



Why is the Rigor of the Ratings Increasing This Year? Twelve Frequently Asked Questions

Beginning with the 2004 report card, the rigor of the absolute performance ratings increases by one-tenth of a point on a five-point scale each year. The system is designed to encourage and reward continuous improvement in South Carolina's public schools.

These questions and responses may assist you in working with your school communities.

1. How is the index calculated?

As detailed in the *Accountability Manual*, the absolute performance index is calculated by assigning point values to each student's scores and calculating the average. The index scale ranges from one to five.

2. How is the index changed into a rating?

The values for school indices are distributed among the ratings categories with the highest values earning a rating of Excellent and the lowest values earning a rating of Unsatisfactory.

3. What was the initial expectation?

When the rating system was established in fall 2000, the numerical average index for schools in the state was assigned the rating of Average. The next ratings were set at .75 and 1.5 standard deviations away from the numerical average of simulated school indices using the 2000 test data. The ratings were published first in 2001, with an initial expectation set at the prior year's performance levels.

4. Why is the rigor increasing?

Educators, parents, policymakers and citizens are working extraordinarily hard to increase the performance of students so that South Carolina's student achievement is at least in the top half of states nationally. The performance of students and schools in 2000 was well below the national average; therefore, the rating system is built to recognize and reward continuous improvement.

5. Why did the rigor not increase in 2002 and 2003?

When the ratings were set in 2000, educators asked for the increase to be delayed so that schools would have adequate opportunity (three full academic years) to implement changes in teaching and learning so that their students would meet the increased expectations.

6. Has the state supported those changes?

The General Assembly has funded professional development, technical assistance and lottery-based grant programs to support the changes. For the 2004-2005 school year, the General Assembly provided \$118 million to support the Education Accountability Act programs and another \$83 million in general instructional improvements.

7. How does the increase in rigor align with the expectations of *No Child Left Behind*?

The accountability ratings system is structured so that in 2010 a school rated excellent has a performance level equal to an average student score of proficient. The goal of *No Child Left Behind* is that every student score at the proficient level by 2014.



8. How does the increase in rigor fit with the improvement ratings?

To earn an average improvement rating, schools must have a gain of between one and two-tenths (rounded from hundredths). The rigor of the absolute rating increases one-tenth of a point each year.

9. Is it reasonable and fair?

Yes. It would be unfair to fail to provide students with the level of knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their lives and work. The ratings system places value on every child and uses the results of the system to leverage change in policies, programs and practices.

10. Is there an increase in rigor in the calculation of the improvement rating?

No. The calculation of the improvement rating is not impacted.

11. Is student performance on science and social studies included in the rating?

Student performance on science and social studies assessments is not included in either the absolute or improvement ratings until 2005.

12. Can South Carolina achieve these goals?

Without a doubt---but these goals require change in how we (as parents and educators) use student time, the ways in which we allocate funds and personnel, and the expectations we have of our schools. We have begun many of these changes and are seeing improvements. *For example,

- ✓ Students have made significant improvements in statewide PACT testing, with gains across all grade levels, subjects, and demographic groups.
- ✓ South Carolina high school seniors have improved their average SAT score by 32 points in the past five years, the largest gain in the country and three times the national increase.
- ✓ The national report card "Quality Counts," published by the respected magazine *Education Week*, ranked South Carolina first in the nation for improving teacher quality in both 2003 and 2004, and seventh in the nation for improving academic standards and accountability in 2004.
- ✓ South Carolina has the nation's third-best improvement rate in mathematics, and the fourth-best improvement in reading, on federal NAEP tests required by No Child Left Behind.
- ✓ South Carolina ranks third in the nation in the number of teachers certified by the prestigious National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (3,226).
- ✓ The Princeton Review ranked South Carolina's testing system as No. 11 in the nation.
- ✓ Four independent research studies, including work by the Princeton Review and the Northwest Evaluation Association, have confirmed that South Carolina's standards for student academic proficiency are among the nations most rigorous.

* This list is taken from the State Department of Education's "South Carolina education accomplishments," August 31, 2004.