

Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force – April 27, 2015

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I am a product of the Dillon 2 School District and a first generation college graduate. I have been an educator for 45 years serving as a teacher, principal, district personnel director and superintendent. I have worked in many of the plaintiff districts serving as a teacher in Ware Shoals, Dillon and Latta before serving as a principal in Chesterfield County and Edgefield County. I was district personnel director in Darlington and superintendent in Greenwood 51. I currently serve as Executive Director of the Western Piedmont Education Consortium, a collaboration of the following districts: Abbeville, Laurens, Clinton, Newberry, Saluda, Edgefield, McCormick, Batesburg Leesville, Starr Iva, Greenwood, Ninety Six and Ware Shoals.

I will address my remarks from two perspectives, one as an educator and the other as parent and grandparent.

I have worked in six of South Carolina's eighty something school districts. I currently serve twelve small districts that have formed a non-profit consortium seeking to bring efficiency and effectiveness to district operations through sharing and networking. I have been privileged to serve as a Palmetto's Finest judge in elementary, middle and high schools across the state. I can bear witness to the correlation between resources and the opportunity to learn. Specifically, I have found that the more resources there are, the more opportunities there are to learn.

Many schools provide a good education for students without a wealth of resources. Many of the districts in our consortium are prime examples of doing much with little. However, those districts could provide more opportunities for their children if there were more resources available.

My children are the products of the four of the six districts where I have worked. My youngest had the most opportunities to learn because she finished her public school education in Darlington, the district that had the most resources of the six in which I worked.

I have grandchildren attending the Lexington One schools, the Greenville schools and one living with me in Greenwood. They are all thriving and getting a good education, I am proud to report. However, some of them have

more opportunities to learn based upon the resources of the community in which they live. And there are children all over our state who do not have the opportunities of my grandchildren because they do not live in communities with the resources of Lexington, Greenville and Greenwood. That should not be the case.

If we want our schools to offer opportunities in multiple languages, in science, in technology, in engineering, in mathematics, in the arts and social sciences, we must provide them with the resources to do so.

I have several suggestions for this Task Force as you look to review education policy and reform public education in South Carolina.

Suggestion One

The number of days and the number of hours in the school year has not changed since I was in school 50 years ago. Knowledge has exploded since the fifties and sixties and we need to teach that knowledge to our children. We cannot continue to pack more and more into the same amount of time and expect mastery teaching and learning. Every year there is legislation introduced to add requirements to our already overloaded curriculum. When something new is added, something else has to be displaced. **Remove laws that add curriculum requirements beyond that included in the Defined Program**

Some students need more time to master concepts than others. Schools need the resources to offer after school, summer and expanded year programs to meet the needs of all students. **Fund extra time**

Suggestion Two

We need to cut out some of the testing that is required by state and federal statutes and provide more focus on teaching and learning. We are spending inordinate amounts of money on assessments to grade schools. This takes away funds and time from instruction. We need to consolidate our accountability systems and eliminate all summative tests that are not absolutely necessary to assure student needs are met. **Consolidate state and federal accountability**

Suggestion Three

We should encourage the kind of cooperation among school districts that our consortium provides. We provide common professional development for teachers and administrators. We develop curriculum and units of study that can be shared by all our schools. We form collaborations with higher education institutions to build leadership capacity and to give our teachers the tools they need to succeed. We share ideas and best practices. We develop shared capacity. **Support regional collaboration of school districts**

Suggestion Four

We need consistent funding sources for our schools. This is a big picture point for our state. The Education Finance Act (EFA) passed in the 1970s to fund our state's Defined Minimum Program has been fully funded in only eight of the forty years of its existence. The excuse for not fully funding the EFA is that there are not sufficient revenues in the state's General Fund to cover the cost of full implementation while meeting the other needs of our state.

The reality is that revenue has been purposefully eroded by billions of dollars since the early 1990s through tax cut initiatives. We have consistently neglected our state's infrastructure and get around to addressing these needs only when forced to do so. When we are finally forced to address a critical need, as with the funding of additional DSS positions this year, we take that funding away from other critical infrastructure areas. We must stop cutting taxes at the expense of neglecting our state's infrastructure needs.

Fully funding the EFA's Base Student Cost would help all districts provide quality-learning opportunities for students. Poor and rural districts need more funding to meet the needs of their students. The .2 poverty add on is a good start to helping poor districts. I believe that adding an additional .1 to that index would allow districts to more effectively deal with poverty issues. **Fully fund EFA and increase poverty weighting to .3**

Suggestion Five

I believe we can reap huge benefits for our state by increasing the options for early childhood programs and parent education programs in our schools. The commitment to these programs must be consistent so that capacity can be built in rural areas over time. Many of our education problems are rooted in poverty. I believe we can make headway in breaking the poverty cycle by

investing in early learning and parent training programs. **Provide funding for early childhood and parenting programs**

Summary

Members of the Task Force, you have an opportunity to shape the future of South Carolina. I am so excited that this opportunity has finally arrived after over 20 years of litigation. I hope that you will be bold and courageous in your recommendations. This is a once in a lifetime chance to get it right for future generations of children in our state.

Please do not let the greed of some who do not wish to pay for quality prevent you from providing quality opportunities for our children. My grandchildren deserve more than a minimally adequate education. Children in every corner of South Carolina need more than a minimally adequate education to be prosperous and contributing citizens. Our state cannot compete if we only provide minimally adequate education.

I, for one, do not want to have a few more dollars in my wallet and have those dollars deprive the children of this state what they need to be successful.

Resources equal opportunity

Thank you for the great service you are providing to the Speaker, to the House of Representatives and to this state. Thank you for allowing me to speak today.