



Embracing the Future
Educating all of South Carolina

Prepared for the
South Carolina Education Oversight Committee

By

Terese Rainwater, Ph.D.

Final Report

August 15, 2005

National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
3035 Center Green Drive, Suite 150
Boulder, CO 80301-2251
(303) 497- 0301

Embracing the Future: Educating all of South Carolina¹

There is a boy who lives along the 1-95 corridor in South Carolina who dreams of going to college. The question before South Carolina is will this boy and others like him see their dreams become realities?² Imagine for this boy “a system of education where every child enters school ready to learn, where all 3rd graders read at or above grade level, where all students have taken algebra by the 8th grade, where high school exit exams test students at the 12th grade level and are aligned with college admission requirements, where all young people graduate from high school prepared for college or work,” and where every student who enters college finishes college.³

Introduction

Not long ago, high school graduates in the United States had a choice between working in agriculture or industry, between going directly into college after high school or entering the workforce. These students knew that they could find jobs immediately after high school that would allow them to support a family. What they lacked in skill, they made up for with hard work. A high school diploma was enough.

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the advice and assistance of Dennis Jones, Aims McGuinness, Kristie Kauerz, and Doris Huchthausen.

² Bud Ferillo, *Corridor of Shame: The Neglect of South Carolina's Rural Schools*, A documentary Produced and Directed by Bud Ferillo (Columbia, South Carolina: Ferillo & Associates, Inc., 2005)

³ Spud Van de Water and Terese Rainwater, “What is P-16 Education? A Primer for Legislators” Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2001) pg v.

A high school diploma is no longer enough. In the last 20 years the American economy has moved inexorably away from manual skills applied in manufacturing and agriculture to intellectual skills employed in a variety of service industries. If ever there was a moment for the old adage, “knowledge is power,” now is that time. The knowledge economy requires more education, more skill, and more ability from each person, citizen, and resident. It requires a new way of thinking about education and the structures that support it. Postsecondary education has become essential for the chance at meaningful work, supporting a family, contributing to the community, and participating in the democracy.

Very simply, many American students are ill prepared for life and work in a global economy. Students need to complete postsecondary education and training and they need to do so with higher skills than ever before. Despite this, the education pipeline leaks students at an alarming rate. Nationally, for every 100 9th graders, 68 graduate from high school, 40 immediately enter college, 27 are still enrolled in their sophomore year, and 18 graduate within 150% time with either an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.⁴ In South Carolina, for every 100 9th graders, only 49 graduate from high school, 29 immediately enter college, 20 are still enrolled in their sophomore year, and 13 graduate within 150% time with either an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.⁵ This means that fewer than two out of every ten 9th grade students are prepared to fully participate in the knowledge economy. As disturbing as these numbers are, it is important to note that they do not include students who drop out before the 9th grade.

Because of the problems that exist within the education pipeline (preschool through postsecondary) educational attainment is increasingly stagnant in the United States. Between 1990 and 2000, attainment of a high school diploma by young adults (18-24 years old) remained

⁴ The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *The Educational Pipeline: Big Investments, Big Return* (San Jose, California: The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2004).

⁵Ibid.

static or declined in all but seven states.⁶ Once the international leader in the percentage of the population that sought a bachelor's degree, the United States has slipped to number 13 of the 32 industrialized nations.⁷ Remaining competitive globally means improving educational attainment.

What accounts for the poor performance of the American education system? There are many reasons, some of which are beyond the control of the education enterprise (family conditions and attitudes, for example). Most problems can be laid at the feet of the education system. American public education operates as several disconnected, unrelated systems. Inefficiency and redundancy are rife. Early childhood care and education is disconnected from elementary school. Middle school is disconnected from high school. And high school is disconnected from postsecondary education and the work place. For example, there is little alignment between early learning standards (what children should know and be able to do prior to beginning kindergarten) and K-3 standards. Similarly, high school assessments often test only at the 10th grade level and are not aligned with college entrance and placement exams.

So where does South Carolina fit into this larger context? The purpose of this paper is to examine how South Carolina can integrate its educational delivery systems to improve student achievement and system excellence. First, this paper will offer a brief overview of the concept of P-16 education reform and outline the skills students need to master as they move through the education pipeline. Second, it will discuss the well-being of South Carolina's children and their likely future success as students. Third, it will examine policy issues specific to each

⁶ United States Bureau of the Census, *2000 Decennial Census* (Washington, DC: United States Bureau of the Census, 2000).

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, *Education at a Glance—OECD Indicators 2002* (Paris, France: OECD, 2002).

transition point. Finally, it will offer policy suggestions designed to ease transitions and improve student success.

P-16 Education Reform: Creating an Integrated System of Education

P-16 education reform, also known as “seamless education” or “the education pipeline,” seeks to improve education performance by integrating education sectors and smoothing student transitions from early childhood through postsecondary education. In this model, all three sectors of public education are linked—preschool, K-12, and postsecondary—to create one system of education in which all students are prepared for college or work and possess the skills necessary to become active citizens and community members. P-16 offers a set of policy options for states looking to improve student achievement, increase educational attainment, and improve system performance at every level of education. Ultimately, P-16 education reform seeks to create “successful workers,” “good neighbors,” and “good citizens.”⁸

A common view behind P-16 reform is that “people in one segment of the education system exist in almost total disregard of the efforts of all the other segments.”⁹ English and Math professors, for example, are often unconcerned about the efforts of First Grade teachers in those subjects. Yet, solid basic skills are absolutely essential for later success as subject areas become more complex. In an ideal P-16 system, students can trust that they will be prepared to succeed at the next level or sector of education. This means that students can trust from their first education experience that they will develop and master critical basic skills necessary for success in later years. It means that they can trust that education sectors are communicating their expectations and standards to each other. It means that students can trust that they will

⁸ Anthony Carnevale and Donna Desrochers, *Standards for What?: The Economic Roots of K-16 Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Educational Testing Service, 2003) pg 1.

⁹ Harold Hodgkinson, *All One System: A Second Look*, (Washington, D.C.: The Institute for Educational Leadership and The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 1999) pg 1.

enter the next level of education without having to take developmental or remedial coursework. It means that students know that they will be given quality counseling and mentoring at each level of education. And it means that students do not need to guess about how much college costs or whether they are prepared to go.¹⁰ In a seamless system, the focus is on what students need to become successful, rather than what institutions, administrators, and practitioners need. The focus rests here because students are the only people who experience each segment.¹¹ The reality for many students, however, is a confusing set of experiences in multiple sectors exacerbated by difficult transitions and little information about expectations.

Unfortunately, as the United States' economy has become knowledge-based, our expectations regarding education and our education policies, practices, and structures have changed little. In general, American schools still operate based on an industrial model in which the top 20% of students are prepared for college and the rest are prepared for work. Learning is measured in Carnegie units not skills achieved. Subject matter is often compartmentalized into discrete class periods. Education in this model was designed to be much like a factory assembly line.

But as the economy has changed, so have student aspirations. Eighty-eight percent of 8th grade students expect to participate in some form of postsecondary education and approximately 70% of high school graduates make the attempt. However, only 42% of the latter group has taken a rigorous academic core set of courses in high school.¹² And even though work-place skills are increasingly the same as college skills, students are unprepared for either college or work after high school. Even so, these students are the success stories.

¹⁰ Terese Rainwater and Andrea Venezia, *Early Outreach,* Student Success: Statewide P-16 Systems (Denver CO: SHEEO, 2003)

¹¹ Harold Hodgkinson, *All One System*, pg 1.

¹² The Education Trust, "Ticket To Nowhere," *Thinking K-16* Vol.3, Issue 2, (1999).

At the other end of the education continuum, research has established a compelling connection between the quality of children’s early learning experiences and later success in school and in life. Unfortunately, these early years, those from birth to 3rd grade, receive less attention from policymakers, and lower levels of public investment, than any other stage in a student’s education.¹³ Only two states (Georgia and Oklahoma) guarantee all 4-year olds access to a pre-kindergarten program. And in all states, parents who place their very young children (infants, toddlers, and 3-year olds) in high-quality, early childhood education programs have few options. Because of this, educational inequalities exist even before children enter kindergarten. Low-income and minority children start kindergarten with significantly lower cognitive skills than their more advantaged counterparts.¹⁴ Even within public school systems, many children lack access to full-day kindergarten programs, primary school teachers who are trained in early childhood development, and quality standards that recognize the unique learning needs of children from birth to age eight.

P-16 education reform underscores the cumulative nature of learning. Rather than a simple accounting of a student’s grade level, this competency-based system of education focuses on what students know and whether they can apply this knowledge to real-world challenges and opportunities. Skills achieved at one level are expanded at the next. Education performance is guided by critical benchmarks that students must meet. As South Carolina seeks to improve the number of students moving through the education pipeline, focus on skill attainment is important to success. Students must have several key skills as they move from one level to the next:

- Preschool—During the preschool years children learn multiple social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills that support their future learning. Studies have linked

¹³Charles Bruner, Victor Elias, Debbie Stein, and Stephanie Schaefer, *Early Learning Left Out: An Examination of Public Investments in Education and Development by Child Age*, (Washington, D.C: Voices for America’s Children and the Child and Family Policy Center, 2004)

¹⁴Valerie E. Lee and David T. Burkham, *Inequality at the Starting Gate: Social Background Differences in Achievement as Children Begin School* (New York: Economic Policy Institute, 2002).

participation in high-quality preschool with higher high school graduation rates, higher attendance in 4-year colleges, and higher lifetime earnings.¹⁵

- Kindergarten—Kindergarten serves as an important transition year for children as they move out of early learning programs and experiences and into the formal structure of the K-12 system. Achievement gaps between disadvantaged and more advantaged children grow wider over the first four years of school attendance (kindergarten to 3rd grade). However, children who attend full-day (vs. half-day) kindergarten programs have higher overall achievement at the end of kindergarten in reading and mathematics.¹⁶ Full-day kindergarten is an important year for narrowing achievement gaps.
- 3rd grade—The achievement of 3rd grade reading levels by the end of third grade is a critical skill for children to master. Students who are not reading on grade level by the end of third grade are unlikely to graduate from high school.¹⁷ This final gateway of early childhood education transitions children from *learning how to read* to *reading to learn*.¹⁸
- 8th grade—Mastery of Algebra I in 8th grade is the gateway from elementary education and basic skills to higher order problem solving skills required in college and the work place. Despite this, fewer than 25% of 8th graders in 1996 were enrolled in Algebra classes.¹⁹

¹⁵ Barnett, S. W. *Lives in the Balance: Age-27 Benefit-Cost Analysis of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program*. (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation; Reynolds, 1996).; A. J., Temple, J. A., Robertson, D. L., & Mann, E. "Age 21 cost-benefit analysis of the title I Chicago child-parent centers." (2002). *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24(4), 267-303.

¹⁶ Rathbun, A., West, J., & Hausken, E. G. *From kindergarten through third grade: Children's beginning school experiences* (No. NCES 2004-007), (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics: 2004).

¹⁷ Connie Juel, "Learning to Read and Write: A Longitudinal Study of 54 Children First through Fourth Grades," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 22+437-47; Robert E. Slavin, Nancy L. Karweit, and Barbara Wasik. *Preventing Early School Failure: Research on Effective Strategies*. (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1993).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Education, *Mathematics Equals Opportunity*, (Washington, D.C: U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

- 12th grade—Mastery of advanced science and math provides students with the necessary skills to pursue postsecondary education and training for the best paying jobs.²⁰ Perhaps as important is the use of the 12th grade to enhance and hone skills rather than taking the senior year off and allowing acquired skills to atrophy.
- 14-16th grades—Lifetime earnings for students who complete a bachelor’s degree, a proxy for educational attainment, are \$2.1 million while lifetime earnings for a student with some college is about \$1.5 million, and lifetime earnings for a student with no high school diploma is \$1.0 million.²¹

South Carolina’s Children, Students and Future

“Children are one third of our population and all of our future.”

~Select Panel for the Promotion of Child Health, 1981”

Children and young adults under 24 years old are one third of South Carolina’s population²² and it is with children that South Carolina has the potential for success. While many states are facing declines in their student populations, one distinctive aspect of South Carolina is that student enrollment in public elementary and secondary school is projected to increase 2% by 2011.²³ And while the student population is expected to grow, another distinctive aspect of South Carolina is that these students are likely to be living in a rural county. Of its 950,000 children, South Carolina has 258,347 children 18 years old or younger living in rural counties compared to those living in large cities (23,370) with the remainder living in urban counties without large

²⁰ The American Diploma Project, *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts*, (Washington D.C.: The American Diploma Project, 2005).

²¹ Jennifer Cheeseman Day and Eric Newberger, *The Big Pay Off: Education Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2002) pg 3.

²² The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being* (Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005) pg 144-145.

²³ Southern Regional Education Board, *Fact Book on Higher Education* (Atlanta, GA: SREB, 2003).

cities. In fact, “South Carolina has the lowest percentage (2%) of children living in large cities” of any state in the nation.²⁴ The geographic distance and sparse population size that characterizes rural counties present unique challenges to creating linkages across the education sectors in South Carolina.

South Carolina has seen educational opportunity and student achievement increase over the last decade. South Carolina has been working to improve school readiness for 4-year old children and these efforts have met with success. In 1984, South Carolina established the Half-Day Child Development Program, which requires every school district to provide at least one pre-kindergarten class for 4-year olds. In 2003-04, this program served 32% of the state’s 4-year old population; the federally funded Head Start program served another 11%. In 1996, South Carolina funded full-day kindergarten for all public schools in the state. Today, South Carolina is one of only nine states that require school districts to provide universal access to full-day kindergarten.²⁵ In 1999, South Carolina implemented First Steps to School Readiness, a statewide, comprehensive, data-driven, multi-component approach to early childhood care and education designed to improve children’s readiness for school. Since then, First Steps has served over 280,000 children with less than one third of one percent from the state’s annual budget.²⁶ Early learning programs funded by South Carolina or Head Start met widely accepted

²⁴ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Book: City and Rural Kids* (Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004) pg. 142. In this report rural areas are defined as: sparsely settled areas and small towns outside metropolitan areas” and “outside government defined areas.” The definition of a metropolitan area is “an urban core of at least 50,000 residents and comprises a core county and neighboring counties that are linked to the to the core county by commuting patterns.” See page 197. In South Carolina the percentages of students in central cities and rural areas who score at or above the NAEP Basic level are lower (58 percent for both) than the percentage for students in suburbs/large towns (63 percent).” Southern Regional Education Board, *Goals for Education*, (Atlanta, GA: 2004) pg 12.

²⁵ Kauerz, Kristie, *Full Day Kindergarten: A Study of State Policies in the United State* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2005).

²⁶ South Carolina First Steps, *Keeping the Promise: Five Years of Results* (Columbia, South Carolina: First Steps, 2004) pg 6.

program quality standards as measured by class-sizes of 20, student-to-staff ratios of 10-to-1, and state certification for pre-K teachers.²⁷

In the last decade, South Carolina has improved 4th-grade performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment by six points for all students and seven points for African American students even as the total student population has grown. From 1998 to 2003, student achievement on the 4th grade NAEP reading assessment improved for all groups and the gap between white and Latino students closed by 12%.²⁸ NAEP performance in 8th grade mathematics improved dramatically with an increase of 17 points for all students and 14 points for black students.²⁹ On this scale, 10 points is about the equivalent to one year of learning.³⁰ Average SAT scores improved 23 points from 2000-2003.³¹

Even so, South Carolina's children face multiple obstacles. Approximately 190,000 (about 20%) of South Carolina children live in poverty³² and a total of 471,000 qualify for the National School Lunch Program.³³ Ranked 45th in the nation by Kids Count, South Carolina is one of the lowest-performing states in the following ten indicators of child well-being:

- Percent of low-weight babies
- Infant mortality rate
- Child death rate
- Teen death rate

²⁷ Southern Regional Education Board, *Goals for Education*, pg 8.

²⁸ Southern Regional Education Board, *Goals for Education*, pg 11.

²⁹ The Education Trust, *Education Watch: South Carolina* (Washington, D.C: The Education Trust, 2004) pg 2.

³⁰ *Ibid*, pg 3.

³¹ National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, *Foundations for the Future: Higher Education in South Carolina* (Boulder, CO: NCHEMS, 2003)

³² The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Book*.

³³ United States Bureau of the Census, *2000 Decennial Census*.

- Teen birth rate
- Percent of teen high school dropouts
- Percent of teens not attending school and not working
- Percent of children whose parents lack full-time work
- Percent of children in poverty
- Percent of single-parent families with children³⁴

Despite the overall gains in student performance mentioned above, there is a yawning gap between white and black student performance on both the 4th- and 8th-grade NAEP reading and math assessments. White students perform higher on every test, sometimes three times higher, than black and Latino students. For example, on the 4th-grade NAEP reading assessment 36% of white students scored proficient or higher while only 11% of black students scored proficient or higher. Similar gaps persist on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT) for Grade 4 English Language Arts.³⁵

Student achievement in high school is also discouraging. South Carolina has the lowest rate of high school graduates as a percentage of 9th graders four-years earlier in the country and it has dropped precipitously from 59% in 1990 to 51% in 2003.³⁶ For high school students who took Advance Placement Exams, gaps exist between groups not only in the number of students taking the exams but on their overall performance on those exams. For example, of all AP Calculus AP test takers, 79% were white while 15% were black even though black students

³⁴ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Book*, pg 144-145.

³⁵ The Education Trust, *Education Watch*, pg 2.

³⁶ National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, *Foundations for the Future*, pg 53.

make up 42% of South Carolina's total public school enrollment. Seventy-two percent of white test takers scored a 3 or better compared to 33% of their black counterparts.³⁷

South Carolina has also seen an increase in the number of teenagers ages 16-19 who are not enrolled in school or college, are not working, and have no degree beyond a high school diploma.³⁸ Very simply, these students are disconnected from the structures and supports that allow students to transition from school into the work place or college. Recent studies have shown that high school dropouts are likely to be unemployed for as much as three years between the ages of 18 and 25.³⁹ For these youth, adult education programs are the only venue for high school completion but of the 104,766 young adults without a high school diploma aged 18-24, South Carolina awarded GEDs to only 2,787 in 2000.⁴⁰

Low educational attainment in South Carolina is connected to high unemployment rates, high rates of poverty, and poor scores on state health rankings.⁴¹ In 1990, South Carolina was 36th in the nation on state health rankings. In 2004, South Carolina was 47th.⁴²

The future of South Carolina will in part be determined by how well policymakers, educators, and community leaders know, understand, and act on their own data.

³⁷ The Education Trust, *Education Watch*, pg 2.

³⁸ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Book*, pg 12.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, *Foundations for the Future*: pg 37.

⁴¹ Ibid, pg 60 based on United Health Foundation: State Health Rankings.

⁴² Southern Regional Education Board, *Investing Wisely in Adult Learning is the Key to State Prosperity* (Atlanta, GA: SREB 2005) pg 4-6.

Making the Transition: Getting More Students Through the Pipeline

For students, skill attainment is the key to staying in the education pipeline and successfully moving from dependence on their families and communities to independence as citizens, workers, and parents. Yet, successful student transition and skill attainment from one level to the next is so difficult and confusing that most students do not succeed. Ironically, it is not a challenging curriculum that accounts for high attrition rates; rather it is confusing messages about how to prepare for the next level of education, an unchallenging curriculum, and a lack of student supports such as counseling, college affordability, and admission and placement procedures that produce poor results. Students who drop out often become “disconnected youth” and later disconnected adults.⁴³

Policymakers, educators, and community leaders in South Carolina can reverse this trend by focusing their efforts on student transition points. Creating an integrated system of education requires examining state and county data for each transition point, identifying policy priorities, and removing policy barriers. This section will consider the particular roles for each of the education sectors beginning with higher education.

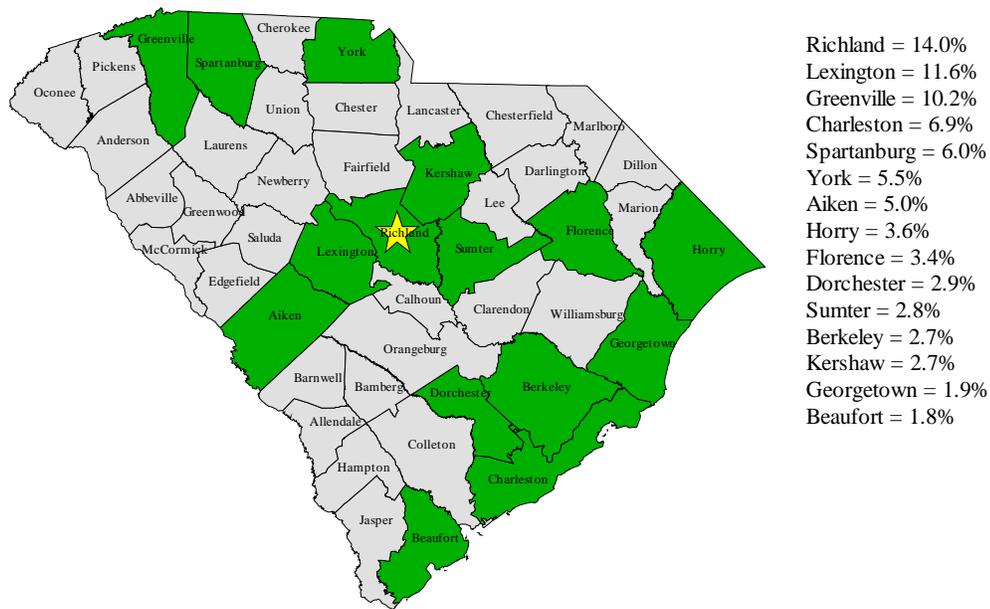
Expectations of Higher Education and the Labor Market

More students in South Carolina need to move successfully through the education pipeline. The question is how to achieve this? One way to examine the education pipeline is to track students as they move through it as was done earlier in this paper. Another way to think about the education pipeline is to examine the counties from which a given institution receives 80% of its first time freshmen. In this analysis another picture, though complementary, of the education pipeline emerges. In large measure, students who attend the University of South Carolina

⁴³ Southern Regional Education Board, *Prekindergarten and Parent Support Programs* (Atlanta, GA: SREB, 2000). Internet address: http://www.sreb.org/programs/srr/pubs/PreK/PreK_parentsupport.asp

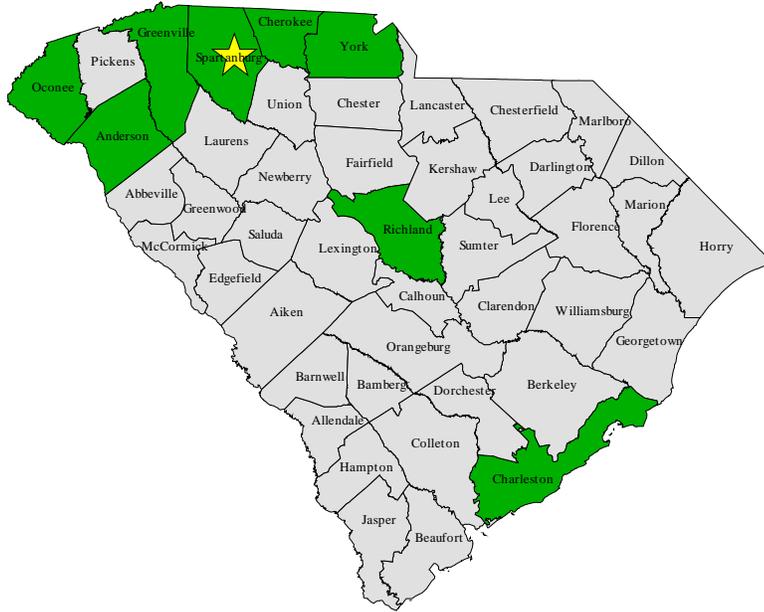
Columbia come from the same counties with Richland, Lexington, Greenville, and Charleston Counties providing the greatest numbers of students. The University of South Carolina Spartanburg draws its students predominantly from six counties in the northwestern corner of the state. The University of South Carolina Beaufort, in contrast, draws virtually all of its students from Beaufort County. This view reveals the institutional and regional nature of the education pipeline. It also reveals the cyclical nature of the education pipeline. These institutions train the teachers who educate the children who will attend these institutions. The education pipeline does not begin in the 9th grade or even in kindergarten. It begins at the university.

**Counties from which the University of South Carolina Columbia
Receives 80% of its First Time Freshmen, Fall 2002**



Data Source: South Carolina Commission on Higher Education

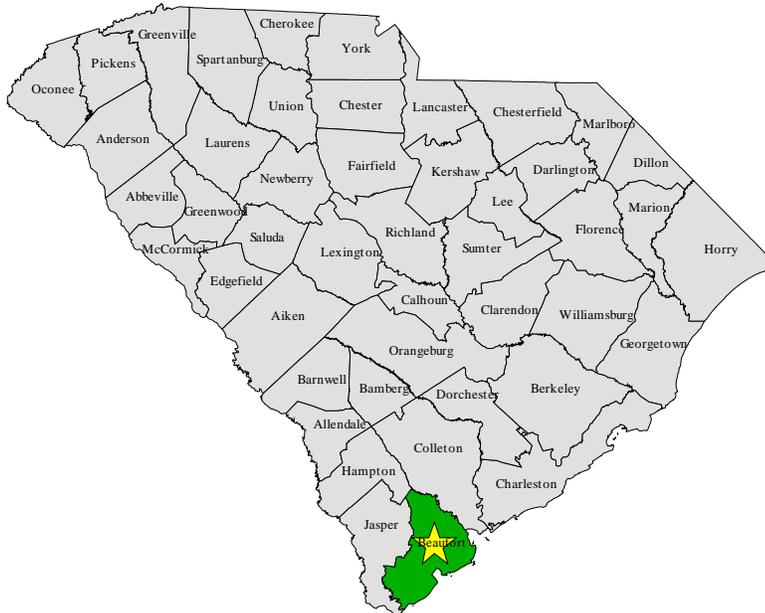
Counties from which the University of South Carolina Spartanburg Receives 80% of its First Time Freshmen, Fall 2002



Spartanburg = 38.7%
 Greenville = 18.3%
 Cherokee = 6.3%
 York = 6.0%
 Charleston = 3.7%
 Richland = 2.8%
 Anderson = 2.1%
 Oconee = 1.4%

Data Source: South Carolina Commission on Higher Education

Counties from which the University of South Carolina Beaufort Receives 80% of its First Time Freshmen, Fall 2002



Beaufort = 90.1%

Data Source: South Carolina Commission on Higher Education

It is a common error when thinking about how to integrate education sectors to begin at the beginning, that is, to begin with preschool and move up. In the current system, early learning sets its standards, K-12 creates its standards and assessments, and higher education sets its admissions standards and placement tests with little or no communication with the sectors. As mentioned earlier, the educators in one sector have very little connection with educators in other sectors. In a system where expectations are established in preschool first, there is no mechanism for lower grades to discern the expectations of upper grades and no incentive for upper grades to communicate with lower grades.

Policymakers need to start at the end of the education pipeline because higher education is the “threshold requirement for career success and social inclusion” and the “culminating venue in the P-16 education pipeline.”⁴⁴ A successful P-16 education system will begin by defining expectations at the end of the pipeline and working backwards. The expectations established here should include both the expectations of higher education and the labor market in a competitive global economy. Done correctly, this will reduce inefficiencies born of each level having disconnected standards, curricula and assessments. In an aligned education system, higher education sets the standard for P-12 achievement.

However, P-16 education reform is not simply a matter of establishing expectations for higher education and the labor market and communicating these expectations to the other sectors. P-16’s success depends on a collaborative effort between the sectors in which there is open and frequent communication about improving student performance. Each sector has strengths, which offer the opportunity to increase the educational quality of the other two. Higher education offers a mixed delivery system with multiple points of entry for students. K-12 offers deep

⁴⁴ Anthony Carnevale and Donna Desrochers, *Standards for What?*, pg 1.

experience defining knowledge, skills, and abilities and assessing these against established standards. Early learning emphasizes a holistic approach to student's learning and development where the focus is on cognitive and academic skills as well as social-emotional and physical-motor skills. Nor is a P-16 system confined to the students currently in the pipeline. Students who drop out of high school, or who are seeking job retraining, become participants in the postsecondary education system through continuing adult education programs. Effective adult education programs are important for a successful P-16 education system.

To improve student movement through the education pipeline and into the labor market, South Carolina needs to consider the following recommendations for each sector of its education system:

The Higher Education Sector

- 1) Provide students with high quality information about postsecondary and labor market expectations so that students are not only “college ready” but also “work ready.”
- 2) Align postsecondary expectations with work place needs.
- 3) Clearly articulate expectations for high school graduates and work with P-12 education to develop standards, curricula and assessments.
- 4) Eliminate multiple college admission and placement assessments.
- 5) Consider the development of an assessment administered in the 10-grade that is aligned with postsecondary placement exams.⁴⁵
- 6) Align teacher preparation with P-12 expectations both in terms of the number and quality of teachers produced.

⁴⁵ Administered in the 11th grade and grounded in the state's assessment, California State University has developed an assessment for use in CSU placement decisions. It also serves a diagnostic purpose for students who don't perform well. These students can utilize their senior year to improve their skills. American Diploma Project, *Ready or Not*, pg 14.

- 7) Support the development and use of a student unit record data system across education levels and work place.
- 8) Focus on postsecondary institutions that serve the majority of students in South Carolina and shift media, research, and policy accordingly.⁴⁶
- 9) Examine remedial and developmental education by asking whether there is there any information that suggests the effectiveness of these programs? Do students who participate in these programs transition into credit-bearing courses at the postsecondary level?
- 10) Support transfer and articulation policies that use common course numbering and are accepted at public 2- and 4-year institutions throughout the state.
- 11) Examine transfer and articulation by asking whether there is any information that suggests the effectiveness of transfer and articulation programs both for entry into higher education and into the workforce?
- 12) Emphasize the importance of adult education as a key element in seamless education system. The term adult education encompasses much more than the narrow definition provided in federal programs. It includes all efforts to improve the knowledge and skills of young adults and adults in the workforce. For example, adult education includes the continuing education and workforce education conducted by the technical colleges and universities in South Carolina.

The K-12 Sector

Although South Carolina has made significant gains in student achievement, student performance still lags behind the rest of the nation. K-12 standards, curricula and assessments

⁴⁶ Andrea Venezia, Michael Kirst, and Anthony L. Antonio, *Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected K-12 and Postsecondary Education Systems Undermine Student Aspirations* (Stanford, CA: The Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research, 2003).

are not aligned with either preschool or postsecondary education. To improve student transitions out of K-12 education, South Carolina needs to:

- 1) Align K-12 standards, curriculum, and assessment with postsecondary and workforce expectations.
- 2) Align state assessments with college placement examinations in K-12 by at least grade 10.
- 3) Provide high quality counseling to students on college admissions, placement, financial aid, and costs.
- 4) Align the rigorous academic core with postsecondary and workforce expectations.
- 5) Ensure that all students complete a rigorous academic core. The goal is to get more students to complete a credential (a degree and/or industry-based certification) as efficiently as possible.
- 6) Create awareness among students that “getting into college” is not the hardest part. The hardest part of postsecondary education is persistence and completion.
- 7) Utilize the senior year more effectively by encouraging participation in opportunities designed to increase student preparation for higher levels of education such as: dual and concurrent enrollment, advanced placement, workforce certification, and internships.

Early Learning

Early childhood involves multiple transitions from birth through age 8. For the purpose of this paper, the focus is the availability of quality preschool and increased participation for 3- and 4-year olds. South Carolina has made progress with school readiness but depending on the county, as many as 41% of children still enter 1st grade unprepared.⁴⁷ This means that these young students begin their elementary school education in need of remediation. Early Learning

⁴⁷ South Carolina First Steps, *Keeping the Promise: Five Years of Results* (Columbia, South Carolina: First Steps, 2004).

seems disconnected from K-12 expectations and school readiness does not appear to be clearly aligned with K-12 standards. In order to improve student transitions from early learning to kindergarten, South Carolina needs to:

- 1) Collaborate with K-12, higher education, business and community leaders to develop statewide priorities for early childhood care and education. Create a strategic plan for addressing these priorities.⁴⁸
- 2) Consider moving toward an informal or formal collaborative governance structure for early learning in which pre-kindergarten, childcare, Head Start and K-12 all participate. Collaborative governance will help ensure continuity of standards (program standards, learning standards, and teaching standards) across the multiple delivery systems.
- 3) Before providing universally available pre-K education, South Carolina should consider providing services to at-risk children whose achievement gaps are the biggest and provide targeted services to these students.
- 4) Define standards by which high-quality preschool programs can be measured and provide both financial and technical supports to improve program quality.
- 5) Eliminate the fragmentation among the preschool community (between state-funded pre-kindergarten, Head Start, center-based child care, and home-based child care).
- 6) Eliminate the fragmentation between early learning programs and elementary school.⁴⁹
- 7) Clearly define “school readiness,” incorporating all five domains of young children’s development (physical, social-emotional, approaches toward learning, cognitive, and language/literacy), set benchmarks based on this definition, and communicate this information to educators, families, and policymakers. One example of a comprehensive set of early learning benchmarks can be found in Washington State.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid, pg 11.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰State of Washington, *A Guide to the Formation of Washington’s Early Learning and Development Benchmarks* (Olympia, WA: Office of the Governor and the Department of Public Instruction, 2005).

- 8) Provide quality early learning options to underserved regions of the state.
- 9) Expand voluntary preschool programs to children ages 3 and 4.
- 10) Improve the professional development system for teachers of preschool-age children by aligning their qualifications with those of kindergarten and primary teachers, establishing a career ladder for increasing their formal educational attainment, and providing commensurate compensation and benefits.

Supporting Successful Transitions

In large measure, the greatest benefits of an integrated, cohesive system of education are gained through targeted policy efforts aimed at eliminating redundancy, decreasing inefficiency and improving student achievement. State policies that guide accountability, finance, and governance will either support or hinder students and South Carolina's efforts to improve public education at every level:

1. **Accountability/Data Systems**—In order to improve student transitions, South Carolina must hold itself accountable for results across sectors. In order to do this, multiple data systems must be streamlined. CHEMIS, student unit record data system for higher education in South Carolina, provides a structure for higher education data collection but is not aligned to either K-12 or preschool data systems. Similarly, school readiness assessment data is collected in isolation from the other sectors. Data must be disaggregated by race and county. The accountability system must be regularly evaluated.⁵¹
2. **Finance**—The issue of funding illustrates multiple disconnects between education sectors. Each level of public education in this country—early learning/pre-kindergarten, K-12, and postsecondary education—has separate and unique funding systems. Not

⁵¹ For a more in depth discussion of P-16 Accountability Models, see Stephen Portch, *A Noble Opportunity: Leading Education Change Through a P-16 Accountability Model* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2002)

only do these funding systems have different revenue sources and different distribution formulas, they are often controlled by separate agencies within state government. The lack of a coherent system of funding across education levels means that the levels do not see themselves as allies in educating students but instead see themselves as competitors for the same resources. The different education sectors do not share an overarching goal. Instead of fostering collaboration, state policies often reinforce these competitive disconnects. The sectors lack incentives to work together. While differences in governance and funding policies are likely to continue—structural conditions are too ingrained to change without large investments of time and energy—there are ways to work within the existing structures to create the fiscal and other incentives that can result in the necessary collaboration and alignment.

3. Governance—Creating a successful P-16 system does not necessarily require a statutory “super board” under which all education sectors reside. Many states have begun their P-16 education reform efforts through voluntary collaborations between sectors. In some states, like Georgia, governors have provided initial leadership and issued an Executive Order. State and Regional P-16 Councils provide a means by which South Carolina governs the P-16 efforts across the state as well as provide a means of holding the sectors accountable.

Conclusion: South Carolina’s Public Agenda

The policy requirements of P-16 education reform may appear daunting. Yet throughout modern times, such large-scale policy reforms have been successful and measurably improved lives. After WWII, the GI Bill expanded access to college in previously unimagined ways. This was followed by a national effort to build postsecondary institutions, both two- and four-year, in every state. Less well known are the gaps that were closed between 1st grade and kindergarten.

In 1970 there “were 40-50% more children enrolled in grade 1 than in kindergarten the previous year” but by “2000 this number had fallen to 6-7%.”⁵² As South Carolina has seen with full-day kindergarten and 8th-grade math achievement, preparing students better and improving student achievement is possible. Examining the student pipeline across the fifty states reveals striking variation from high school retention to high school graduation to college participation and finally college completion.⁵³ Different choices create different results. The conclusion is a hopeful one: *policy matters.*

The policies South Carolina chooses can improve the lives of children, improve public P-16 education, close achievement gaps and revitalize workforce opportunity. Creating a coherent, integrated system of public education—preschool through college—removes barriers in the form of unaligned standards, curriculum, and assessment; low quality college admission information; and disconnected data systems. But creating a P-16 education system cannot be done in a vacuum. It must be connected to a broader public agenda for education—a long-term agenda that identifies South Carolina’s priorities and is sustained over time.

A public agenda for education is a set of policy priorities designed to improve people’s lives. In order to sustain policy change in the face of political volatility, economic downturns, rising health care costs, diminishing resources, and changing workplace expectations, statewide leadership is necessary to shape and sustain attention to South Carolina’s immediate and long-term need to raise educational attainment.⁵⁴ In order to be successful, South Carolina will need to engage all of the state’s policy leaders: the Governor, the Legislature, business and civic leaders, and

⁵² The National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy, *The Education Pipeline in the United States, 1970-2000* (Boston, MA: Boston College, 2004) pg 45.

⁵³ National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, *Conceptualizing and Researching the Educational Pipeline*, NCHEMS News, May 2003.

⁵⁴ National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, *Foundations for the Future: Higher Education in South Carolina* (Boulder, CO: NCHEMS, 2003).

educators. In addition, state leadership must be able to either allocate resources or to influence the allocation of resources to provide incentives for schools and postsecondary institutions to support and pursue the state's public agenda. States that have pursued a public agenda for education have seen results.