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Education challenges remain despite signs of success

Education Oversight Committee releases report evaluating SC's progress toward reaching education goals

Editor's Note: The annual "Where Are We Now" report will be presented at the EOC full committee meeting on Monday, December 13. The meeting will begin at 1:00 PM in Room 433 of the Blatt Building.

A pdf copy of "Where Are We Now? Evaluating South Carolina's Progress Toward the 2010 Goal and Measuring a Vision for 2020" will be available December 13 from the EOC website at www.eoc.sc.gov.

Columbia – The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC) today presented its annual report on South Carolina's effort to reach the 2010 goal, which states that "by the year 2010, South Carolina's student achievement will be ranked in the top half of states nationally." The goal, established in 1998, further states that South Carolina "must become one of the five fastest improving systems in the country."

For the second time, the EOC presented SC's progress toward reaching the 2020 Vision, which was established by the committee in September 2009. The 2020 Vision states that by 2020, "all students will graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete successfully in the global economy, participate in a democratic society and contribute positively as members of families and communities."

Neil Robinson, Chairman of the EOC, presented South Carolina's progress and ranking on national measures. He pointed to the progress students and schools have made while urging audience members not to lose sight of the challenges. "While we have made significant progress in some areas and have much of which to be proud, challenges remain for our students, schools and communities," stated Robinson.

Recognizing the economic hardships that many in SC are facing, Robinson urged attendees to continue to commit to realizing a vision for SC by 2020.

"Despite these challenges, it is not time to back away from student achievement. Children can learn, teachers can teach, and we can work together toward realizing a vision for this state by 2020. We must continue to work toward reaching those high expectations we have set for schools and students," stated Robinson.

South Carolina's standing among states on students graduating from high school on-time is highlighted in this year's release. Graduation rate is a measure that historically has been difficult to compare because states have various ways of calculating high school graduation rates. SC is one of 22 states that currently report data using the "compact cohort rate," methodology agreed upon by the nations'

governors in 2005. Of the 22 states, SC ranks 14th, ahead of Mississippi, Washington, Rhode Island, North Carolina, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oregon, and New Mexico.

“These data are far from complete as data systems continue to be refined,” stated Robinson. “However, we see signs of progress.”

As part of the 2020 Vision, the EOC established a goal that 88.3% of students graduate from high school on time. Based on data reported by the SC Department of Education on the 2009 AYP release, SC’s graduation rate is 73.7 percent.

The most recent results from the Nation’s Report Card, or the National Assessment of Education Progress, show South Carolina slipping in rankings for math but seeing improvements in fourth grade reading.

- 4th grade Reading – the Nation’s Report Card (2009)
 - SC ranked 39th in the nation.
 - Improvement from a ranking of 42nd in 2007; 41st in 2005.
- 8th grade Reading – the Nation’s Report Card (2009)
 - SC ranked 42nd in the nation.
 - Slip from a ranking of 41st in 2007; 39th in 2005.
- 4th grade Math – the Nation’s Report Card (2009)
 - SC ranked 38th in the nation.
 - Slip from a ranking of 33rd in 2007; 28th in 2005.
- 8th grade Math – the Nation’s Report Card (2009)
 - SC ranked 33rd in the nation.
 - Slip from a ranking of 28th in 2007; 21st in 2005.
 - Following results of 2007 Math NAEP assessment, SC was considered one of the five fastest improving systems in the country.

Robinson stressed the need to take a look at the declines in math, especially in light of the gains made in the last decade.

Results of the 2009 NAEP science assessment are expected to be released later this year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. In Science, results from the 2005 assessment rank SC 32nd in the nation in 4th grade science; 29th in 8th grade science.

Referring to NAEP data, Robinson reviewed parts of the 2020 Vision that related to reading proficiency. The vision states that 95 percent of students should score Basic and above on grades 4 and 8 in reading. Based on 2009 NAEP Reading results, 62 percent of 4th graders are scoring Basic and above. Sixty-eight percent of 8th graders are scoring Basic and above.

Robinson also presented data regarding SAT and ACT, two college admissions tests given nationwide. SC ranks 48th among states on the SAT and 43rd on the ACT, which is an improvement from a ranking of 46 in 2009. Participation on both tests is rising.

South Carolina continues to rank in the top half of states nationally in both participation in and passage of Advanced Placement Courses. These are nationally recognized for their challenging curricula. Most colleges and universities award college credit to students who score a 3 or above on AP end-of-course exams. Points in the presentation included:

- SC's AP participation rank (20th) was determined in a comparison of the percent of 2009 public high school graduates, as reported by the College Board. In 2009, 26 percent of that group in SC took an AP exam in high school; and
- SC's AP passage rank (21st) was determined in a comparison of the percent of students in the public high school graduating class of 2009 who scored a 3 or higher on an AP exam at any point during high school. In 2009, 15 percent of graduates in SC scored a 3 or higher on an AP exam.

Robinson also presented data regarding the achievement gap that exists among students of different racial/ethnic groups and different economic status. Stressing that the gaps "remain persistent," Robinson pointed to comparisons made on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS), Advanced Placement participation and passage, SAT and ACT, as well as gaps on the NAEP Reading assessment.

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.

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