

DON'T  **YOUR CHILDREN** Spring 2003

LEARNING MATTERS

Public Education in South Carolina Teacher Survey



This report presents findings of a mail survey conducted by MarketSearch Corporation on behalf of the Education Oversight Committee.

In an effort to monitor the implementation of the South Carolina Education Accountability Act (EAA), the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) has conducted a series of surveys and focus groups over the past four years among the general population, educators, parents and community leaders to gauge general attitudes toward education, accountability, involvement in education and other related issues.

As part of its continuing effort to monitor and assess the implementation process, the EOC conducted this study among pre-K through 12th grade teachers across the state to assess their perceptions of reform at this stage of the process.

Findings presented in this report are based on 435 questionnaires returned by the cut-off date (December 12, 2002). Questionnaires were mailed on November 8 and 12, 2002. Sampling error is +4.7% at the 95% confidence level. Return rate for the study is 31%, based on 458 returned questionnaires (including those coming in after the cut-off date).

Where appropriate, comparisons to a telephone study conducted in December 1998 among 239 teachers have been provided.

Overview

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As in previous research, these findings identify a general feeling among teachers that improvements are being made and will continue. Teachers support accountability and feel they are doing their part in improving South Carolina's education system. For example, teachers believe the content standards have impacted the way they teach classes and that real change has come about through focusing on the standards.

Many teachers, however, are critical of the efforts of students, parents and legislators. Additionally, most teachers feel the paperwork required under the new system has taken away from teaching and planning time.

In previous research, teachers and other groups expressed skepticism about achieving the state's education goals. Although teachers have an impression that schools have improved, they remain skeptical of these goals. For example, most teachers do not believe South Carolina reached its goal of becoming the fastest-improving education system in the country by 2002. Similarly, most teachers feel the goal of South Carolina's education system being ranked in the top half of states nationally by 2010 is not realistic.

Perceptions of Education in South Carolina

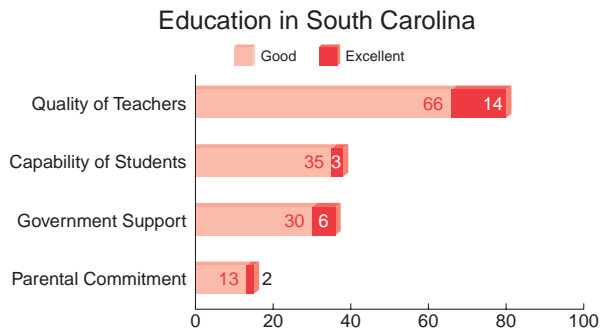
Perceptions of Education in South Carolina

Teachers reluctant to view any of the players as “excellent.”

- Teachers were asked to indicate their impressions of:
 - The quality of teachers in the state,
 - The general capability of students in the state,
 - The level of state or local government support for improving education, and
 - The level of parental commitment to improving schools for all students.
- Findings indicate that teachers are reluctant to feel any of the players – including themselves – are excellent.

Only 14% of teachers believe the quality of teachers in South Carolina is excellent. This level is down significantly from 1998, when 23% of teachers rated the quality of teachers in South Carolina as excellent.

- Quality of teachers, however, is only one variable in the equation for successful schools. As found in previous research, teachers are fairly critical of the capability of students, level of government support and level of parental commitment.

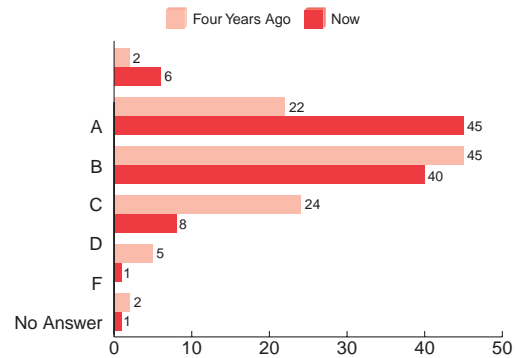


While ratings of South Carolina’s education system are modest, teachers perceive schools as improving.

- Few (6%) teachers give South Carolina’s pre-K through 12th grade education system an A. Instead, teachers tend to give South Carolina’s pre-K through 12th grade education system a B (45%) or C (40%).

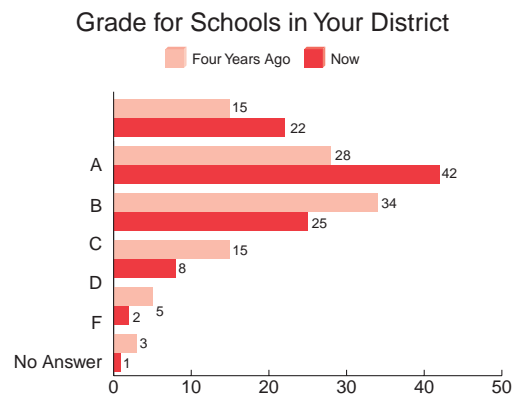
While the grades given to South Carolina’s education system are modest, findings indicate that teachers feel the system is working. When asked what grade they would have given to South Carolina’s pre-K through 12th grade education system four years ago, only 2% said they would have given an A and 22% said they would have given a B.

Grade for South Carolina's Pre-K through 12th Grade Education System



- Teachers’ impressions of the schools in their district are more positive than those across the state. While only 6% of teachers give schools across the state an A, 22% give the schools in their district an A.

Similar to findings for South Carolina’s education system, findings clearly show that teachers feel that schools in their district have improved.

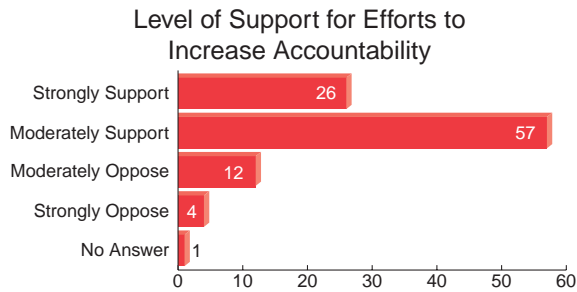


Evaluations of Reform Efforts

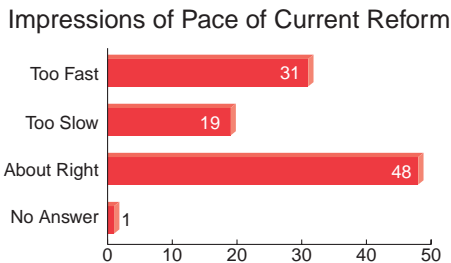
Evaluations of Reform Efforts

Teachers support efforts to increase accountability.

- While falling short of enthusiastic support, more than four out of five (83%) teachers say they support efforts to increase accountability; 26% say they strongly support efforts to increase accountability.



- Nearly half (48%) of the teachers surveyed feel the pace of the current reform is moving about right. While less than a third (31%) feel the pace is too fast, only one in five (19%) feels the pace is too slow, only one in five (19%) feels the pace of reform is moving too slow.

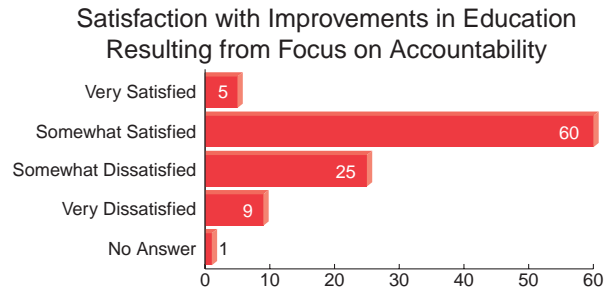


These findings are generally consistent with those recorded in 1998, when 36% of teachers felt the current reform was moving too fast, 21% felt reform was moving too slow and 36% felt reform was moving about right.

Few are “very satisfied” with results from focus on accountability.

- While 65% teachers are at least somewhat satisfied with the improvements in overall education resulting from the focus on education accountability, teachers are far more likely to be somewhat satisfied than very satisfied.

More than a third (34%) of teachers are dissatisfied with improvements in education resulting from a focus on accountability.

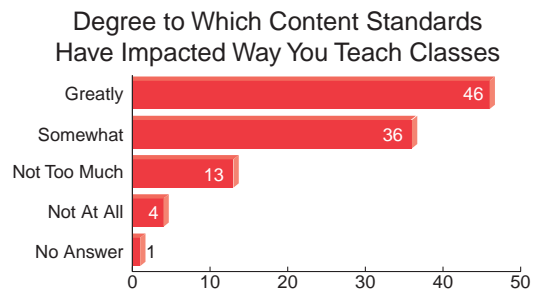


African-American teachers (83%) and teachers in urban areas (74%) are more likely than their demographic counterparts to indicate satisfaction with improvements in overall education.

Most teachers feel focus on standards is making a difference in the way classes are taught.

- Findings indicate that teachers feel the new content standards are making a difference in the way classes are taught. Nearly half of teachers (46%) say the new content standards and assessments have greatly impacted the way they teach their classes.

While an additional 36% say the content standards have impacted their teaching methods somewhat, few say the new content standards have not had an impact on their teaching methods.

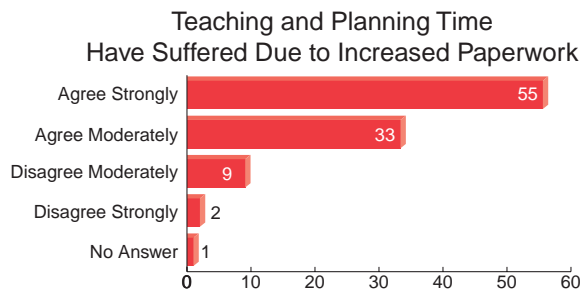


- More than two out of three (70%) teachers agree, “Real change has come about through focusing on the standards in my teaching;” 26% agree strongly.
- Two-thirds (66%) of teachers agree with the statement, “The new assessments help me focus my teaching on the standards;” 20% agree strongly.

Evaluations of Reform Efforts

Increased paperwork taking away from teaching and planning time.

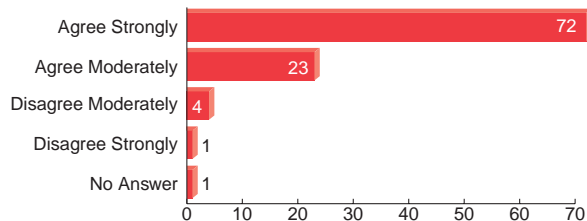
- Most teachers feel the additional paperwork required under the EAA has had a negative impact on their teaching and planning time. Nearly nine out of ten (88%) teachers agree with the statement, “I have dedicated so much of my time completing state and/or district paperwork that my teaching and planning time have suffered;” 55% agree strongly.



Findings suggest that the impact of increased paperwork has been somewhat worse than expected. In 1998, 80% of teachers agreed with the statement, “I will have to dedicate so much of my time completing paperwork...that my teaching and planning time will suffer.”

- The vast majority (95%) of teachers agree with the statement, “The Accountability Act is just another attempt by our state government to mandate change, but the real work is in the classrooms;” 72% agree strongly.

The EAA is Just Another Attempt by the State Gov't to Mandate Change, but the Real Work is in the Classroom



Teachers critical of the efforts of students, parents and legislators.

- For the most part, teachers feel they have done their part in implementing the new content standards set by the EAA. Many teachers, however, are fairly critical of the efforts of students, parents and legislators.

How would you grade the job teachers have done implementing the new content standards set by the Accountability Act?

A	40%
B	45%
C	12%
D	2%
F	<1%
No Answer	1%

- Only 5% of teachers give students an A on the job they have done achieving performance standards set by the EAA. The majority of students receive a grade of B (36%) or C (44%), while only 15% get a D or F.

How would you grade the job students have done achieving performance standards set by the Accountability Act?

A	5%
B	36%
C	44%
D	12%
F	3%
No Answer	1%

- Nearly half (48%) of teachers give parents a grade of D (33%) or F (15%).

How would you grade the job parents of students have done supporting students to reach the new standards?

A	1%
B	14%
C	36%
D	33%
F	15%
No Answer	1%

- Teachers are also critical of the job legislators have done funding schools in general (grade of F for 24%) and low-performing schools (grade of F for 18%).

How would you grade the job legislators have done funding schools in general?

A	2%
B	10%
C	32%
D	30%
F	24%
No Answer	1%

How would you grade the job legislators have done funding support for low-performing schools?

A	5%
B	18%
C	30%
D	28%
F	18%
No Answer	2%

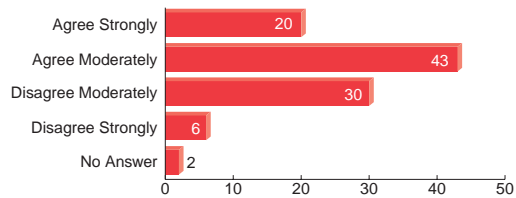
Funding Under the EAA

Funding Under the EAA

Findings identify mixed emotions relating to funding under the EAA.

- Teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements relating to the distribution of financial support and resources under the EAA.
- More than three out of five (63%) teachers, particularly those in rural areas (71%), agree with the statement, “Schools that are already strong and offer a good education have continued to improve under the new system, while the schools that need help have suffered because they aren’t receiving any support.”

Schools That Are Already Strong and Offer a Good Education Have Continued to Improve, While the Schools That Need Help Have Suffered because They Aren't Receiving Any Support

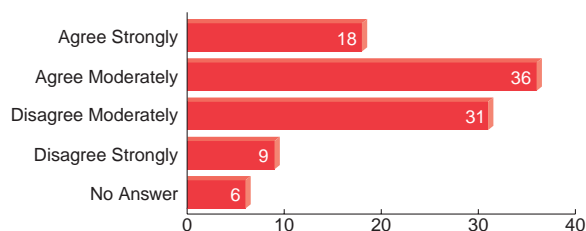


Findings indicate that this problem is worse than expected. When asked this question in 1998, only 54% agreed that this could be a problem.

- Teachers are mixed when it comes to their feelings about where the support is going. Just over half (54%) of teachers agree with the statement, “Most of the support has gone to schools in big cities like Columbia, Charleston and Greenville, while the rural schools have been ignored.

Teachers in rural areas are significantly more likely to agree (65%) than teachers in urban (45%) or suburban (49%) areas.

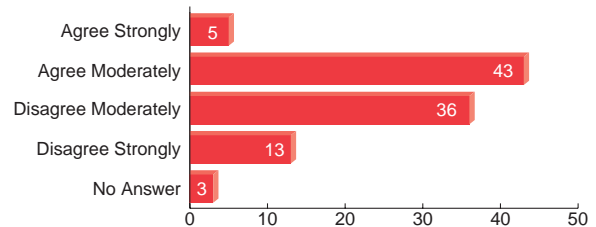
Most of the Support Has Gone to Schools in Big Cities Like Columbia, Charleston and Greenville, While the Rural Schools Have Been Ignored



These figures are generally consistent with those recorded in 1998.

- Teachers are split on their agreement with the statement, “The new system offers a strong support system for schools that need help and is helping to improve the needy schools academically and financially.” While somewhat divided in their positions, teachers are more than twice as likely to disagree strongly than to agree strongly.

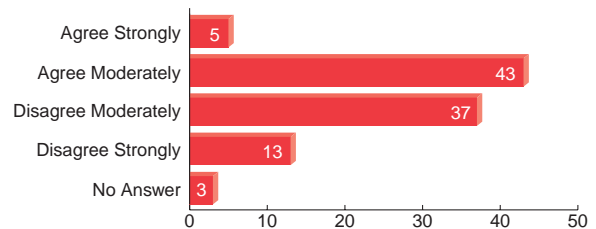
The New System Offers a Strong Support System for Schools That Need Help and Is Helping to Improve the Needy Schools Academically and Financially



Teachers are less likely to agree with this statement now that the EAA is a reality than they were in 1998 (61%).

- Similarly, teachers are split on their agreement with the statement, “Schools in my area have benefited from the new system.”

Schools in My Area Have Benefited From the New System



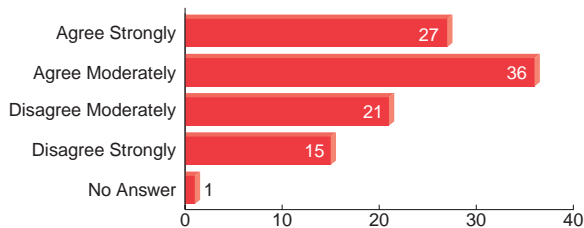
In 1998, 63% agreed with the statement, “Schools in my area will benefit from the new system.”

Resources Under the EAA

Teachers feel resources are an important factor in EAA success; mixed as to provision of resources.

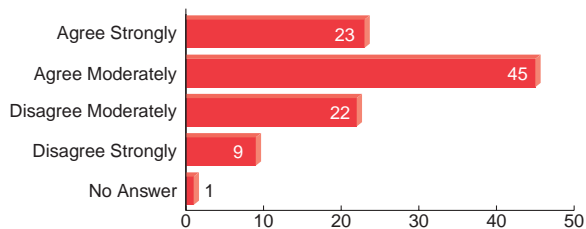
- More than three in five (63%) teachers agree that, "Given the proper resources, all South Carolina students can learn the content standards."

Given the Proper Resources, All South Carolina Students Can Learn the Content Standards



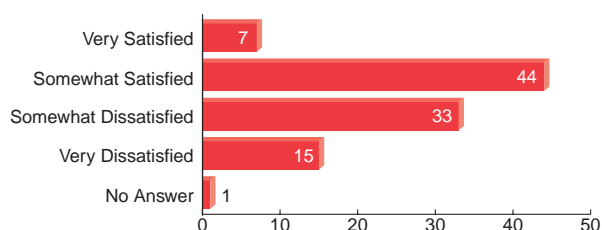
- Further, 68% of teachers feel they have access to the appropriate resources to implement or teach the new standards successfully.

I have Access to the Appropriate Resources to Implement or Teach the New System Successfully



- Even so, teachers are divided as to their satisfaction with the provision of resources under the EAA.

Satisfaction with Provision of Resources Under EAA

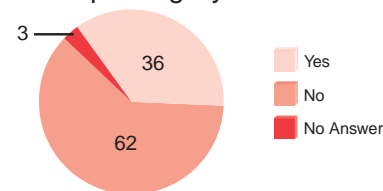


Achieving Goals

Most feel South Carolina did not achieve the goal of becoming the fastest improving; question goal of entering into top half.

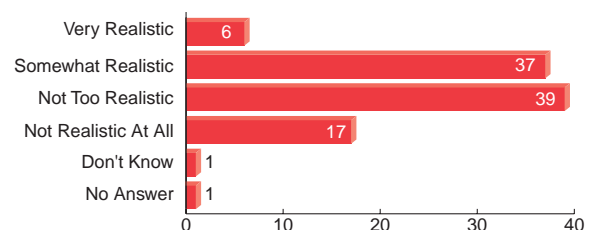
- Teachers were asked if South Carolina reached the goal of becoming the fastest-improving education system in the country by 2002. While 36% feel South Carolina reached its goal, 62% do not.

Did SC Reach Goal of Becoming Fastest-Improving System in Country?



- Most teachers do not feel the goal of South Carolina's education system being ranked in the top half of the country by 2010 is realistic. Only 6% of teachers surveyed feel this goal is very realistic. While 37% find this goal to be somewhat realistic, 56% of teachers find this goal to be either not too realistic (39%) or not realistic at all (17%).

Goal of SC's Education System Being Ranked in Top Half by 2010



These figures are generally consistent with those recorded in the 1998 study, when 46% found the goal to be either very (7%) or somewhat (39%) realistic.

Achieving Goals

- More than four out of five (85%) teachers feel that through the combined efforts of the state, educators and the general public, South Carolina can significantly improve its position relative to other states.

This figure is down somewhat from the December 1998 study, when 92% believed combined efforts would lead to South Carolina's improving position relative to other states.

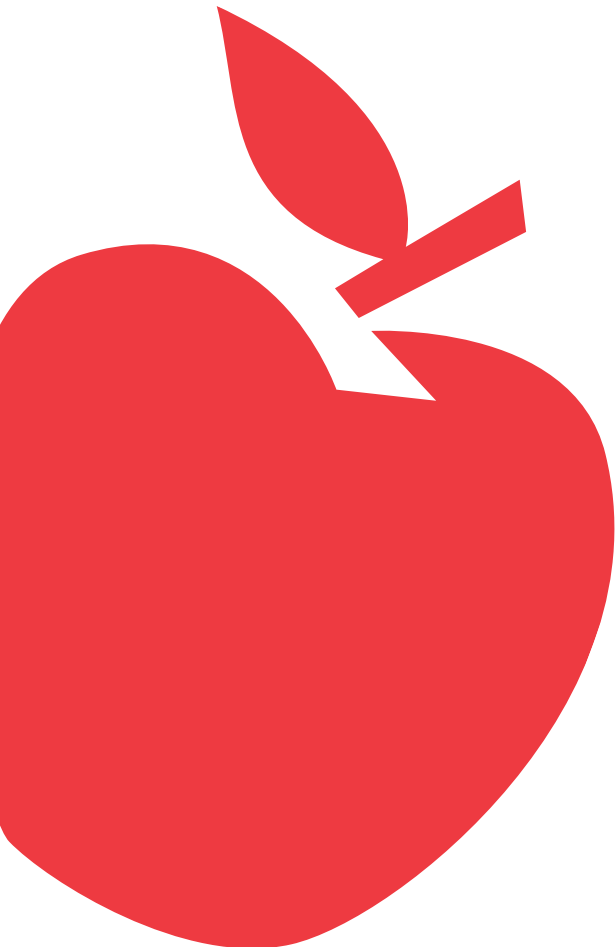
Other Issues

Other Issues

- Teachers were asked to indicate which incentives, if any, would persuade them to teach in under-performing and rural schools. Only 16% of teachers say they could not be enticed, regardless of the incentive offered.
- Nearly a third (30%) say the same salary schedule as paid in more urban areas would entice them to take positions in rural and under-performing schools. Salary supplements based on schools' characteristics are appealing to roughly one in five (21%). Other incentives are received with less enthusiasm.

Historically, under-performing and rural schools have difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers. Which of these incentives would encourage you to teach in these schools.

<i>The same salary schedule as paid in more urban schools</i>	<i>30%</i>
<i>Salary supplements based on characteristics of the school</i>	<i>21%</i>
<i>Incentives such as tuition reimbursements, mileage costs, etc.</i>	<i>11%</i>
<i>Salary supplements based on performance</i>	<i>3%</i>
<i>Housing so I could live in the community</i>	<i>1%</i>
<i>Other</i>	<i>7%</i>
<i>Would not be enticed, regardless</i>	<i>16%</i>
<i>No Answer.....</i>	<i>1%</i>





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Conclusion

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As in previous research, findings identify a general feeling that improvements are being made and will continue. Teachers support accountability, and there is a general consensus that through the combined efforts of the State, educators and the general public, South Carolina can significantly improve its position relative to other states. However, teachers are critical of the job students, parents and legislators have done thus far. In addition, while feeling improvements have been made, teachers remain skeptical of achieving the goals set by the EAA.

An opportunity may exist for the EOC to increase communications with teachers relating to successes under the EAA.