



from the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
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News – For Immediate for Release

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Editor's Note: The EOC meeting will begin at 1:00 p.m., Monday, April 14, in Room 101 of the Solomon Blatt Building (corner of Assembly and Pendleton streets.) A list of the identified schools, a technical report on this year's EOC gap analysis, and other related materials are available online at www.eoc.sc.gov.

Administrators from two of the identified schools have been invited to present information about their schools' efforts to reduce the achievement gap. The committee will hear from Charles Middleton, Principal of Walhalla Middle School in Oconee County and Melvin Middleton, Jr., Assistant Principal at Sanders-Clyde Elementary in Charleston County.

141 SC elementary and middle schools to be honored for reducing the achievement gap

Columbia – Sixteen percent of South Carolina elementary and middle schools will be honored by the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC) Monday, April 14, for reducing the achievement gap for at least one historically underachieving student group.

In the sixth annual release of the gap-closing schools, 141 schools were identified based on results of the English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics portions of the 2007 Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT). The schools had high student achievement for at least one target subgroup --- African American students, Hispanic students, or students participating in the free/reduced price lunch program.

Identified as a persistent challenge nationwide, the achievement gap is defined as the difference in achievement between the target group (the historically lower-scoring demographic group) and the statewide comparison group (the historically higher-scoring group) at various PACT performance levels (Basic or Above / Proficient or Advanced.)

Details from this year's gap analysis reveal:

- In an analysis of PACT math and English Language Arts (ELA) scores:
 - Achievement in both subject areas from 2006 to 2007 was generally flat.
 - In both 2006 and 2007, approximately one-third of all students scored at the Proficient or Advanced level on the ELA test and one-third scored Proficient or Advanced on the math test.
 - In both years, almost one-fourth of all students failed the ELA test and one fourth failed the math test (scored Below Basic).
- In an analysis of the sizes of the achievement gaps in ELA and math:
 - As indicated in the tables below, the sizes of the gaps in 2007 generally increased compared to 2006, reflecting the general lack of progress overall in performance on the ELA and math tests. The gap between white and Hispanic students decreased at the Basic and above level in both math and ELA. In math, the gap decreased at the Proficient or Advanced level.

PACT English Language Arts Achievement Gaps Among Demographic Groups, 2006 and 2007					PACT Math Achievement Gaps Among Demographic Groups, 2006 and 2007				
Comparison Group – Target Group	Percent Basic or Above		Percent Proficient or Advanced		Comparison Group – Target Group	Percent Basic or Above		Percent Proficient or Advanced	
	2006	2007	2006	2007		2006	2007	2006	2007
White – African American	20.5%	20.9%▲	25.9%	26.3%▲	White – African American	23.4%	23.6%▲	28.9%	29.1%▲
White Hispanic	19.7%	19.1%▼	21.5%	21.8%▲	White Hispanic	19.2%	17.5%▼	22.3%	21.6%▼
Pay Lunch – Free/Reduced Price Lunch	21.0%	21.2%▲	28.1%	28.2%▲	Pay Lunch – Free/Reduced Price Lunch	21.1%	21.2%▲	28.3%	28.3%-

▼: Gap Decreased ▲: Gap Increased

- The *smallest* achievement gap was observed in PACT math at the Basic and above level (17.5 percentage points) comparing the performance of white and Hispanic students.
- The *largest* achievement gap was observed in PACT math at the Proficient and Advanced level (29.1 percentage points) comparing the performance of white and African American students.
- Achievement gaps observed at the Proficient or Advanced levels in ELA and math are larger than those at the Basic or above performance levels for all groups.
- Gaps between white and African American students remain consistently larger than gaps between white and Hispanic students and between pay and free- or reduced-price lunch students.
- Although performance was flat, there was an increase overall in the number of schools recognized this year (135 schools identified in 2006.)
- Many of the schools recognized in previous years for closing the achievement gap have maintained their accomplishment.
 - Nineteen schools have been recognized for six consecutive years.
 - Eighty-six (61 percent) of the 141 schools recognized in 2007 were also recognized in 2006.
- Thirty percent of this year's honored schools are high-poverty schools, serving a student population of at least 70 percent poverty. Twelve of the recognized schools have 90 percent or more of their students in poverty.
- Performance on the science and social studies PACT tests was analyzed in this year's report but schools were not recognized for achievement in these content areas. The gaps in these subject areas should be noted.
 - The performance of all students on the Social Studies and Science tests at both the Basic and above and the Proficient or Advanced levels increased from 2006 to 2007.
 - The largest gaps in achievement for a subject area were observed in science.
 - The size of the achievement gaps between the demographic groups studied in 2007 decreased in eight and increase in four of the twelve gap comparisons.
- Although progress is being made, the sizes of the gaps are discouraging if South Carolina is to meet its 2010 achievement goal for all students.

Analysis of performance by gender groups and ethnicity

This year, the EOC performed a supplementary analysis of PACT ELA and math performance by gender groups, ethnicity, federal free- or reduced-price lunch status, and 2007 Absolute ratings. The analysis revealed:

- The performance of every demographic group was highest in schools rated *Excellent* and lowest in schools rated *Unsatisfactory*, with overall very low performance for all groups in schools rated *Unsatisfactory*.
- In both ELA and math, the gaps between groups at the Basic or above performance level were larger in low-performing schools (*Below Average* or *Unsatisfactory*) than in high-performing schools (*Excellent* or *Good*);

- Conversely, in both ELA and math, the gaps between groups at the Proficient or Advanced performance levels were smaller in low-performing schools (*Below Average* or *Unsatisfactory*) than in high-performing schools (*Excellent* or *Good*), reflecting the overall very low performance of all groups in low-performing schools;
- Across both subjects and performance levels and across school rating categories, the highest-performing groups were white female and Other female students and white pay lunch and Other pay lunch students;
- African-American male students and African-American free- or reduced-price lunch students were the lowest-performing groups in both subjects and across absolute rating categories.

This year's gap release again provides ample evidence that high performance levels can be achieved in high-poverty schools. Thirty percent of this year's honored schools are high-poverty schools, serving a student population of at least 70 percent poverty. Twelve of the recognized schools have 90 percent or more of their students in poverty.

Serving a student population of 99.6 percent poverty in 2007, Sanders-Clyde Elementary has been honored three years for progress in closing the gap. Assistant Principal Melvin Middleton, Assistant Principal at Sanders-Clyde said that schools cannot ignore basic needs that student come to school with.

"At Sanders-Clyde, we take a holistic approach to education. Basic needs have to be addressed in order for students to learn," said Middleton.

Charles Middleton, Principal of Walhalla Middle School affirmed the study released last April that highlighted the important role of a positive school climate in schools consistently recognized for progress in closing the gap.

"Teachers care at our school and home/school relations are critical," said Middleton. "We require teachers to turn in a log of eight positive contacts per month with parents."

Principals and staff from many of the recognized schools will be present on April 14 to be recognized by the EOC.

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.