



South Carolinians speak out on Education

Summary of Key Findings
June 2009



A public engagement project conducted by
Clemson University for the SC Education Oversight
Committee





PROJECT OVERVIEW

Revisions to the Education Accountability Act of 1998 (EAA) were enacted in June 2008. Within the law, the South Carolina General Assembly charged the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) with specific responsibilities in refining and revising the state's educational assessment and accountability systems. EOC duties included, among others, the direction "to work with the State Board of Education and a broad-based group of stakeholders, including, but not limited to, parents, business and industry persons, community leaders and educators" to "determine the criteria for and establish five academic performance ratings of excellent, good, average, below average, and school/district at-risk." (Section 59-18-900 B)

To accomplish the charge outlined in law, a comprehensive statewide public engagement project was initiated by the EOC in Fall 2008. The EOC contracted with Clemson University. The project included an unprecedented collaboration among three of Clemson's five colleges; the College of Business and Behavioral Sciences, the College of Engineering Sciences, and the College of Health, Education, & Human Development.

The project proceeded in three phases:

1) Survey development

- A National Advisory Council (NAC) was formed to assist in the development of questions for the phone and web surveys.
- Testing of the question item pool included four preliminary focus groups and pilot phone interviews.

2) "SC Survey of Educational Effectiveness": Phone and web survey administration

- Phone interview surveys ran from November 2008 through February 2009. Over 1,200 phone interviews were aided by electronic random selection and calling of South Carolina landline phones statewide.
- The web survey was distributed by 51 school districts as well as the SC Education Oversight Committee, SC School Boards Association, SC Commission on Minority Affairs, SC-AARP, and SC Christian Action Council.
- A companion business survey was developed and distributed with assistance from the SC State Chamber of Commerce as well as nine local chambers of commerce, the SC Realtors Association, and the SC Child Care Association.
- The web surveys yielded over 5,200 quantitative responses and several hundred open-ended comments.

3) Survey Analysis and Interpretation

- Seven focus groups served to validate the surveys at the analysis phase.

HOW THE EOC WILL USE RESULTS

The EOC will use the survey results to establish a 2020 Goal for South Carolina in June 2009.

As outlined in state law, the Education Oversight Committee will use results from the Clemson report as well as other sources to establish the performance levels that correspond with the five school and district ratings. This information will also assist members in establishing student expectations within content areas.



PROJECT PARTICIPATION

For the purposes of this project, Clemson identified stakeholder groups as “Parents”, “Business”, “Educators”, and “Taxpayers”. Over 50 percent of respondents identified themselves as members of the education community.

KEY FINDINGS

The results of this project show that South Carolinians are concerned about their schools, the future of public school students, and hold high expectations for both.

- ✓ All four groups of stakeholders (parents, business, educators, and taxpayers) share high expectations for schools and students.
- ✓ Stakeholders differ in views about achieving those expectations.
- ✓ Many South Carolinians are not familiar with educational trends regionally or nationally.
- ✓ South Carolinians expressed a large degree of surprise or no knowledge concerning achievement gaps among student groups.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

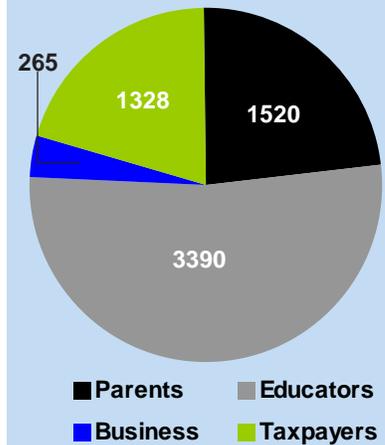
South Carolinians responded to questions concerning what skills students should possess upon graduation. These responses showed agreement on the fundamental importance of Reading, Math, and Writing, as well as a strong desire that young people exit public schools ready to be productive citizens.

Skills that are important to young people as they leave school in the 21st century*

	Parents	Educators	Business	Taxpayers
Reading	99.5%	99.9%	89.8%	99.7%
Skills to Succeed in the Workplace	99.0%	99.5%	99.1%	98.7%
Math	97.9%	99.8%	100.0%	99.5%
Writing	99.7%	99.7%	99.6%	99.4%
Knowledgeable Citizen	99.3%	99.4%	98.3%	98.8%
Science	93.0%	97.6%	93.6%	96.9%

*Respondents ranked skills “Critically Important”, “Very Important”, or “Important”

Project participation



“The focus should be on universal acquisition of strong reading skills by the end of third grade - whatever it takes to accomplish this goal.”
--White taxpayer, 55-64 years old, Master’s degree, survey comment

“My belief is that if we teach the basics everyday, we can cull minds and assist them in growing into successful adults.”
--White taxpayer, 45-54 years old, no degree, survey comment

“South Carolina and school districts in particular need to do more in actively recruiting and continuously pursuing minority educators.”
--African-American staff in school, 35-44 years old, Bachelor’s degree, survey comment



HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

South Carolinians have high expectations and want their schools to improve. Even though they differ in their views about good schooling, South Carolinians want students to be productive and successful.

- ✓ Over 60 percent of South Carolinians believe at least 90 percent of children in a school rated *Excellent* should be performing at grade level or above. In other words, no more than 10 percent of children should *not* be performing at grade level.
- ✓ Sixty percent of South Carolinians believe at least 90 percent of children should be improving their performance from one year to the next in a school rated *Excellent*. No more than 10 percent of children should *not* be improving their performance from one year to the next.
- ✓ Among respondents, 98 percent consider high school graduation rate to be “Critical”, “Very Important”, or “Important” as an important factor for schools to be successful.
- ✓ Seventy two percent of respondents consider offering advanced coursework to students (such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate) to be “Critical”, “Very Important”, or “Important”.

Portrait of a School Rated “Excellent” in SC (based on majority responses from the surveys)



In a school rated *Excellent* with 500 students attending...



450 of the students should be **performing on grade level or above** and **improving their performance** from one year to the next.



No more than 50 students in that school should be **performing below grade level** or **not improving** from one year to the next.

High School Graduation in SC

73.3%

2008 statewide on-time graduation rate reported by SCDE on 2008 report cards

88.3%

High School Graduation Rate Goal established by EOC. School, district, and state goal set for 2014

51.2%

Percent of *parent* survey respondents that think an acceptable graduation rate for 2020 is *at least* 85 percent.

46.8%

Percent of *educator* survey respondents that think an acceptable graduation rate for 2020 is *at least* 85 percent.

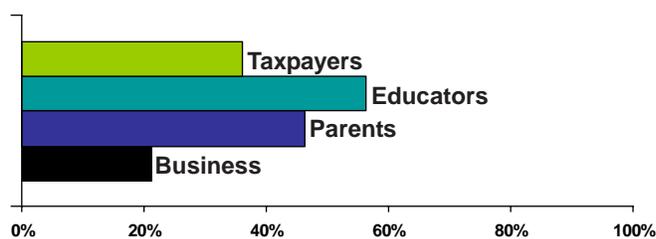


DIFFERENCES OF VIEWPOINTS AMONG STAKEHOLDERS

The survey exposed a variety of differences of viewpoints held among stakeholders. Of the stakeholder groups, educators reported the most difficulty in believing that all students can or should perform at grade level.

- ✓ Only four percent of educators felt it was reasonable for **all** students to be performing at grade level in a school rated *Excellent*. By comparison, 18 percent of parents and 11 percent of taxpayers felt 100% was a reasonable expectation. *Note: business stakeholders were not provided this question on their web survey.*
- ✓ Over 56 percent of educators believe that schools provide key knowledge to students to succeed, but parents are split on the view. The majority of taxpayers and business leaders do not believe that schools provide key knowledge.
- ✓ Over 50 percent of educators either strongly agree or agree that parents and families **do not** provide support at home for academic achievement. Forty-seven percent of taxpayers and 34 percent of parents feel that support is not provided at home. These data suggest a communication gap between educators and the closest network for student support -- families.

Percentages of stakeholders who responded that schools were providing students with the key knowledge they need to succeed



Parents and families do *not* provide support at home for academic achievement

	Parents	Educators	Taxpayers
Strongly agree	4.7%	21.7%	15.5%
Agree	29.5%	31.0%	31.2%
Disagree	53.4%	35.5%	37.2%
Strongly Disagree	12.4%	11.8%	16.1%

*Business respondents were not provided this question.

“...I feel that teachers and the educational system always get blamed and students and parents are not held accountable for their child’s education.”

--*White educator, 35-44 years old, Masters degree, survey comment*

“To me, 0% (percent of failure in school rated Excellent) is unrealistic. No school, district, or governing state department of education is perfect. Under 10% would be wonderful and truly should be an ideal target. Reasonably, I believe 10-20% is acceptable.”

--*African-American staff in school, 35-44 years old, Bachelor’s degree, survey comment*

“It’s next to impossible to attain the goals set in the current system. Our school has had its highest ever scores, but dropped a ratings level. How is that fair? It’s just another means for bullying our teachers and schools, and defeating the morale of the people we want to do the work.”

--*White administrator in school, 35-44 years old, Masters degree plus, survey comment*



LACK OF AWARENESS OF NATIONAL TRENDS IN EDUCATION

Survey data regarding the fairness of the requirement for continuous improvement in schools to achieve higher ratings as well as questions asking respondents to grade schools locally, regionally, and nationally reveal a lack of awareness of national trends in education.

- ✓ Fifty-seven percent of parents and 47 percent of taxpayers responded that the system of increased rigor is fair. In contrast, 28 percent of educators think that it is fair that schools improve their performance in order to achieve higher ratings.
- ✓ Overall, survey participants expressed optimism about students' ability to grow, as a majority believe that students can succeed as rigor increases.
- ✓ The surveys offered participants a chance to assign grades to schools in their communities, the state, and the nation. The percentage of "Don't know" responses increase as the degree of distance increased.
- ✓ As noted with public school opinion polling nationally, most respondents rate schools in their community highly. But despite comments about how SC standards are different and more rigorous than the rest of the nation, South Carolinians gave higher grades to schools in the nation than to schools statewide.

Grade the schools in your...

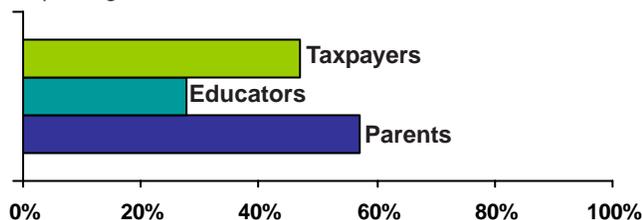
	Community	State	Nation
A	24.4%	3.4%	2.9%
B	40.2%	23.8%	33.4%
C	22.3%	41.6%	42.1%
D	7.7%	19.0%	8.3%
F	2.9%	4.5%	1.5%

The school keeps raising requirements so some children will never be able to succeed

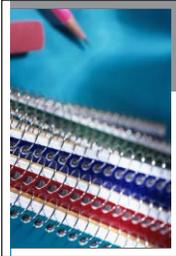
	Phone survey	Web survey
Strongly agree	4.1%	18.0%
Agree	40.3%	26.9%
Disagree	48.5%	43.6%
Strongly Disagree	7.1%	11.5%

Is the practice of requiring increased performance fair?

% responding YES



Note: business stakeholders were not provided this question on their web survey.



LACK OF AWARENESS OF ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Parents, educators, and taxpayers had the opportunity to respond to questions concerning achievement gaps among various groups. Overall, awareness of the existing gaps in achievement is low, particularly for parents.

- ✓ Most of the survey comments as well as the focus groups revealed the greatest concern about achievement gaps due to poverty and social conditions.
- ✓ Comments by stakeholders showed some variety in concerns about performance gaps. In the surveys, educators tended to state their concern that any of the achievement gaps are included in accounting for school ratings.

Lack of awareness of achievement gaps

Those responding No Differences or Don't know

	Parents	Educators	Taxpayers
White and Black Gap	34%	7%	18%
Advantaged and Disadvantaged gap	21%	3%	12%
Native English & ELL gap	22%	9%	19%
Students with and without disabilities gap	25%	8%	22%

The Future of South Carolina's Workforce

Business stakeholders expressed a strong preference for a workforce prepared in interpersonal skills, the acceptance of personal responsibility as well as personal initiative in addition to the ability read and write.

Percentage of business stakeholders who responded that the skill deficit represents a critical issue

Low level of commitment/motivation	66.4%
Poor communication skills	63.2%
Inadequate reading and writing skills	58.4%
Lack of initiative/entrepreneurship	49.1%
Poor math skills	45.0%
Insufficient computer skills	33.8%
Lack of industry specific skills	28.5%

"Most students today, whether black or white, have parents who received the same educational opportunity. I believe that this has closed the 'achievement gap' between races. Those who are disadvantaged do not have the same support from parents and extended family, which causes the gap."

--White educator, 35-44 years old, Bachelors degree, survey comment

"That (the gap) surprises me. I work with non-native English learners, and I thought the Hispanics would be below the African Americans. That's actually a very sad step, right there, that someone needs to reach out, especially in this day, to the African American community."

--urban Hispanic focus group, Upstate

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Clemson University is a public, land-grant university located in upstate South Carolina. The mission of Clemson University is to fulfill the covenant between its founder and the people of South Carolina to establish a “high seminary of learning” through its historical land-grant responsibilities of teaching, research and extended public service.



SC EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Reporting facts. Measuring change. Promoting progress.

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.