

Framework for Testimony Presented to the Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force

On January 23, 2015, Speaker Jay Lucas created the Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force. According to Speaker Lucas, the Task Force is to “begin laying the groundwork for substantial, necessary education reforms.” Recognizing the myriad of thoughts and opinions regarding education throughout this state, Chairwoman Rita Allison and the Task Force have decided that citizens from across the state, especially the Plaintiff districts in the *Abbeville* decision, must be given the opportunity to share their thoughts.

Because the subject of education covers many areas, and the time and resources of the Task Force are limited, individuals who present to the Task Force are asked to do so within a framework designed to get information effectively and efficiently.

Recently, Transform SC completed a project entitled the **Profile of the South Carolina Graduate**. This project has been approved by the South Carolina Association of School Administrator’s Superintendents’ Roundtable, the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, the Education Oversight Committee, the State Board of Education, and the Superintendent of Education. The profile sets out three areas of critical importance to our graduates: **World Class Knowledge, World Class Skills, and Life and Career Characteristics**.

With those areas in mind, these questions become crucial:

- Are the schools in your area producing high school graduates who have mastered rigorous language arts and math standards so that they are ready for college or careers?

Kingstree Senior High School, as well as the other high schools in Williamsburg County, is producing graduates who have mastered rigorous language arts and math standards so that they are ready for college and/or careers. Our teachers’ lesson plans are guided by the standards, even though SC standards have been in a state of “flux” (as I would call it). Our standards are not exactly Common Core, but they are very similar to Common Core. Our teachers teach such that our students will master the concepts needed for college or careers. Our CATE department does an excellent job preparing students for the world of work. Some of our cosmetology students, for example, take the State Boards before graduation and are immediately ready to start work after school. The Building Construction Class build a beautiful bookcase for me for the Title I books that Mrs. Betty Scott ordered for the Special Education and English classes. I have received good comments about the workmanship and one even had the students build one for her classroom.

- Do your schools offer multiple languages, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, arts, and social sciences?

Unfortunately, we only offer Spanish as a second language. We used to have French at all three high schools, but it was so difficult to maintain credentialed teachers in those three positions. At KSH we used to offer Spanish, French, German, Russian, Japanese, and Latin. Now, it is only Spanish due to budget constraints and the fact that it is so hard to recruit foreign language teachers in the rural areas. We offer enough science for graduation, but are limited in offering more advance courses. When the budget crunch hit, we lost not only a science position, but one each in English, math, and social studies, as well as the electronics class. We have different levels of Band and Art.

- Is there creativity and innovation within the schools?

In Williamsburg County, we have the WC Magnet School of the Arts, and there is a lot of innovation there. At KSH, teachers try to innovate in order to make lessons more appealing and students more engaged. We are within the CCEL (Carolina Consortium for Enterprise Learning (CCEL), and received more than \$24.9 million in RTT funding as a whole/WCSD received \$13 million, and teachers use Mastery Connect to get ideas/lessons/quizzes/tests from other teachers around the country. They also post lessons to Mastery Connect. Each student will be receiving a Dell laptop to use in the classes and at home. There is a lot of hands on in the science classes and many of our self-contained teachers use manipulatives with their students. Teachers are encouraged to use project-based learning, and it is helping our students. Ex. Pizza and fractions.

- Is there critical thinking and problem solving?

There is critical thinking and problem solving: Students don't just add and subtract; they must read and understand word problems and figure out what they need to do in order to solve the problems. The pizza and fractions lesson is a good example. How many pizzas do we need to order from Pizza Hut?

- Is there collaboration and teamwork?

There is collaboration and teamwork. Teachers of English meet weekly and discuss what they are doing that week and what is and is not working well. Teachers verbally give the name of a student they are working with to help him/her be more successful. The department chair shares any concerns coming from the administration about upcoming EOC testing, MAP data, etc.

- Is there communication, information, media, and technology?

We communicate on a daily basis through emails. What is unfortunate is that we have to shut down certain classes during MAP testing so that our students can be tested. It is necessary so we can see where our students are and how far they have progressed (We do this three times a year.) And while it is on my mind, our teachers are getting a bit burned out with having to hold the classes of our colleagues when they are out sick or at a conference. Our district just does not have the money to call subs every time there is a teacher absent.

- Are they learning how to learn?
Many students are, but, unfortunately some are not. They want to cram for the test, spit it out on the test, and then forget about it. Some don't see the necessity of long-term retention of information.
- Are they learning integrity, self-direction, a global perspective, perseverance, work ethic, and interpersonal skills?

While they may not always show it, some are learning integrity (integer), self-direction, a global perspective, work ethic and interpersonal skills. They know what plagiarism is; they know what self-assessment is; they know that there is a great, big world out there; they know that they need a good work ethic in order to succeed in this global society; and they are learning interpersonal skills. On the rare occasion where there is a fight between two students, many times the students themselves will break the fight up and encourage their peers to calm down.

- What is the role of the local school district and your local community when it comes to education?

The WCSD provides a safe, learning environment for the public school students in WC. The schools provide progress reports and report cards to the parents and guardians to keep them abreast of what their children are doing. They can schedule meetings/visits with the Guidance Department and/or individual teachers. The community's role is to support the local schools and stay abreast of how their children are doing. The community supports the schools through local PTA's, fundraisers, etc. (Ex. The Senior parents at KSH are helping to raise money for the Senior Trip this year to Orlando, which will be a learning experience for our seniors.)

- What should the state do to support the local districts?

The state needs to make sure that no matter where a student lives, he/she should have the same opportunities that students in more affluent areas do. There needs to be equity of resources so that equity of opportunity can be a reality. The state needs to never pass legislation that hurts school districts/students based on a single test.

- If the local districts do not meet their responsibilities, how should the state respond?

The state should first make sure it meets its responsibilities. After there are equity of resources and equity of opportunity, then, if local districts don't meet their responsibilities, the state should have a plethora of strategies in place to help our districts to meet their responsibilities. I would never say fire the superintendent or fire all the principals or fire the teachers. The districts and the state together should come up with a plan to move the district forward. The state took over Allendale schools, and most agree that many things remained the same. Again, EQUITY of resources and EQUITY of opportunity will go hand in hand in making our students succeed.

- Should the state have a responsibility for local facilities, and, if so, what oversight should it have?

Absolutely! With equity of resources, local districts can build state-of-the-art schools in Williamsburg County as there are in Horry County. The oversight should be that the money is being spent on building these state-of-the-art schools and that money is not going into the pocket of any one individual. We just saw what not having enough oversight did in Lee County with the Charter school. How someone can embezzle over \$1,000,000.00 is beyond my comprehension. We want our students to live and work in a global society, and we need to give them state-of-the-art facilities to help prepare them.

- How could school leadership in your area be improved?

We at KSH have an excellent first-year principal, Mr. Alex Gordon. Having said that, I believe all principals, just like all teachers, can improve their skills. I believe in mentoring. You could also have a small group of people that could be called the Principal's Unofficial Sounding Board/Cabinet/Whatever, and would feel comfortable telling a principal, "Hey that was really a good idea!" or "Hey, you kind of messed up there. Here is a different way you could have handled that."

- If you could change one thing about public education in South Carolina, what would it be?

I would change the mindset that teachers have to "teach to the test" so our students will be ready for EOC, ACT Aspire, ACT, or whatever the assessment may be next year. An English teacher once told me that she missed teaching certain reading selections. They were either not on the official list or they could not be used to teach the difference between a simile and a metaphor.

- How can rural, low wealth districts improve the quality, stability, and effectiveness of its teachers to achieve the world class knowledge, skills, and life and career characteristics in the Profile of the Graduate?

Incentives could be offered to teachers who locate in the rural, low-wealth districts and promise to work for at least five years. The state can help pay for the incentives. More money can be put into QUALITY Staff Development to help teachers improve their skills. Districts, with the state's help (resources) can offer free masters degrees to teachers who get certified in certain hard-to-staff areas. The Williamsburg Cohort is how I was certified in LD Resource.

- What can be done to support rural communities in building capacity for long term educational success by strengthening and sustaining collaboration among community, parent, business and education leaders?

Nearby colleges/universities can partner with schools, communities and business leaders in bringing certain cultural activities to the rural areas. Working together, they can get a certain cultural event started and then help the schools maintain.

- What critical areas need improvement in each level of schooling, especially for high-poverty students, to provide their students with high quality learning opportunities and experiences that put them on a path to achieve the Profile of the Graduate.

EQUITY of resources! More after-school programs! More Advanced Placement/Dual Enrollment Classes! More quality teachers who stay more than two years (to get their student loans forgiven)! Higher teacher salaries!

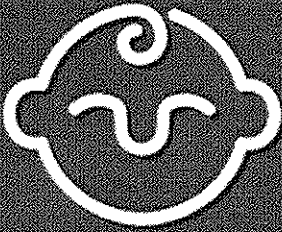
- What is working and what needs to be improved to provide high quality early childhood education with better family engagement, birth through age four, so that young children with risk factors are ready for school and to enter their path to the Profile of the Graduate?

First Steps is a good program and should be maintained. From Healthy Start, to Family Strengthening, Early Intervention (Babynet), Quality Childcare, and Early Education, First Steps has helped hundreds of thousands of our youngsters get the right start in their education.



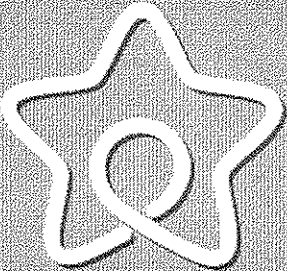
STRENGTHENING

FAMILY



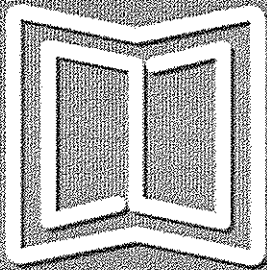
INTERVENTION (BABYNET)

EARLY



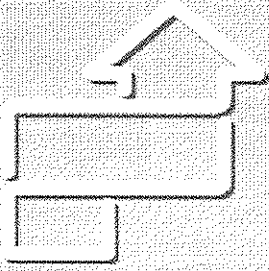
CHILD CARE

QUALITY



EDUCATION

EARLY



- When students fall behind along the path to achieve the Profile of the Graduate, what additional family involvement and learning opportunities through afterschool and summer programs are needed?

There should be cultural opportunities offered for parents and students. The 21st Century Learning Grant at KSH has offered students an opportunity to get extra help in ELA, math, science, technology, aerobics; 90% of the students who are in the 21st Century After-school program made the honor roll Second Quarter. Summer learning camps could be offered to help those in danger of not graduating on time. Again, all of this costs money, but aren't our children worth it???

- What changes in policies, regulations, and funding are needed to modernize the school transportation system so that rural students have shorter transportation times and more access to vocational, career and technology, and dual enrollment opportunities off campus, and quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities.

More money needs to be in the budget to buy more modern buses. Many buses on our roads break down too often and need to be replaced.

Before presenting to the Task Force, please keep this framework in mind. The General Assembly cannot cure every ill facing education, but it can act in the areas where it is best able. Answers to one or many of the questions will help guide the debate.