

At a Glance

2007 School and District Ratings

November 2007

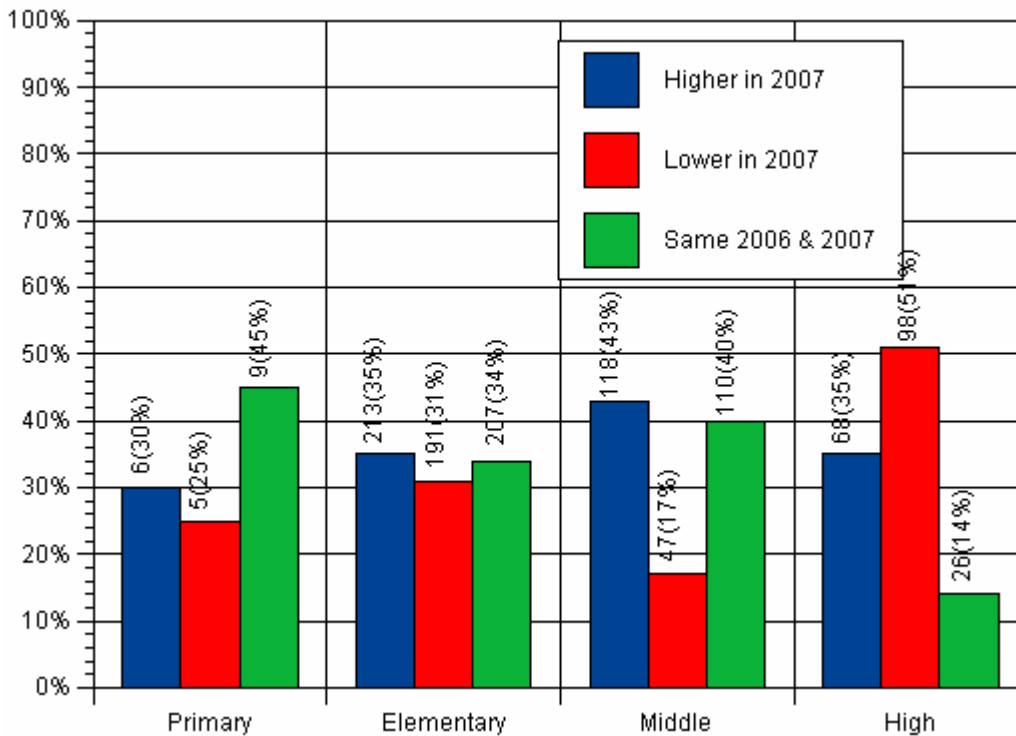
Background

- The seventh annual school and district ratings were released on Thursday, November 15, 2007. The ratings are developed pursuant to the provisions of the Education Accountability Act of 1998, and they document South Carolina's efforts to improve the performance of its students and schools.
- Overall, the 2007 ratings demonstrate South Carolina's continuing struggle to be nationally competitive. The rating system is built upon an aspiration that South Carolina's student achievement is to be ranked in the top half of states nationally by the year 2010.

Observations from this year's release

- Performance for elementary and middle schools was influenced by declines in mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA), as measured by the state testing program. Fifty-seven percent of schools experienced declines in PACT performance in ELA and 42 percent experienced declines in math.
- At the high school level, we saw a lowering of overall average graduation rate. This decline may be the result of stronger and more accurate databases. We anticipate increasing accuracy as databases are affected by the phase-in of the unique student identifier system.
- Over 65 percent of South Carolina's students are enrolled in a school rated Average or above.
- About one third of schools earned a higher index and one-third earned a lower index (Absolute indexes determine the Absolute ratings for schools). Highly effective organizations cannot succeed with this variability. Each of us, individually and collectively, must examine our work and resolve those issues that are precluding not only higher performance, but consistent performance.

Comparison of Absolute Indexes in 2006 and 2007



- Reading remains a critical academic need area, with 57 percent of schools experiencing declines in PACT ELA performance, at the Basic and above level. No content area is more fundamental to student success than reading.
- Poverty remains a persistent, critical issue for young people and their families. Only five percent of South Carolina schools – 54 schools – serve a population of students of 30 percent poverty or less. Over half of all South Carolina schools have at least 70 percent of their students living in poverty—and this percentage has increased over the last 2 years. The avg. poverty index for a school rated Excellent is 46 percent, compared to an avg. poverty index of 90 percent in a school rated Unsatisfactory. The index is based on a formula which considers the percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced price lunch and/or are Medicaid-eligible.

Success despite challenges

- Some schools and districts in challenging situations are succeeding. Schools in Saluda County enroll a very diverse population and experience the challenges associated with staffing rural schools. Yet, over the last five years, the school district has made dramatic gains in student achievement.
- McCormick High School earned an Absolute rating of Excellent this year, up from Unsatisfactory in 2004. McCormick made these gains while serving a population where 88 percent of the students are eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch and/or are Medicaid-eligible. This is one example of a school that made gains in their ratings because student performance went up.

Perspectives from this year's release

- “The ratings and the indexes that determine ratings show us that student and school performance varies widely across the state. While some areas are succeeding, historic underachievement threatens many areas of South Carolina.” – *Alex Martin, EOC Vice-Chairman*
- We have too many students performing below expectations and failing to graduate from high school in four years. It's a wake-up call to focus on key priorities that can make a difference, such as attracting and retaining high-quality teachers; revising our testing system to give teachers better tools; creating more instructional choices for students and parents within the public school system; and building a more effective and equitable funding system.”—*Jim Rex, SC Superintendent of Education*
- “The annual publication of the school and district report cards represents a call to action for South Carolinians to make a difference in the quality of our schools. Not only do we call upon teachers to support children as they learn a challenging curriculum – we call upon parents to be involved. I encourage parents to get involved in the schools your children attend and build relationships with teachers and school administrators....I call upon businesses to take action within the schools in your community. These schools are training our future leaders. The ultimate goal, as we all know, is to improve the quality of life for all South Carolinians by. The ONLY way we can do this is by educating the children of today to meet the challenges of tomorrow. They will be the skilled workforce of tomorrow. They will be the voters who sustain democracy. They will be the mother, fathers, and neighbors who make our communities strong.” – *Alex Martin, EOC Vice-Chairman*

Additional information is available online on the release of this year's school and district report cards. Discussion points and a historical look at the ratings are available online at www.eoc.sc.gov.

Technical information regarding the calculations of this year's ratings is available in the *2006-2007 Accountability Manual*. A pdf of the manual is available online at www.eoc.sc.gov. Under “Reports and Publications,” click on “Accountability.”

You can also contact the EOC at (803) 734-6148.