years.
- ❑ Almost 90 percent of students stayed in the same district all five years.

Percent Satisfied with Home-School Relations



Source: SDE, 2003-04 Student, Parent, and Teacher Surveys

Home-School Relations

Middle school students are, as a group, more pleased with home-school relations than parents and teachers.

- ❑ On the 2004 Parent Survey, 43 percent of parents do not agree that their child's teachers tell them how they can help their child learn.
- ❑ Twenty-nine percent of teachers say that parents at their school are not interested in their children's schoolwork. (TS)

Poverty's Impact

2004 Parent, Teacher and Student Survey Results Satisfaction with Home and School Relations			
Survey Element	Lower Poverty (50% or Less) Schools (n=60)	Medium Poverty (51% - 79%) Schools (n=134)	Higher Poverty (80% or More) Schools (n=76)
Percent Teachers Satisfied	84.4	64.2	39.7
Percent Parents Satisfied	64.0	61.6	61.9
Percent Students Satisfied	83.4	82.2	80.3

Source: EOC Analysis of 2004 Parent, Student, and Teacher Surveys

Teachers in higher-poverty schools reported extremely low levels of satisfaction with the relations between home and schools compared to teachers in lower- and medium-poverty middle schools. However, the satisfaction rates for parents and students did not differ significantly across poverty levels. Parents in low poverty schools are much less satisfied than are teachers and students.

Risk Behaviors

The middle grades are a critical time in the development of risk-taking. Though small numbers of students have initiated their risk-taking during elementary school, many initiate poor habits during the middle grade years.

% of Students by Grade Ever Having:	6th	7th	8th	9th	12th
Smoked cigarettes	21.4	32.5	42.2	49.1	55.5
Drunk alcohol	29.8	40.7	52.3	61.7	74.2
Used any illicit drug	10.5	16.0	24.2	33.0	45.5
Gotten high on a drug	4.0	8.6	15.1	23.1	33.4

(Source: DAODAS, 2001-02)

% of Students by Grade in Last 30 Days Having:	6th	7th	8th	9th	12th
Smoked cigarettes	8.2	14.1	19.7	25.0	27.5
Smoked 1 or more per day	3.8	7.6	12.0	18.4	21.8
Drunk alcohol	9.6	15.8	23.9	32.1	41.8
3 or more drinks per occasion	1.8	3.5	6.9	13.0	25.0
Binge drinking	3.3	5.9	9.5	15.1	23.1
Binge drinking weekly or more often	1.0	1.9	3.1	5.5	10.3
Smoked marijuana	3.1	6.7	11.6	18.2	20.7

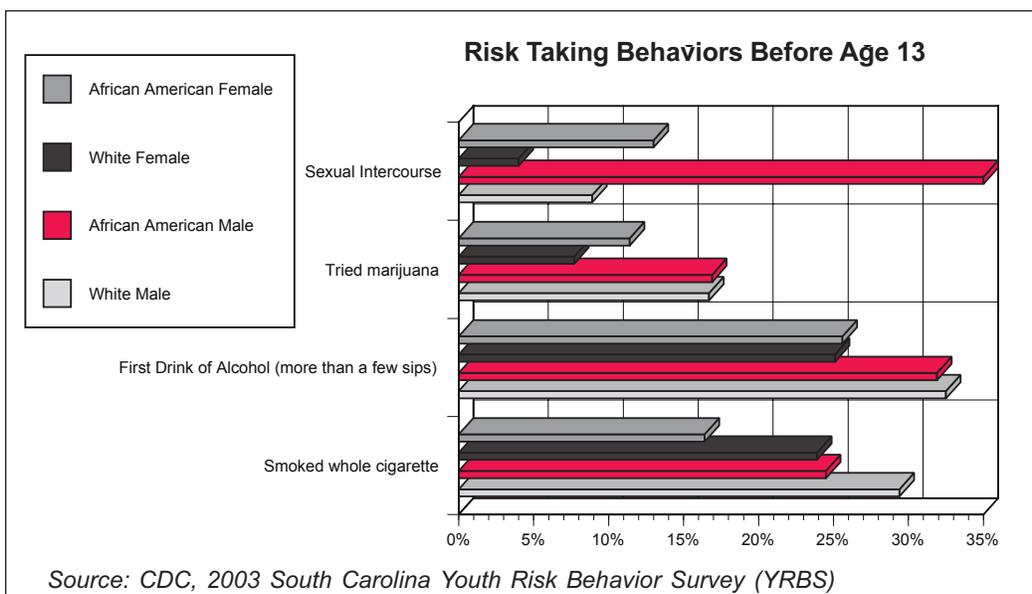
(Source: DAODAS, 2001-02)

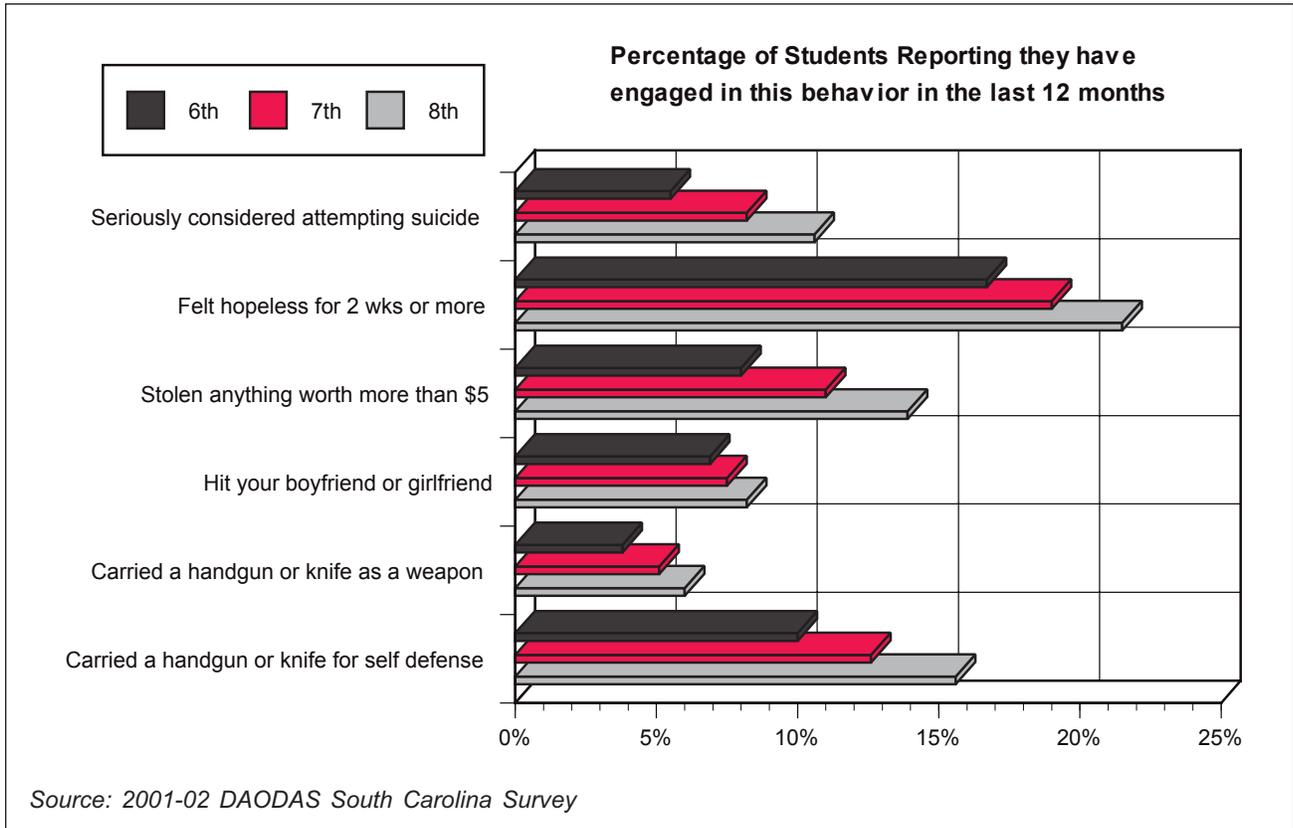
Risk behaviors take many forms other than substance use, including violence, criminality, violation of school rules, depression, self-harm, and sex. Most of these behaviors increase in prevalence during middle school. The data show that between grades nine and twelve, many behaviors continue to increase while a few decline somewhat.

increases as students progress in grade levels. Twenty-one percent of sixth graders state they have smoked cigarettes. This percentage has nearly doubled by the eighth grade and almost tripled by the twelfth grade. Drug and alcohol usage increases substantially as students progress through middle school and high school.

There are important differences across gender and race groups in their risk-taking habits, as seen in the chart below, which examines risk behaviors before the age of thirteen.

Risk behavior, as reported by the South Carolina Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Services (DAODAS),





The table above examines risk behaviors other than drugs and alcohol. Particularly alarming is the high and increasing rate of students who felt hopeless for two weeks or more.

A study of the special circumstances of students related to and in some cases playing a significant causal role for poor academic performance is the school year 2002

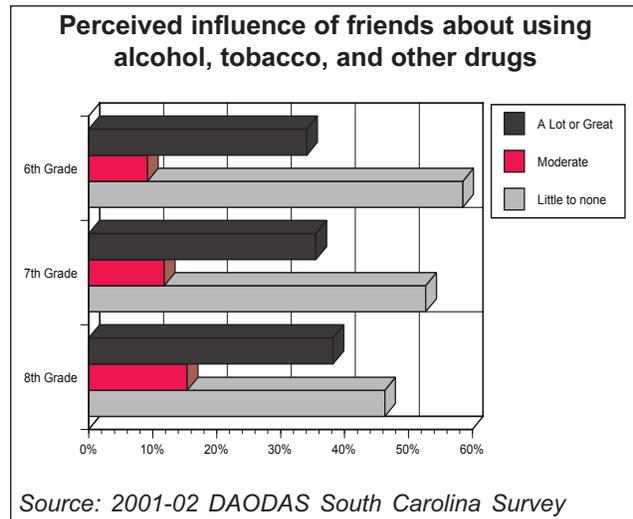
survey of alcohol and drug use (table below.) The survey asked about usual grades in school as well as about risk behaviors. The results do not prove that substance use or the other risk behaviors cause poor grades; however, the strong association emphasizes the significant differences in attitudes, habits, and peer influences for students with high versus low grades.

Substance Abuser Rates at Levels of Academic Performance - Middle Grade Students						
Usual School Grades in Past Year						
	A Range	B Range	C Range	D Range	F Range	Total
Smoked cigarettes (in past 30 days)	6.4%	11.8%	19.0%	24.4%	32.2%	14.0%
Smoked marijuana (in past 30 days)	3.0%	5.6%	10.3%	14.4%	21.9%	7.4%
Binge drank (drank 5 or more drinks on one occasion in past 30 days)	2.9%	5.1%	8.8%	11.4%	19.8%	6.5%

Source: 2001-02 DAODAS Middle School (Grades 6-8) Student Survey of Public School - Attitudes and Behaviors Related to the use of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs

- ❑ Forty-seven percent of eighth graders said their parents have little or no influence on them about using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. (DAODAS)
- ❑ Ninety-four percent feel their parents would think it wrong or very wrong to drink beer, wine, or hard liquor regularly. (CTC)
- ❑ Thirty-two percent of youth have responded that someone in their family had a severe alcohol or drug problem. (CTC)

Twenty-two percent of females in the middle grades have felt hopeless for two weeks or more (DAODAS)



Two in five South Carolina middle school children in working families (40 percent) are unsupervised in the afternoons. (2005, J.C. Penney Co., Inc., America After 3 PM Survey.)

Student Activities

Are students involved in extracurricular activities? How do students spend their time away from school? Do they read, use the computer, or just watch television?

- ❑ Parents said that 46 percent of their young teens read for pleasure at least a half hour each school day. (NCHS)
- ❑ Fifty-seven percent of children were involved in volunteer or community service work in the past year. (NCHS)
- ❑ Over fifty percent are involved in team sports or lessons after school or on weekends. (NCHS)
- ❑ Sixty percent of students are in clubs or organizations like scouts, boys/girls clubs or religious groups, and 26 percent are involved in sports, clubs, or activities at least three days a week, but 37 percent are not involved any days. (NCHS)
- ❑ Twenty-one percent of South Carolina eighth graders reported watching six or more hours of television and videos daily. Forty-three percent watch four or more hours. Parents, however, report that only seven percent of middle school students watch television and videos over four hours a day. (2003 NAEP, Reading)

- ❑ Eighty-six percent of eighth graders use a computer at home. (2003 NAEP, Reading)
- ❑ In 2002, 38 percent of eighth graders in South Carolina said parents had strict rules about getting homework done. (2002 NAEP, Writing)

Neighborhood

Approximately half or more of students feel they are supported by their communities. However, a significant minority say they are not supported by and do not like their neighborhood.

- ❑ Sixty percent of students say there are “people in my neighborhood who encourage me to do my best,” and over 50 percent say that people in their neighborhood are “proud of me when I do well.” (CTC)
- ❑ Nearly 70 percent of students say they feel safe in their neighborhood but 24 percent say there is crime and/or drug activity occurring in their neighborhoods. (CTC)
- ❑ Twenty-eight percent of students do not like their neighborhood. (CTC)
- ❑ Over half of the students state there are not “lots of adults in my neighborhood that I could talk to about something important.” (CTC)

MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN SC

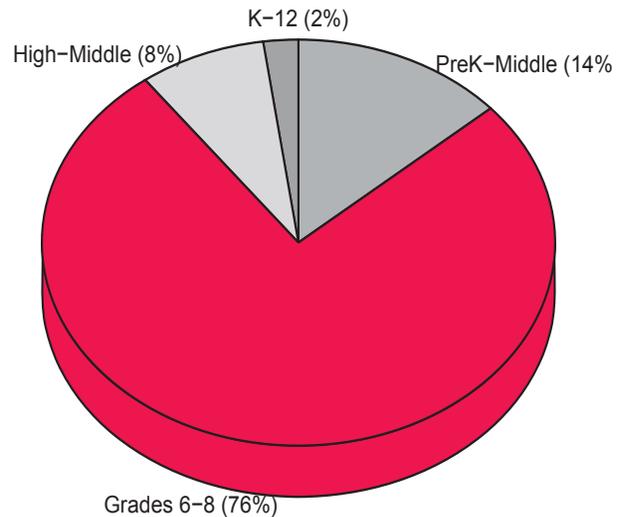
The majority of middle schools contain grades 6, 7, and 8, but there are many other school organizational patterns which include middle grade students.

South Carolina's middle schools are grouped in a number of different configurations, as noted in the figure to the right.

In some schools containing middle school grades as well as elementary school grades (Pre-kindergarten through grade 5) the middle grades students are the oldest students in the building; these schools are classified as PreK-Middle in the tables below. In schools containing high school grades in addition to the middle school grades (such as grades 6-12, 7-12, 7-9, etc.) the middle grades students are the youngest students in the building; these schools are termed High-Middle.

Finally, there are a few schools containing all grades from Kindergarten through grade 12; these schools are identified as K-12.

South Carolina Young Adolescents are in a variety of grade configurations, 2005



N=274

Source: 2005 Report Card data files, SDE

Middle Schools at a Glance

PreK-Middle

Number of Schools in 2005: 37
 Avg. enrollment in 2005: 491 students
 Avg. Number of Teachers Employed: 35.5
 Avg. Number of Principals Employed*: 1.8
 Avg. number of Guidance Counselors employed: 1.3
 Avg. number of Media Specialists employed: 0.8

Grades 6,7,8

Number of Schools in 2005: 209
 Average enrollment in 2005: 675 students
 Avg. Number of Teachers Employed: 44.2
 Avg. Number of Principals Employed*: 2.6
 Avg. number of Guidance Counselors employed: 1.8
 Avg. number of Media Specialists employed: 1.0

High-Middle

Number of Schools in 2005: 22
 Average enrollment in 2005: 493 students
 Avg. Number of Teachers Employed: 39.7
 Avg. Number of Principals Employed*: 2.5
 Avg. number of Guidance Counselors employed: 1.7
 Avg. number of Media Specialists employed: 1.1

K-12

Number of Schools in 2005: 6
 Average enrollment in 2005: 141 students
 Avg. Number of Teachers Employed: 19.0
 Avg. Number of Principals Employed*: 1.2
 Avg. number of Guidance Counselors employed: 0.4
 Avg. number of Media Specialists employed: 1.0

* Includes assistant principals and principal specialists

Source: 2005 Report Card and professional staff data files, SDE

Poverty Rates**Poverty Index by Grade Organization Category, 2001-2005
Schools Containing at Least One Middle Grade (6,7, or 8)**

Grade Organization of Schools	Poverty Index in 2001	Poverty Index in 2002	Poverty Index in 2003	Poverty Index in 2004	Poverty Index in 2005
PreK-Middle	64.7	66.6	67.7	70.5	71.5
Grades 6, 7, 8	56.2	58.3	60.6	63.7	65.3
High-Middle	66.5	70.1	70.4	74.3	70.9
K-12	47.0	74.7	66.1	84.2	81.8

Source: EOC Analysis of 2001-2005 Report Card data files, SDE

- Poverty levels in all middle school categories increased between 2001 and 2005.
- In 2005, schools containing grades other than grades 6-8 tended to have somewhat higher levels of poverty than schools containing 6-8 grades only.

The average student enrollment for a middle school rated Excellent in 2005 was 902. For a school rated Unsatisfactory, the average enrollment was 464.

How do Middle Schools Spend Their Money?

Per pupil expenditure: \$6,022
Average percent spent on teacher salaries: 62 percent
Average teacher salary: \$41,328

Source: Median values from State Report Card Profile Data, 2005

Teachers

Who is teaching the students in the middle grades? Currently, 40 percent of teachers hold secondary certification and 60 percent hold elementary certification.

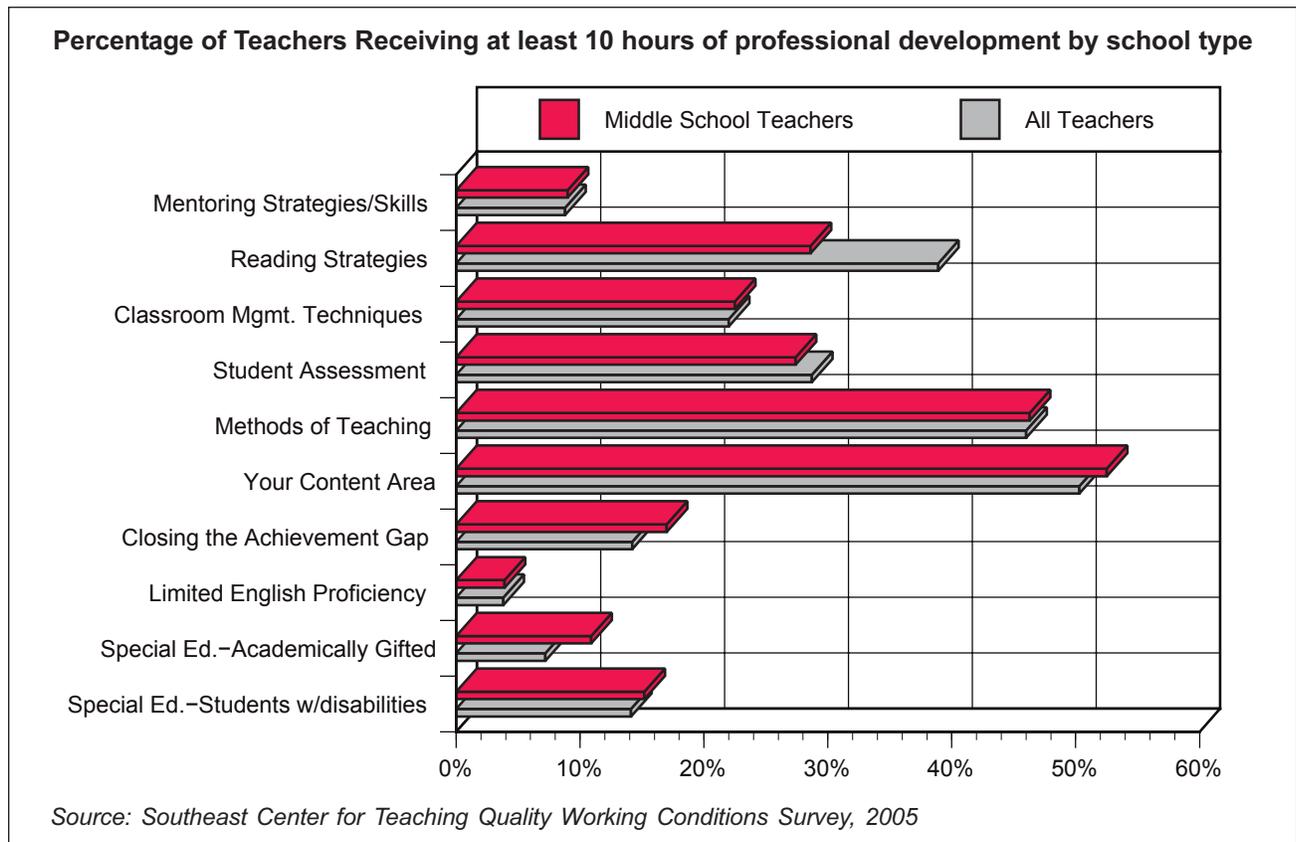
The following data is from the 2005 Report Card profile information.

- ❑ Fifty-two percent of middle grades teachers have advanced degrees and 90 percent are highly-qualified, based on criteria outlined in No Child Left Behind legislation.
- ❑ Eighty-five percent of teachers have returned to their school or district from the previous school year for a three year period.
- ❑ Seventy-eight percent of teachers in the middle grades hold continuing contracts.

- ❑ Ninety-five percent of teachers were present on any given school day.

The graph below shows the percentage of middle school and other teachers receiving at least ten hours of professional development. Middle school teachers lag behind their colleagues teaching elementary and high school in professional development focused on reading strategies. They are ahead in professional development focused on the teaching of academically gifted students.

Schools with the same absolute rating of Excellent all four years have the highest percentage of teachers with continuing contracts and the lowest percentage of teachers out-of-field. In contrast, schools with an Unsatisfactory rating all four years show the highest percentage of teachers out-of-field and the lowest percentage of continuing contract teachers and teachers with advanced degrees.



The average age of an original middle school building in South Carolina is 37 years.

Poverty's Impact

Fiscal Data / Teacher and Administrator Data				
Report Card Profile Element	Year	Lower Poverty (50% or Less) Schools (n=56)	Medium Poverty (51%-79%) Schools (n=137)	Higher Poverty (80% or more) Schools (n=81)
Percent Expenditures for Teacher Salaries	2005	63.5	61.5	59.3
Avg. Teacher Salary	2005	\$42,997	\$41,054	\$40,358
Number Teachers in School	2005	55.8	40.1	35.1
Principal's Years at School	2005	5.4	4.5	3.7
% Teachers with Advanced Degrees	2005	56.4	49.5	49.5
Teacher Attendance Rate	2005	95.0	94.8	94.5
% Continuing Contract Teachers	2005	81.5	78.4	66.9
Highly Qualified Teachers	2005	87.9	89.2	87.3
% Teachers with Emergency or Provisional Certificates	2005	4.4	6.1	12.3
% Teachers Returning from Previous Year	2005	87.0	85.4	78.4
Student:Teacher Ratio in Core Subjects	2005	22.3	21.6	18.7
Professional Development Days per Teacher	2005	11.5	12.1	12.7
Prime Instructional Time	2005	90.1	89.2	87.7
Number Students Enrolled	2005	866.3	615.5	470.8
Dollars spent per student for instruction	2005	\$5,635.20	\$5,951.10	\$8,075.30

*Audited data from previous year

Source: EOC Analysis of 2004 Report Card data files, SDE

- Higher-poverty middle schools tend to be smaller, with fewer teachers and students, and lower-poverty middle schools tend to be larger than either medium- or higher-poverty middle schools.
- When compared to lower-poverty or medium-poverty middle schools, higher-poverty middle schools tend to spend more per student but devote more of the expenditure toward non-instructional costs and to have less well-paid teachers.
- Teachers in higher-poverty middle schools tend to be the least experienced, least qualified group when compared to teachers from lower- or medium-poverty middle schools.

Poverty's Impact - continued

- ❑ Teachers in higher-poverty middle schools tend to have lower attendance and are less likely to return to the school the following year than teachers in lower- or medium-poverty middle schools.
- ❑ Teachers in higher-poverty middle schools tend to receive more days of professional development than teachers in lower- or medium-poverty middle schools.
- ❑ The ratio of students to teachers in the core academic subjects is highest in lower-poverty middle schools and lowest in higher-poverty middle schools.
- ❑ Levels of prime instructional time, a measure of the amount of time teachers and students are engaged in academic instruction, are highest in lower-poverty middle schools and lowest in higher-poverty middle schools.

Absolute Ratings by Grade Organization Category, 2005 Schools Containing at Least One Middle Grade (6, 7, or 8)						
Absolute Rating	Year	PreK- Middle	Grades 6, 7, 8	High-Middle	K-12	Total
Excellent	2005	1 (2.7%)	7 (3.4%)	1 (4.5%)	0	9 (3.3%)
Good	2005	9 (24.3%)	37 (17.8%)	1 (4.5%)	0	47 (17.3%)
Average	2005	9 (24.3%)	74 (35.6%)	6 (27.3%)	2 (50%)	91 (33.6%)
Below Average	2005	13 (35.1%)	67 (32.2%)	11 (50.0%)	0	91 (33.6%)
Unsatisfactory	2005	5 (13.5%)	23 (11.1)	3 (13.0%)	2 (50%)	33 (12.2%)
Totals	2005	37 (100%)	208 (100%)	22 (100%)	4 (100%)	271 (100%)

Source: EOC Analysis of 2005 Report Card data files, SDE

PERFORMANCE

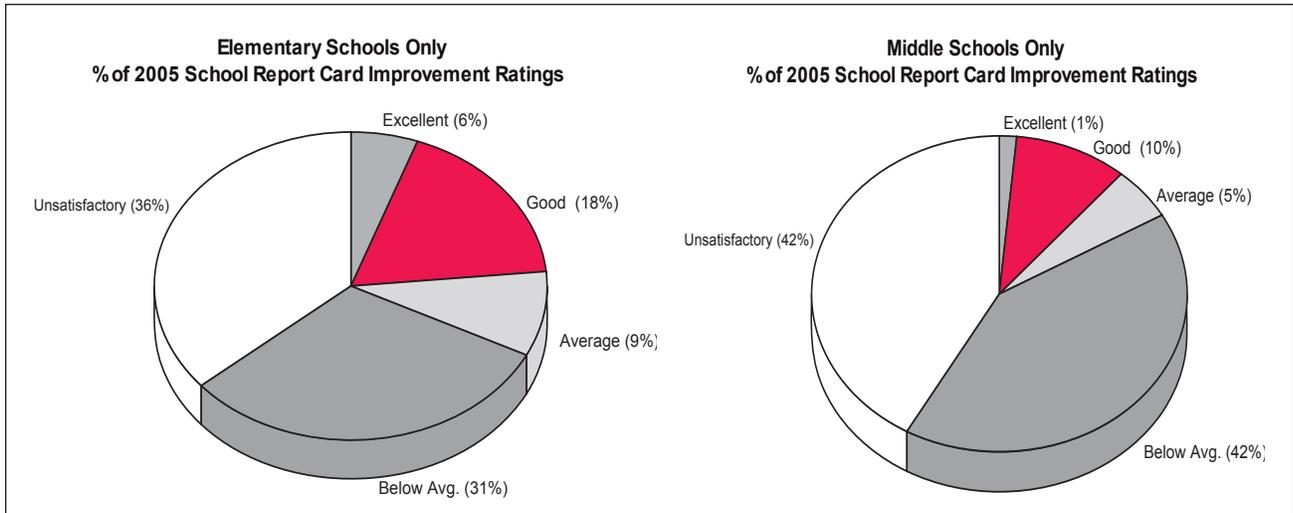
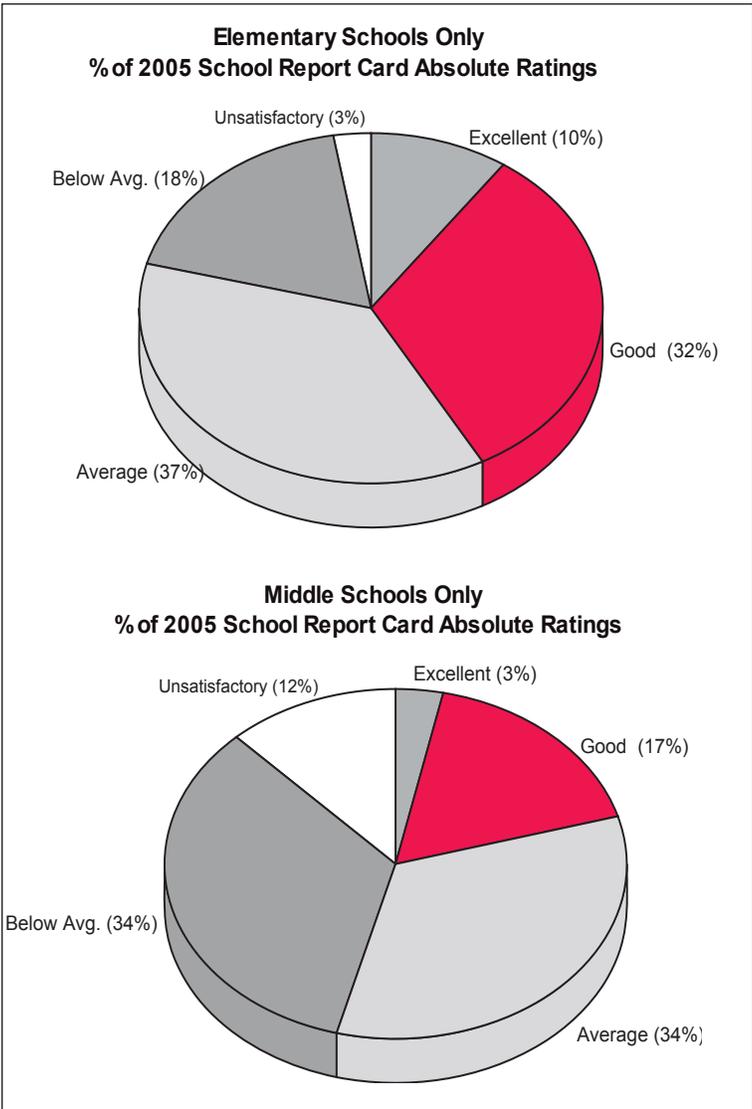
By 2010 South Carolina's student achievement will be ranked in the top half of states nationally. To achieve this goal, we must become one of the five fastest improving systems in the country.

What about the performance of middle schools? In comparing the 2005 Absolute Ratings for elementary and middle schools in the charts at the right, ratings of schools decline from the elementary to the middle level.

In 2005, ten percent of elementary schools were rated Excellent, compared to three percent of middle schools. Forty-six percent of middle schools were rated Unsatisfactory or Below Average in 2005, compared to 21 percent of elementary schools.

The charts on page 26 show a historical snapshot of Absolute ratings, from 2001-2005. Twenty-nine middle schools were rated Unsatisfactory in 2001. That number decreased each year until 2005, when 33 middle schools were rated Unsatisfactory. Elementary schools also progressively decreased the percentage of Unsatisfactory and Below Average schools since 2001 until 2005.

A comparison of Improvement Ratings, a measure based on longitudinally matched student data, shows that eleven percent of middle schools have an improvement rating of Excellent or Good.



Elementary Schools Only
2000-2001 Through 2004-2005 School Report Card Absolute Ratings
Number and Percentage of School Report Cards

Rating	2005 Absolute Rating Number (%)	2004 Absolute Rating Number (%)	2003 Absolute Rating Number (%)	2002 Absolute Rating Number (%)	2001 Absolute Rating Number (%)
Excellent	60 (9.7%)	106 (17.3%)	114 (18.8%)	106 (17.5%)	96 (15.9%)
Good	199 (32.3%)	241 (39.3%)	227 (37.4%)	217 (35.8%)	191 (31.6%)
Average	229 (37.1%)	199 (32.5%)	196 (32.2%)	195 (32.2%)	208 (34.4)
Below Average	113 (18.3%)	64 (10.4%)	66 (10.9%)	81 (13.4%)	100 (16.5%)
Unsatisfactory	16 (2.6%)	3 (0.5%)	4 (0.7%)	7 (1.2%)	10 (1.7%)
Total	617 (100%)	613 (100%)	607 (100%)	606 (100%)	605 (100%)

Note: Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Middle Schools Only
2000-2001 Through 2004-2005 School Report Card Absolute Ratings
Number and Percentage of School Report Cards

Rating	2005 Absolute Rating Number (%)	2004 Absolute Rating Number (%)	2003 Absolute Rating Number (%)	2002 Absolute Rating Number (%)	2001 Absolute Rating Number (%)
Excellent	9 (3.3%)	11 (4.1%)	13 (4.8%)	14 (5.1%)	11 (4.0%)
Good	47 (17.3%)	67 (25.1%)	72 (26.8%)	73 (26.6%)	58 (21.3%)
Average	91 (33.5%)	91 (34.1%)	95 (35.3%)	91 (33.2%)	91 (33.5%)
Below Average	92 (33.8%)	80 (30.7%)	70 (26.0%)	70 (25.6%)	83 (30.5%)
Unsatisfactory	33 (12.1%)	16 (6.0%)	19 (7.1%)	26 (9.5%)	29 (10.7%)
Total	272 (100%)	267 (100%)	269 (100%)	274 (100%)	272 (100%)

Note: Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Of the 244 middle schools for which data was available for all five years, 107 of them (44 percent) had the same absolute performance rating for all five years. Of these 145 schools:

- 8 schools were consistently Excellent;
- 30 schools were consistently Good;
- 30 schools were consistently Average;
- 30 schools were consistently Below Average;
- and 9 schools were consistently Unsatisfactory.

Poverty and Performance Ratings in South Carolina's Middle Schools

The association between socioeconomic status as measured by the poverty index and performance ratings is striking. Among schools with consistent absolute performance ratings, schools with higher poverty indices are associated with lower school report card performance ratings.

There is a broad range among South Carolina middle schools in the poverty levels of students attending them. In 2005, the percentages of students in poverty in middle schools ranged from eleven percent to 100 percent.

For analysis purposes, the middle schools were divided into three groups corresponding roughly to the schools in the lowest quarter of the distribution of poverty (50 percent or fewer students in poverty), schools in the approximately middle half of the distribution (schools in which 51 percent to 79 percent of their students are in poverty), and the approximate top quarter of the poverty distribution (schools in which 80 percent or more of the students are in poverty).

**2005 Absolute Ratings
Lower, Medium, and Higher Poverty Middle Schools**

2005 Absolute Rating	Lower Poverty (50% or Less) Number of Schools (%)	Medium Poverty (51%-79%) Number of Schools (%)	Higher Poverty (80% or More) Number of Schools (%)
Excellent	9 (16.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Good	27 (48.2%)	20 (14.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Average	18 (32.1%)	68 (50.0%)	5 (6.3%)
Below Average	1 (1.8%)	44 (32.4%)	46 (58.2%)
Unsatisfactory	1 (1.8%)	4 (2.9%)	28 (35.4%)
Total	56 (100%)	136 (100%)	79 (100%)

Percentage totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Source: EOC Analysis of 2005 Report Card data files, SDE

Academic Progress in the Middle Grades

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Grade 8 Assessments

Math

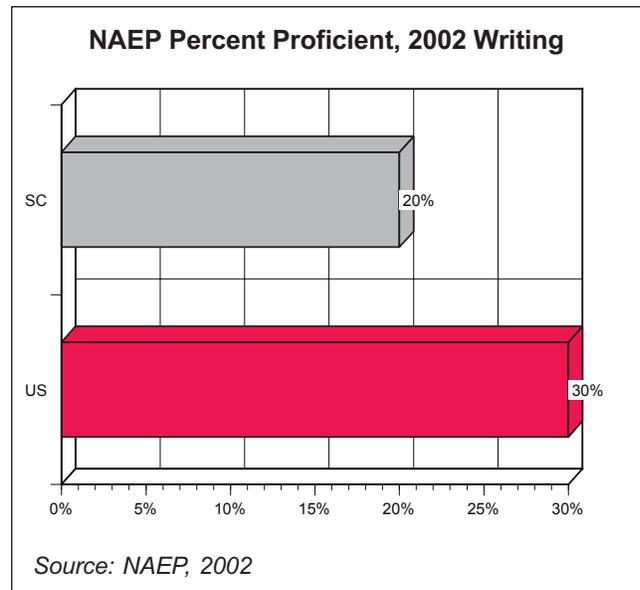
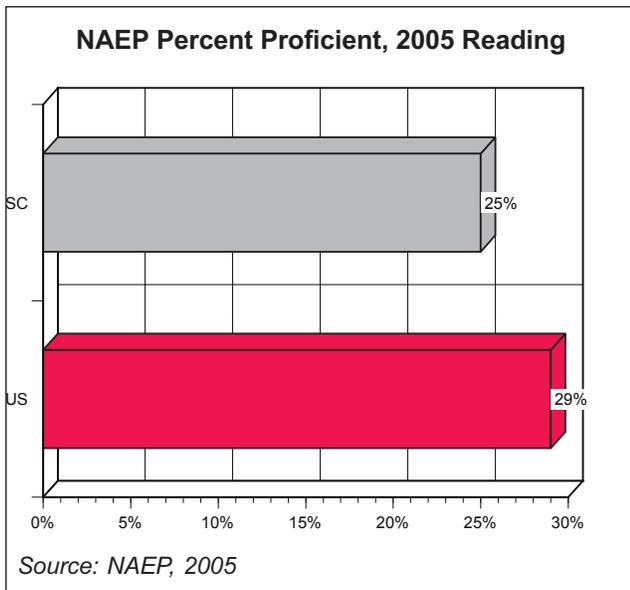
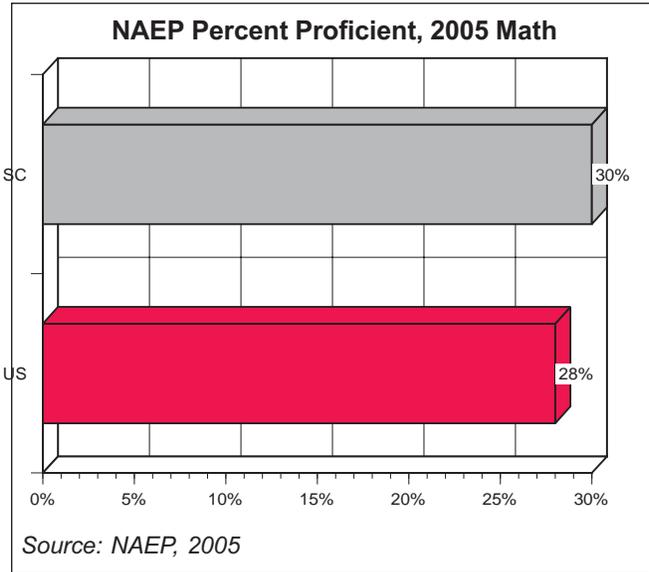
In 2005, the percentage of South Carolina eighth grade students who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level in Math was 30 percent, two percentage points higher than the nationwide average of 28 percent. South Carolina's 2005 percentage was greater than that in 2003 (26 percent), and was greater than that in 2000 (17 percent).

Reading

In 2005, the percentage of South Carolina eighth grade students who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level in Reading was 25 percent, compared to 29 percent nationwide. South Carolina's 2005 percentage was up one percentage point from 2003, when 24 percent of students scored Proficient.

Writing

In 2002, the percentage of South Carolina eighth grade students who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level was 20 percent, compared to 30 percent nationwide. South Carolina's 2002 percentage was greater than 1998 (15 percent).



End of Course Tests

The End of Course tests are administered at multiple school organizational levels, including middle schools, junior high schools, and high schools, not just at high schools alone. Most middle school (grades 7 and 8) students who are enrolled in high school credit courses are also enrolled in the Gifted and Talented or other accelerated academic programs. The data from the Algebra I/Math for Technologies II End of Course tests, the only end of course test for which results are available, show that 47 percent of middle school students who took the Algebra I test received a scale score corresponding to a grade of “A”. In contrast, only eight percent of students received a scale score corresponding to a grade of “D” or “F”.

Duke Talent Identification Program (TIP)

According to officials at the Duke University TIP Program, in 2004-05, there were 6,413 applicants from South Carolina to the program. The program is offered to seventh grade students. The number of applicants includes students from 218 public schools and students enrolled in private schools.

Of the 6,413 applicants, 5,906 or 92 percent, took the ACT or SAT. On the state level, 1,057 students (603 males and 458 females) were recognized for receiving a score of 510 on either the math or verbal section of the SAT or a score of 500 on both.

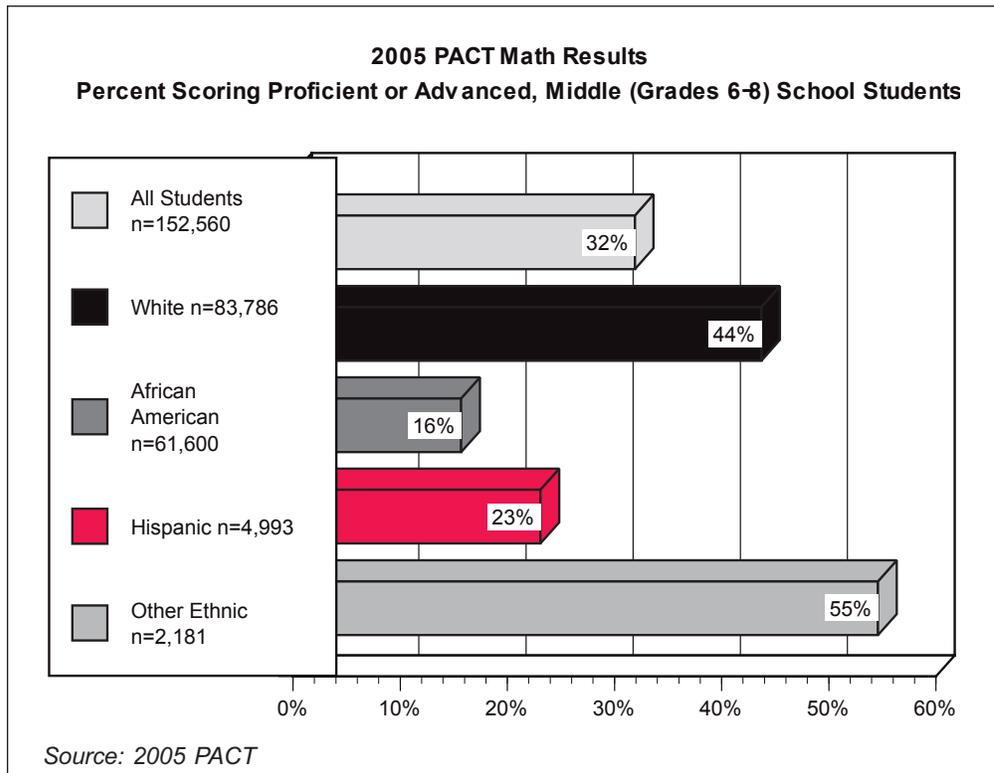
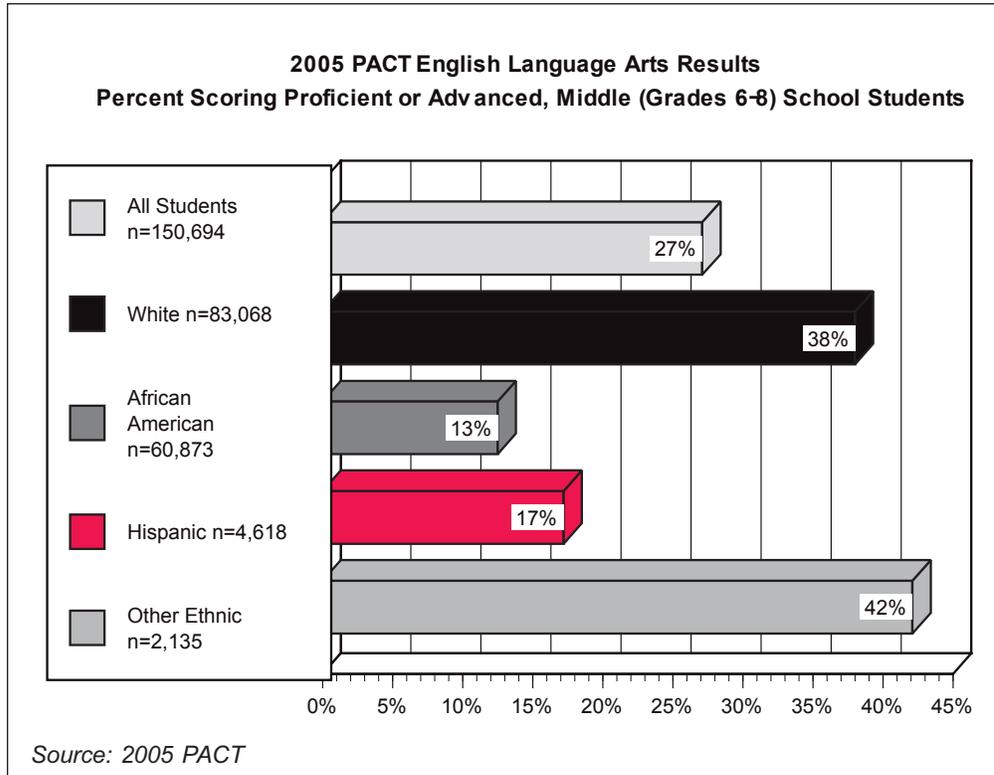
Thirty-nine students (26 males and 13 females) were recognized nationally, as Grand Recipients. This level of recognition is given to students who scored 650 on one of the two tests or who obtained a combined score of 1260.

Other Recognition for South Carolina Middle Schools

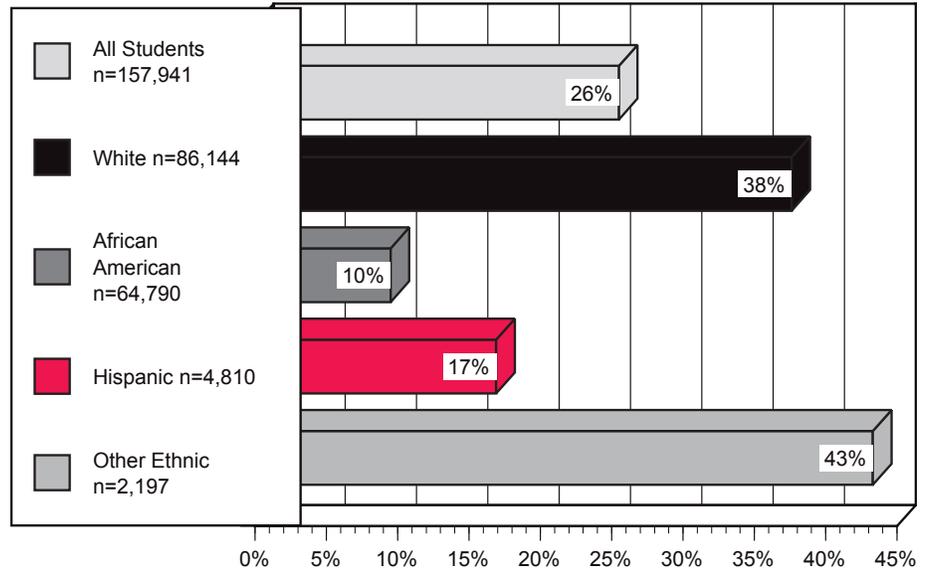
- ❑ Red Carpet Schools: Of the 54 school awarded the Red Carpet for the 2004-05 school year, seven recipients were middle schools. The schools recognized are: Hanahan Middle School (Berkeley), Mauldin Middle School (Greenville), A. R. Rucker Middle School (Lancaster), Alcorn Middle School (Richland 1), R. P. Dawkins Middle School (Spartanburg 6), Excelsior Middle School (Union), and Saluda Trail Middle (York 3)
- ❑ Two middle schools, Blythewood Middle (Richland Two) and Northside Middle (Lexington Two), were among the 16 finalists for the Carolina First Palmetto’s Finest Award
- ❑ Two middle schools, Robert E. Howard Middle (Orangeburg Five) and Southeast Middle (Richland One), were recognized for having Exemplary Writing Programs. The award was given in April 2005, by the Writing Improvement Network at USC.
- ❑ In 2005, Newberry Middle School (School District of Newberry County) wins national recognition for career guidance program.

One of the most significant education challenges is closing the achievement gap. A persistent gap exists between minority and majority students and their economically disadvantaged peers.

The tables on pages 30 and 31 show the achievement gap that exists in performance between different ethnic groups, in the middle grades.

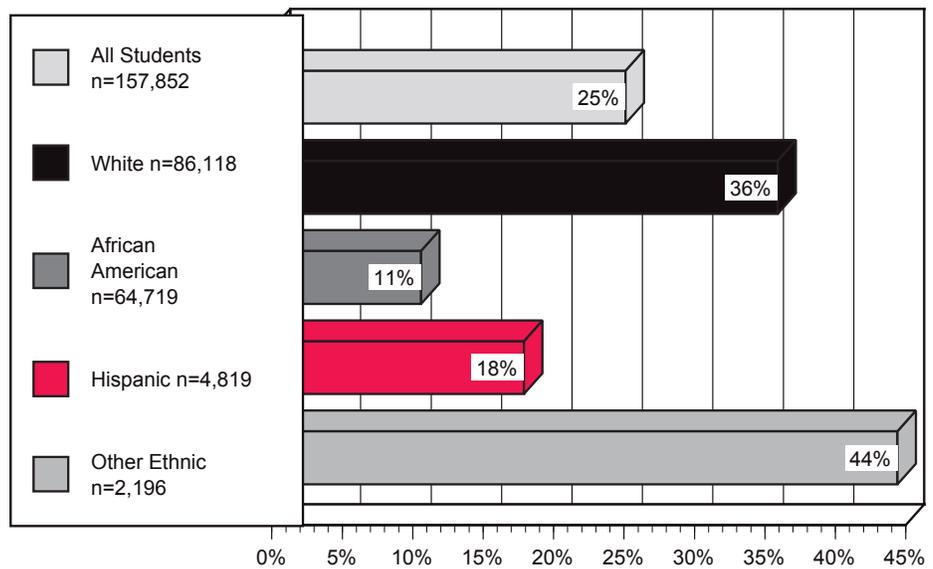


2005 PACT Science Results
Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced, Middle (Grades 6-8) School Students



Source: 2005 PACT

2005 PACT Social Studies Results
Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced, Middle (Grades 6-8) School Students



Source: 2005 PACT

ANALYSIS

In 1989, the Carnegie Corporation of New York published *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (www.turningpts.org). The study emphasized the need to strengthen the academic core of middle schools while creating challenging, caring, and equitable learning communities for young adolescents.

Caught Between the Lines: South Carolina's Students in the Middle is presented as a profile of the middle grades, both the students and schools. Based on the data presented, a number of questions stand out to consider.

How can educators and parents:

- 1 Improve the health, social, family, and achievement status for these students?
- 2 Effectively address the emotional needs of students in the middle grades?
- 3 Provide opportunities for adolescents to connect with their schools and communities and establish positive relationships with adults?
- 4 Make the coursework more challenging and personally meaningful to students in the middle grades?
- 5 Sustain and extend the gains students have made on NAEP, PACT, and end-of-course tests?

