talking points
understanding the school report card

I. report cards: a component of SC's educational accountability system

An education goal has been established for our state's children:

By the year 2010 our student achievement will be ranked in the top half of the states nationally. To achieve this goal, we must become one of the five fastest improving states in the country.

The lever to urge education improvement is South Carolina's education accountability system.

Our system is designed to increase the academic performance of all students to ensure our state has a workforce ready to utilize information technologies, to solve problems creatively, and to exhibit the ethical, responsible behaviors our communities and employers need today and in the future.

The system has five key components:

1. **Academic standards.** The standards define what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in the four core academic areas: English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science and social studies. Copies of parent friendly curriculum standards in both English and Spanish versions are available to parents on the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee's (EOC) Information for Parents Web page at www.sceoc.org. The full text of the academic standards is available on the State Department of Education (SDE) Web site at www.myscschools.com.

2. **Assessments.** Assessments measure student mastery of the standards. The assessments used vary by the grade level of the student.

- Readiness tests that monitor students' cognitive, social and emotional development across a year are administered to kindergarten and first-grade students.
- Students in grades three through eight take the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT) in the four content areas.
- The High School Assessment Program (HSAP) ELA and mathematics subtests are administered to high school students and passage is required for graduation.
- Data from end-of-course assessments in Algebra I, English I, Biology I, and Physical Science will be used as one of the criteria for determining high school ratings, beginning with the 2006-07 school year.

3. **Public Reporting.** This component includes school and district report cards, evaluation reports, and research studies. Report cards provide schools and communities with information on the progress of schools and districts measured against the 2010 goal.

4. **Professional development and Technical Assistance.** The state provides assistance for teacher training on the content standards and how to teach them as well as support for low performing schools and districts. Through the No Child Left Behind requirements, parents of children in Title One schools that do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements for two and three consecutive years are provided options including transfers to other schools or supplementary services for their children. Schools that are rated Below Average or Unsatisfactory are eligible to receive a menu of items including:

- External review teams coordinated by the SDE.

- Teacher and/or principal specialists or other personnel through the tiered assistance program, or alternative research-based technical assistance.
- Allocations to implement summer school programs providing additional instruction to students not meeting standards.
- Funding for homework centers.
- Lottery grants for K-5 and 6-8.
- Grants for teacher professional development.

5. **Rewards and Intervention.** Recognition is provided to high performing and rapidly improving schools through the Palmetto Gold and Palmetto Silver Rewards Program. There is a set of prescribed interventions the state with school districts that are not improving. Additional interventions for Title 1 schools were added through No Child Left Behind (contact SDE for more information).

II. purposes of the report cards

How is our school performing?
Are we serving all students well?
Which information helps us determine how our school performance can be developed?
How can we use the information to promote stronger schools and districts and increase student achievement?

The annual school report cards provide educators and citizens with information to evaluate the performance of schools.

They are excellent sources to begin conversations about the school's strengths and challenges among educators, students, parents and local citizens.

Report cards are an annual publication that schools and communities can use to chart progress over time.

The report cards serve four main purposes:

1. to inform parents and the public about the school's performance;

2. to assist in addressing the strengths and weaknesses within a particular school;

3. to recognize schools with high performance, and

4. to evaluate and focus resources on schools with low performance.

Report cards are issued annually to schools by November 1 and to parents no later than November 15. Report cards may be mailed directly to parents from the SDE or sent home with students by school leaders.

The results for each school and district must be advertised in a local, audited newspaper of general circulation within 45 days of the report card release.

There are seven forms of the report cards, depending upon the school level or district organization:

Primary schools (enrolling students only Grade 2 and below)
Elementary schools
Middle schools
High schools
Career/technology centers
School districts
SC special schools (e.g. Wil Lou Gray Academy or the S.C. School for the Deaf and Blind).

Although report card contents are tailored to the grade levels included within the school or district, every report card include the following components:
    General information;
    Performance ratings and Adequate Yearly Progress notification;
    Performance trends over time;
    Standardized test results by student demographic groups and grade levels;
    School profile information;
    School Principal and SIC narrative; and
    Survey results.

III. report card components

General Information

The name, location, enrollment, leadership of the school and the year on which the report card information is based is printed on the report card cover.

General information can create opportunities for school and community dialogue. For example, the name of the school can spark questions like *Is the school named for a historical figure? How was the school named? Is the name a source of community unity?*

The address of a school can be another discussion point. *Which neighborhoods does the school serve? What are the students' living conditions? What community resources are available to educators, students, and their families? How long has the school been at that address?*

The enrollment and grade structure of a school are factors in some communities. Communities may view their schools as too small or too large. Some may believe schools should only serve grades kindergarten though eight or kindergarten though 12, while others believe schools should be structured as grades kindergarten through five for elementary schools, grades six through eight for middle schools and grades nine through 12 for high schools.

District report cards provide general information about district-wide functions that may not be on the school report card. One is the district's fiscal authority or method for generating local revenue. Some school districts have total independence in fiscal matters, while others have no authority or limited authority. Some districts must obtain approval from a county council, legislative delegation or through a referendum. A few districts operate within a statutory cap of millage rates. The section titled "Board Membership" contains information about trustees, stating whether positions are elected or appointed. The average number of training hours for the year and the percent of new members who completed the State-mandated orientation training in included as well. (Contact the SC School Boards Association at www.scsba.org for more information about school boards in South Carolina.)

The 2010 education goal is stated as a reminder for schools and communities to focus on the long range achievement goal.

Web sites are listed as resources for more information.

Performance Ratings and Adequate Yearly Progress

Each school receives two ratings – one for absolute performance and one for improvement – and notification of whether or not the school met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements.

Five rating terms are applied to the ratings of school performance.

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Below Average
- Unsatisfactory

The criteria and formulas for calculating a school rating vary according to the grade levels within the school or district (see School and District Ratings section of the tool kit and the 2005-2006 Accountability Manual.)

Absolute Ratings

Absolute Ratings reports the school's levels of student performance during a school year measured against the 2010 education goal.

Absolute rating criteria vary by school levels:
For *primary schools:* student attendance rate, pupil-teacher ratios, parent involvement, external accreditation, and professional development in early childhood

For *elementary and middle schools* (grades 3 – 8): student performance on PACT.

For *high schools:* exit exam first attempt passage rates, exit exam longitudinal passage rate, eligibility for LIFE

scholarships (to be phased out in 2006) and graduation rate. Beginning in 2006-2007, the results of end-of-course tests will replace LIFE scholarship eligibility in the calculation of high school ratings.

For *career and technology centers:* percentage of students who earn a 2.0 or above on the final course grade, the graduation rate, and the percentage of graduates who are placed in either postsecondary instruction, military services or employment.

Improvement Ratings

The Improvement Rating reports the school's student achievement progress from one school year to the next.

Improvement ratings are based on:
For *elementary and middle schools:* longitudinally-matched student PACT scores.

For *primary schools, high schools, and career and technology centers:* cohorts of students.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

AYP notification indicates whether a school or district has met annual target requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

See *Q&A About NCLB and AYP* in the Resources section of this toolkit. For specific information, contact the State Department of Education at www.myscschools.com.

Ratings and AYP notification for each school or district over a four-year period are featured to mark progress.

The breakdown of ratings for Schools with Students Like Ours is presented in a table below the Absolute Rating. Schools with Students Like Ours are schools with a similar percentage of students eligible for Medicaid services and/or participating in free/reduced lunch program. The information is provided for comparison purposes only and not incorporated into the school rating.

Performance ratings and AYP also create opportunities for school and community dialogue. *Are our ratings improving, declining or staying the same? Why? Which AYP targets did we meet and which ones did we not? Why?*

Standardized Test Results

Student performance on standardized test are displayed both in pie charts and tabular form and compared to schools with a similar student population.

In the tabular form, results are presented for each subject area tested and broken out by student gender, ethnicity, disability status, socioeconomic status, migrant status, and limited English proficiency status. In the last column of each demographic student group, the state objective is presented to report the target (percent scoring Proficient or Advanced or "3" on HSAP) necessary for the school or district to meet to AYP.

Results also are broken out by grade levels in each subject are tested.

Why disaggregate the data? By disaggregating the data, schools can see if a focus on resources and/or assistance is working Under the EAA, schools are rewarded in their improvement ratings for significantly improving the achievement levels of historically underachieving student groups.

For primary schools, PACT results of third grade students who attended the primary school as a second- or first- grader are presented in tabular form and is the basis for the test score criterion in AYP.

For elementary and middle schools, PACT results are reported in pie charts for ELA, mathematics, science and social studies and in tabular form for ELA and mathematics.

For high schools, results of HSAP passage rate are reported in tabular form as well as the exit exam passage rate. Other performance results displayed are percent of seniors eligible for the LIFE scholarships to four-year institutions (must

pass both SAT/ACT score requirement and grade point average set by the state), and graduation rate.

Test results are used to address questions such as *Which groups of students are meeting expectations and which groups are not progressing? In which content areas is performance stronger? At which grade levels? Do students perform higher relative to the requirements as they move through the school?*

School or District Profile Information.
The school profile page provides information to understand better the conditions, opportunities and challenges the school faces.

The information includes (but is not limited to) expenditures, teacher qualifications, student and teacher attendance rates, opportunities in the arts, character education programs, parent conference rates, and student suspensions and expulsions for violent and/or criminal offenses.

The percentage of highly qualified teachers and the percentages of highly qualified teachers in low poverty and high poverty schools are reported to comply with No Child Left Behind.

The information is divided among three categories: students, staff and school programs. Information from Schools With Students Like Ours and the state median also are presented to enable comparisons.

School profile information can spark discussions and changes to foster high performance. *Are our school's attendance rates for students and teachers improving or declining? What are the trends in our expenditures per student and how do they compare to trends in our performance ratings? How do our average teacher salary, percent with advanced degrees, and percent of highly qualified teachers compare to the state median? Is participation in special programs (e.g. percent eligible for gifted and talented, percent enrolled in high school credit courses, etc.) increasing or declining?*

School or District Narrative
The school principal, in conjunction with the School Improvement Council, writes a narrative about the school's accomplishments and its plans to address any barriers to increasing student achievement.

How does the narrative by the principal and SIC expand upon student achievement results?

Survey Results
Results of surveys of teachers, students and parents evaluating their school's learning environment, social and physical environment and home-school relations are provided to supplement the statistical information.

Surveys are distributed by the SDE each spring to assess the learning environment, social and physical environment and home-school relations of the school. Each survey includes approximately 50 questoins.

Survey item results are provided to schools. Surveys are administered to all teachers and to students and their parents in grades five, eight, and 11, or in the highest grade in their school.

Are there significant differences among the responses by teachers, students or parents to the three summary questions? What are potential reasons for the differences? How do the evaluation results compare with other information on the report card? What are the strengths and weaknesses of parental involvement activities at our school? Are parents encouraged to volunteer in the school? Are there any significant changes from last year's results?

IV. closing remarks

The strength of the report card lies in the efforts of educators, staff, parents, students, and citizens to understand the factors that impact student achievement and to foster positive actions.

We at [name of school] invite you to be a part of our actions to drive understanding and positive change.