

Report of the Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force

Submitted to the Honorable Jay Lucas
Speaker of the House



Submitted by the Honorable Rita Allison, Chair

January __, 2016

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Table of Contents

Overview of the Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force	p. 2
Description of Task Force Meetings	p. 3
Description of Subcommittee Meetings	p. 6
Background	p. 8
Findings	p. 9
Projected Timeline	p. 14
Subcommittee Recommendations	p. 15
Appendices	p. 34

OVERVIEW

The Defendants and the Plaintiff Districts must identify the problems facing students in the Plaintiff Districts, and can solve those problems through corporately designing a strategy to address critical concerns and cure the constitutional deficiency evident in this case. Abbeville County School District v. State, 767 S.E. 2d 157, 180 (2014).

After the South Carolina Supreme Court issued its long-awaited decision in the case of *Abbeville v. South Carolina* (Cite), Speaker of the House of Representatives Jay Lucas commissioned the Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force. According to Speaker Lucas, “[e]ffective education reform requires more than just suggestions from administrators; it demands valuable input from our job creators who seek to hire trained and proficient employees. All available avenues should be explored to guarantee our students receive a workforce-ready education that prepares each child for the 21st century.”

In order to gain a broad perspective from multiple vantage points, the following individuals were appointed to the Task Force:

- Representative Merita A. “Rita” Allison (District 36-Spartanburg), Chairwoman of the House Education and Public Works Committee. (Chair of the Task Force)
- April Allen, Director of State Government Relations, Continental Tire Corporation
- Wanda L. Andrews, Ed. D., Superintendent, Lee County School District
- Representative Kenneth A. “Kenny” Bingham (District 89-Lexington), Chairman of the Public Education and Special Schools Subcommittee, House Ways and Means Committee
- Representative Joseph S. Daning (District 92-Berkeley), House Education and Public Works Committee
- Lewis Gossett, President and CEO, South Carolina Manufacturing Alliance
- Representative Jerry N. Govan (District 95-Orangeburg), House Education and Public Works Committee
- Representative Jackie E. “Coach” Hayes (District 55-Dillon), House Ways and Means Committee
- Rainey Knight, Former Superintendent of Darlington County Public Schools
- Representative Dwight A. Loftis, (District 19-Greenville), House Ways and Means Committee

- David Longshore, Jr., Ph.D., Former Superintendent, Orangeburg School District 3
- Representative Joseph H. “Joe” Neal (District 70--Richland and Sumter), House Ways and Means Committee
- Terry K. Peterson, Ph.D., Director of the Afterschool and Community Learning Network
- Superintendent Molly Spearman, State Superintendent of Education
- Rick Reames, Executive Director, Pee Dee Education Center
- Mr. John Tindal, Superintendent, Clarendon School District 2
- Dr. James C. “Jimmie” Williamson, President and Executive Director, South Carolina Technical College System

TASK FORCE MEETINGS

Early on, the Task Force determined that it was important to hear from invited speakers and concerned citizens. To accomplish this, a series of four hearing were held. Two hearings were conducted in Columbia, one in Dillon, and one in Due West (Abbeville County).

I. Columbia--February 23, Blatt Building

The initial Task Force meeting was opened by Speaker Lucas providing a charge to the members. Following his remarks, the Task Force heard presentations from the following individuals:

- The Honorable Richard W. Riley, Former Governor and United States Secretary of Education
- Michael A. Rebell, LL.B, Professor of Law and Educational Practice, Columbia University
- Professor Derek Black, USC School of Law
- Former State Superintendent of Education Barbara Nielsen
- Former State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum

Following the conclusion of the remarks, the Task Force adopted a framework for speakers at upcoming forums.

II. Dillon--March 23, Dillon Middle School

Dillon Middle School hosted the second Task Force meeting. The meeting was the first of three that allowed for participation from the general public. Mr. D. Ray Rogers, Superintendent of Dillon School District 4 welcomed the committee and provided opening comments. Invited speakers included the following:

- Dr. Tammy Pawloski--Director, Francis Marion University Center of Excellence
- Representative Terry Alexander--House District 59, Darlington and Florence Counties
- Dr. Helena Tillar, Superintendent, Marlboro County School District and Chair of the Pee Dee Education Center
- Debbie Hyler, The School Foundation (Florence School District 1)
- Dr. Rette Dean, Retired Superintendent, Marion School District 7

In addition to the invited speakers, the Task Force heard from 23 other individuals. Among those participants were educators, students, parents, school board members, and clergy. During her testimony, Dr. Tillar provided a framework and summary of the Plaintiff's recommendations (Appendix I).

III. Due West (Abbeville County)--April 27, Erskine College

Abbeville school district is not only the first district listed in the lawsuit, it geographically sits on the other end of the state from Dillon. Dr. Ashely Woodiwiss, the Grady Patterson Professor of Politics at Erskine College welcomed the Task Force. The invited speakers for this hearing were as follows:

- Mr. Jonathan Phipps--Superintendent of Abbeville County School District
- Dr. David O'Shields--Superintendent of Laurens County School District 56
- Kay Cleveland--Special Programs Director for Laurens County School District 56
- Mr. Greg Tolbert--Boys and Girls Clubs of the Upstate
- Dr. David Mathis--Superintendent of Saluda County School District
- Dr. Ray Wilson--Executive Director of the Western Education Piedmont Education Consortium
- Dr. Fay Sprouse--Superintendent of Greenwood School District 51

As with Dillon, there was enthusiastic participation during the public comment portion of the hearing. Eight individuals, in addition to the invited speakers, shared their thoughts with the Task Force.

IV. Columbia--June 1, Blatt Building

The final public comment hearing concluded the receipt of general testimony. (Subsequent testimony and material was still accepted by the five subcommittees.) Prior to the presentation of testimony, Dr. JoAnne Anderson presented a set of 90 recommendations on behalf of the plaintiff districts (Appendix II),¹

The list of the invited speakers is as follows:

- Representative Leola Robinson-Simpson--House District 25, Greenville County
- The Reverend Dr. Herman R. Yoos, III--Bishop of the South Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American on behalf of LARCUM (LARCUM is an acronym for Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic, United Methodist)
- Mr. Mike Burgess--Educator, River Bluff High School
- Bradford Swann--Students First State Director
Dana Laurens--Outreach Director
- Robert Gantt-- President of the South Carolina School Boards Association and Lexington-Richland Five school board member
- Kathy Maness--Executive Director, Palmetto State Teachers Association
- Dr. Scott Turner--Incoming President, South Carolina Association of School Administrators (Dr. Turner spoke in place of Dr. Christina Melton, current SCASA President)
- Bernadette Hampton--President, South Carolina Education Association--
- Ryan Mahoney--Foundation for Excellence in Education and Palmetto Promise
- Zelda Waymer--Executive Director, South Carolina Afterschool Alliance
Nikki Williams--Executive Vice President, EdVenture Children's Museum
- Dr. James Harvey--South Carolina Association of School Psychologists

¹ At the conclusion of the public forums, staff provided the Task Force with another set of recommendations. These recommendations can be found in Appendix III.

In addition to the invited speakers, four other individuals provided remarks to the Task Force.

At the conclusion of the testimony, the Task Force agreed to create five subcommittees. The subcommittees are as follows:

- Transportation and Facilities Infrastructure
- Accountability (Academic and Financial), Continuous Improvement, and Leadership (District, School, and Community)
- Educator Recruitment, Retention, Effectiveness, and Professional Development
- College and Career Pathways of High Quality Learning Opportunities in Elementary, Middle, and High Schools
- High Quality Early Childhood Education and Family Engagement

The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee provided the Task Force with data regarding the Plaintiff districts (Appendix IV). EOC information included the following:

- report card ratings for each district,
- the district's poverty index,
- student enrollment and performance,
- early childhood participation,
- information on teachers and administrators.

Prior to adjourning the meeting, Chairwoman Allison announced that subcommittees would be meeting in late July/early August. In the meantime, she requested that Task Force members notify staff if there were any data requests.

Subcommittee Meetings

Chairwoman Allison, with input from the Plaintiff representatives, created five subcommittees. The subcommittees, their membership, and the days on which they met are as follows:

- **Transportation and Facilities Infrastructure**
John Tindal--Chair
Joe Daning
Rita Allison

Met August 31, September 8, and October 27.

- **Accountability (Academic and Financial), Continuous Improvement, and Leadership (District, School, and Community)**

Kenny Bingham--Co-Chair
Rainey Knight--Co-Chair
Lewis Gossett

Met August 12 and September 28.

- **Educator Recruitment, Retention, Effectiveness, and Professional Development**

Jackie Hayes--Co-Chair
David Longshore--Co-Chair
Rick Reames
Dwight Loftis

Met July 29, September 2, and October 27.

- **College and Career Pathways of High Quality Learning Opportunities in Elementary, Middle, and High Schools**

Jerry Govan--Co-Chair
Molly Spearman--Co-Chair
Terry Peterson
Jimmy Williamson

Met September 15 and October 28.

- **High Quality Early Childhood Education and Family Engagement**

Wanda Andrews--Co-Chair
Joe Neal--Co-Chair
April Allen

Met August 13 and September 30.

Background

Thomas Edison is widely credited as creating the first commercially viable light bulb. The key to his success was finding an inexpensive, but durable, filament--one made out of carbonized bamboo. Not surprisingly, it took a considerable amount of trial and error to identify carbonized bamboo as the solution to the problem of producing long-lasting light bulbs. It is reported that his team tested over 6,000 different materials before finally getting it right and claiming victory.

It is enticing to believe that there is a definitive solution to a complex and ongoing problem. If the right combination (or filament) can be found, we can then declare success and move to the next challenge. Unfortunately, this approach does not work for every kind of problem, but it can be argued that it has been applied to education, both in South Carolina and the nation. The thinking seems to be that if the right programs are initiated, and enough dollars are spent, eventually something has to work.

This is not to say that all of the programs put into place have been inappropriate, or even entirely unsuccessful. The Education and Economic Development Act was created to better coordinate the employment opportunities of the business community within local schools. Students can choose career pathways and career counselors help guide them in their post high school explorations. The Education Accountability Act, in part, called for additional pay to teacher and principal specialists who agreed to travel to under-performing schools and assist in improvement efforts. The Read to Succeed Act, which is still in the beginning stages, is designed to ensure that all students are reading on grade level at the end of third grade. CDEPP was created to allow access to prekindergarten programs in economically struggling areas.

And yet, despite these and other well-designed and well-meaning pieces of legislation, there remain schools and entire school districts that cannot provide the education that their students deserve and need to be successful in the 21st century. Thus, while an Edisonian solution could be feasible if the problem was limited to inserting a particular program into a district, the facts do not support such an approach.

For example, there are five school districts with poverty indices above 96 percent (three of them over 97 percent) that routinely receive report card grades of either “below average” or “at risk.” Initially, it could be assumed that poverty is keeping these districts from succeeding. But that assumption collapses when other districts with equally high poverty rates score at the “average” or even “good” levels. Moreover, a few districts with poverty indices in the 80-90 percent range have ratings of “excellent.”

The question then becomes, if the problem is not limited to poverty, what else keeps districts from excelling? Perhaps the answer is in the form of leadership and capacity--not exactly as tidy as carbonized bamboo, but something that can be addressed.

Instead of developing and implementing new programs for schools, a better path is to identify underdeveloped district leadership and shortfalls in facility and personnel infrastructure. Numerous studies point to teachers being the key *in-school* influence on students. In order to have outstanding teachers, and, therefore, promote positive influences on students, strong

principals must be in place. For there to be strong principals, it is incumbent to have an effective and capable superintendent. To help ensure that the right superintendents are hired and given the tools they need, a well-functioning and competent school board should be in place. The research is clear. To have a successful school, there must be effective principals and teachers in the school building.

FINDINGS

Finding 1:

To further the goal of effective leadership, the General Assembly should enact legislation that leads to collaboration with the State Department of Education (SDE), institutions of higher education, and organizations such as the South Carolina Association of School Administrators and the South Carolina School Boards Association. The General Assembly should work to create the teacher/principal/superintendent pipeline before the shortage becomes critical.

If the role of leadership is fully embraced, it will take a coordinated effort to identify, grow, and nurture leaders from the school board level to the classroom. Difficulties in attracting educators are already appearing, and districts that already struggle in this area will likely face growing challenges. Because the promotion and practice of strong leadership is essential, assistance to school boards in regard to their practices and operations should also be provided.

Finding 2:

Although better leadership is, in itself, a noble endeavor, it is necessary for the state to create a vision for its leaders and provide measurable objectives for districts to meet. With the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate as the ultimate goal, the General Assembly should specify metrics that indicate progress. For instance:

- **all students should be reading on grade level by the end of third grade;**
- **all students should have an individualized graduation plan by the ninth grade that focuses on a career cluster;**
- **all students should be college and career ready by the end of the twelfth grade.**

Finding 3:

Many indicators are already in state law. The General Assembly should review existing legislation and update, modify, expand, or consolidate goals for student achievement in order to better focus and guide districts. Once goals are in place, there must be a rigorous and transparent accountability system.

The General Assembly should establish the educational goals for South Carolina students. The Education Oversight Committee should assess and report on whether the goals are being achieved. The State Department of Education should assist districts that struggle to be successful and provide access to best practices across the state in the form of professional development and technical assistance.

Finding 4:

When local districts are unable to attract or develop leadership as evidenced by the accountability system, it is imperative that the state insert itself more directly into local issues than it otherwise would. Should a district continually find itself “at risk” or “below average,” the state, through SDE, should be available to provide intensive and immediate assistance. The type of assistance is dependent on the unique local situation.

For example, assume several districts or schools in an identifiable geographic area not able to hire enough district personnel. The General Assembly (or SDE through clear parameters established by the legislature) could establish benchmarks and develop recommendations to encourage greater efficiencies. For example, districts could be encouraged to merge so called back-office functions (accounting, human resources, facilities maintenance, safety, IT, etc.). In some instances, districts could be encouraged or required to consolidate. SDE should be provided the resources and authority to assess districts’ needs.

The examination of back office functions necessarily raises the issue of funding--is more needed or can obstacles be overcome with existing resources. Simply providing more money without the wherewithal to effectively and efficiently allocate it will not lead to transformative change. Of course, when examining both school and district functions, the constant focus must remain on how to best meet the needs of the students.

When examining per pupil spending, the five most underperforming all spend more than the state average, with two districts spending over \$15,000 per student. By contrast, Aiken spends approximately \$9,100 per student and Dorchester 2 spends approximately \$8,500 per student. Of course, districts with smaller student populations have fewer overall dollars to spend.

There is a paradox in regard to school funding: how much additional funding is necessary to provide an adequate education to all students versus how well the district utilizes existing resources. To help solve the paradox, outside assistance can prove exceedingly useful.

Under the auspices of a state budget proviso, four school districts agreed to undergo an efficiency study during the 2014-15 school year. This study examined areas such as facilities, transportation, and finance. Each district that was reviewed was presented with a comprehensive report outlining numerous suggestions for improvement.

Finding 5:

All plaintiff districts, particularly those scoring “below average” or “at risk,” should be required to have an efficiency and effectiveness study conducted. The results of these independent studies can be used to request additional resources from the General Assembly or, alternatively, direct the district toward greater efficiencies. To assist in the delivery of assistance, SDE should establish regional centers with primary focus in the plaintiff districts.

Unfortunately, for some small and underfunded districts, just because a problem is identified does not necessarily mean that the problem can be corrected. Districts may not have the

expertise to implement recommendations. In order to assist districts in building capacity, the State Department of Education should become a key provider of technical assistance.

Finding 6:

The State Department of Education should establish a stronger emphasis on providing expertise and assistance to districts, with the Office of First Steps adopting the same role in regard to early childhood providers. This could manifest itself in the form of targeted and intensive professional development at the district, school, and day care levels, assistance with back-office functions, and information technology consultation.

This focus may require restructuring within SDE; however, the department should provide technical support to districts while also making the case to the General Assembly for resources or legislation that meet the needs of the districts.

Finding 7:

To ensure that the state remains focused on improving educational opportunities for children, the General Assembly should direct the creation of an Office of Transformation. The Office of Transformation should identify low-performing schools in the Plaintiff districts and provide intensive and innovative interventions that produce immediate improvements in the academic growth and achievement of students. Additionally, the Office will evaluate the impact of the interventions.

Finding 8:

The General Assembly should consider increasing the poverty rating for school districts with extreme poverty from 0.20 to 0.50 and not requiring a local Education Finance Act (EFA) match on these funds. Districts should be held accountable for how the funds are expended and the impact on student academic growth and achievement.

In Fiscal Year 2014-15 the General Assembly included a special weight in the Education Finance Act (EFA) for students in poverty. While funding is not the solution to many of the problems facing education, the General Assembly must recognize that school districts with high concentrations of students who live in poverty face daunting challenges. For example, poverty negatively affects school readiness in kindergarten. Students in poverty incur summer loss in reading and mathematics because they do not have ongoing opportunities to learn and practice essential skills. Students in poverty also experience medical and physical needs that often detract from learning.

Research shows that approximately \$1,200 in additional expenditures is needed to provide the support that children who live in poverty achieve. These additional expenditures are for quality after-school programs, summer programs, extended school years, and overall increases in the amount of time spent learning.

Finding 9:

Create a School Infrastructure Bank that has the authority to provide funding to districts that comply with the Bank's directives. Even before the filing of the *Abbeville* lawsuit, a recurring and constant concern revolved around the issue of facilities. The bond bill adopted by the General Assembly during the 1999-2000 session alleviated many facilities problems, but the problem of inadequate school buildings remains. Unfortunately, SDE does not have an adequate listing of district needs in regard to either deferred maintenance or capacity. Even if SDE did have such information, questions remains regarding the capacity of many districts to keep buildings in good working order.

Because building needs are constant, a School Infrastructure Bank should be established to provide ongoing assistance to the plaintiff districts. Before and during the lifetime of a loan, the bank must issue, and the district must comply, directives necessary for the efficient operations of school facilities to include.

For example, the Bank should require districts to undergo a thorough efficiency and effective audit that highlights the operation of school buildings. The Bank should stipulate that districts undertake a study of future enrollment trends so that both the construction and closing of buildings is considered. Additionally, it should ensure that districts have a building maintenance plan, and the wherewithal to carry implement it.

Finding 10:

The General Assembly recognizes that as long as the state is responsible for the transportation of students to and from school, the General Assembly needs to monitor the amount of time that students spend on buses and use that time to promote student learning. The mantra "any-time learning" has to be instilled in all policies decisions. Consequently, looking to other states that have instituted computerized bus transportation systems that maximize efficiencies, and again, thinking innovatively for the 21st century, the state must consider other remedies to large buses in rural South Carolina. Could state entertain the idea of leasing buses, especially smaller buses equipped with Wi-Fi access in rural South Carolina to limit the morning ride time for students to one hour?

The sharing of resources--particularly buses--must be explored. The use of state and district owned buses for transportation to early childhood centers, dual enrollment classrooms, and CTE centers demands strong consideration.

Even with improved leadership and targeted resources, the goal of improving educational opportunities for all South Carolina children would be enhanced if students began their academic careers ready to learn. The General Assembly has already taken an important first step by providing full-day four-year-old kindergarten programs to at-risk four-year-olds residing in over 60 school districts. As with other programs enacted by the Legislature, the question now becomes how effective is the program. What is the quality of the interaction between the child and teacher in four-year-old kindergarten?

The General Assembly has also mandated that children entering public five-year-old kindergarten in school year 2016-17 will be measured for readiness along several domains – early literacy and language development; mathematical thinking; physical well-being; and social and emotional development. These readiness results will be able to answer the question of how effective are the programs and initiatives that support children and their families from birth to age five.

Finding 11:

The State Department of Education (SDE) recently selected three four-year-old kindergarten assessments. Individual districts may choose the one they wish to administer. The General Assembly should use the results of the assessments to determine whether individual programs are providing high quality learning to their students. If not, assistance in the form of professional development should be provided from SDE and the Office of First Steps. Professional Development should be available on both the instructor and administrator level. Additionally, a technical assistance network should be established between First Steps and SDE. Because both entities work with four-year-old kindergarten programs, it would be useful if the schools and centers were provided with similar information and guidance.

Finding 12:

The General Assembly should also examine whether all early childhood programs should be combined into one agency. Programs are currently provided through several state agencies (DSS, DDSN, DHEC, etc.). By involving so many different entities, knowing where to turn for assistance can be daunting. Moreover, the current system increases duplication and while decreasing efficiency. In order to centralize services, one agency should have control over state efforts that involve children four-years-old and younger.

OTHER BUDGET ISSUES:

Funding of Teacher Cadet Programs in high schools in Plaintiff Districts

Increased funding of Rural Teacher Incentive Program

Phase-in of funding for districts with extreme poverty

TIMELINE:

The following timeline is designed to provide a framework to the General Assembly. The Task Force is cognizant of the fact that the enactment of legislation is not guaranteed, and the timing proposed is subject to change.

June 2016	Enactment of legislation creating the Office of Transformation. SDE begins implementation of Regional Service Centers to increase capacity of plaintiff districts. Local districts begin implementation of recommendations that do not require approval of the General Assembly.
July 2016	Increased funding for school bus purchases or leases and for school bus drivers' salaries. Evaluation of school infrastructure needs, including technology, begins.
September 2016	The Office of Transformation is open and functioning
March 2017	School Infrastructure Report submitted to General Assembly and Governor.
June 2017	Enactment of legislation creating School Infrastructure Bank.

Subcommittee Recommendations

Provided below are the recommendations of the five Task Force subcommittees:

Transportation and Facilities Infrastructure Subcommittee

Recommendation 1:

The State will fund studies by the State Department of Education (SDE) (or allow SDE to contract with a private vendor) of school facilities in each of the Plaintiff Districts to analyze the needs, costs, and funding options to construct, renovate, and maintain schools in the Plaintiff Districts to provide adequate and safe space and modern equipment providing students with excellent academic and vocational learning opportunities.

These facilities must provide the space, technology, and equipment sufficient to enable the instructional staff and school leadership to expand student experiences in a manner that decreases student dropout rates and prepares them for technical training, post-secondary education, or the military. The facilities must increase student access and choices from a broader array of EEDA clusters, the arts, technology, technical education, and community learning.

These studies should also consider the use of school facilities as community learning centers, including access to technology, and as sites for the provision of multi-agency services. Demographic trends, including future district population trends, should also be incorporated in the study.

Finally, the studies should include the following items:

- Determine which districts have a five-year master plan;
- Determine current and projected enrolment capacity and utilization rates by school and gravel-levels;
- Analyze the needs, costs, and funding options to construct, renovate, or upgrade schools with special attention given to health, safety, energy management, technology, and instructional-needs of students;
- Determine if facilities can be shared or consolidated, especially for districts having fewer than 1,000 students; and
- Determine each district's ability to fund needed renovations or constructions;

The Department of Administration should oversee the study since a similar study was done this past year of state agencies.

Recommendation 2:

Once the study of school facilities referenced in Recommendation 1 is complete, SDE will create priorities for facility funding. The foremost category for immediate funding will be health and safety. Once the health and safety deficiencies are met, other categories will be funded.

Recommendation 3:

The State will provide a more robust school transportation system, including stable and adequate funding, for reductions in student travel time so that student learning is not impeded and students have increased access to courses, extra-curricular activities, and afterschool and summer learning opportunities. The feasibility and effectiveness of providing digital access for students on busses should be determined and provided if proven both feasible and practical in order to increase learning time.

Recommendation 4:

Plaintiff districts, with the assistance of SDE, must be required to evaluate whether intra-district consolidation of facilities is possible, and, if so, what transportation resources are needed. Plaintiff districts will report their findings to the Governor, Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore of the Senate.

Recommendation 5:

Districts should investigate whether facilities could be shared with other districts or entities such as Technical Colleges. Plaintiff districts will report their findings to the Governor, Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore of the Senate.

Recommendation 6:

SDE should study the feasibility of using more, but smaller, buses in rural areas where there is lower population density. Additionally, SDE should survey plaintiff districts to determine if smaller buses are desirable.

Recommendation 7:

The State Department of Education should evaluate the possibility of developing or purchasing software that could improve the state's bus routing system for the purpose of reducing student ride time and increasing the overall efficiency of the program.

Recommendation 8

The General Assembly should consider proposing a change to the state constitution whereby a district's debt limit can increase from eight percent to ten percent.

Recommendation 9

A capital bond fund, or School Infrastructure Bank, for facilities and other infrastructure needs should be established pursuant to the study referenced in Recommendation 1. Districts should be able to borrow funds from the state at a low--or no--interest rate.

Recommendation 10

The SDE should analyze whether plaintiff districts can, or should, cooperate and coordinate bus routes (i.e. could districts agree to transport across district lines in order to improve efficiency, and could routes be consolidated). SDE should further examine if statutory changes would be necessary to allow inter-district cooperation between districts.

Recommendation 11

The General Assembly will establish a special line item appropriation for plaintiff districts that will increase the average hourly rate paid to school bus drivers and to fund additional school bus drivers. The fund will initially focus on the plaintiff districts but then expand to all other districts.

Recommendation 12

SDE will work with school districts to develop best practices in regard to cross-training employees to also drive school buses.

Accountability (Academic and Financial), Continuous Improvement, and Leadership (District, School and Community) Subcommittee

Recommendation 1

Assessment cut scores need to be raised and aligned to NAEP College and Career Standards.

Recommendation 2

The accountability system should reflect college and career readiness. Schools should be graded on students being ready for jobs or college.

Recommendation 3

The accountability system should measure how well schools communicate career options to students.

Recommendation 4

Districts should identify regulatory barriers that prevent them from operating efficiently.

Recommendation 5

Efficiency studies of district operations would be very beneficial. A district should be required either to implement the study's findings or explain why they cannot be implemented. Incentives encouraging districts to undertake such studies and implement the recommendations should be examined.

Recommendation 6

It is essential that the state have a longitudinal data system in order to gauge student success from pre-K to college and/or careers.

Recommendation 7

The State Department of Education (SDE) and the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) should develop criteria for measuring school success in regard to students' workforce readiness. Data governance policies should be developed in order to require agencies to share relevant information.

Recommendation 8

SDE should ensure that schools provide linkages for students with both potential employers and institutions of higher education.

Recommendation 9

SDE and EOC should examine diplomas for special needs students. There should be an examination of how special needs students impact the graduation rate.

Recommendation 10

SDE should encourage schools to provide more effective follow through with parents and students in regard to the Education and Economic Development Act. This includes the use of high school assessments to help guide students' college and career decisions.

Recommendation 11

Leadership from the School Board to the classroom must be improved.

Recommendation 12

There should be mandatory training for Board members. Barriers to effective board leadership need to be explored and corrected.

Recommendation 13

The General Assembly should support leadership training programs for Superintendents and Principals.

Recommendation 14

Barriers for individuals wishing to be school leaders need to be examined (i.e. certification). Additionally, alternate pathways for school leaders should be considered.

Recommendation 15

Principal mentors should be used for new school leaders (see, e.g. CEEL, Northeast Leadership Academy, etc.).

Recommendation 16

Collaboration among districts and the sharing of best practices must be enhanced.

Recommendation 17

All school districts should be accredited through AdvanceEd.

Recommendation 18

The General Assembly should identify incentives for districts considering consolidation. Consolidation should be strongly explored by persistently underperforming districts, districts with low student populations, and districts in danger of financial insolvency. Funding inequities that exist between districts must be addressed.

Recommendation 19

Districts should be encouraged to consolidate business functions (i.e. human resources, transportation, facilities management, information technology, etc.) where appropriate.

Recommendation 20

If an Achievement School District (ASD) is considered to be the best option for assisting persistently struggling schools and districts, the model must to be modified so that it addresses the needs of South Carolina. For example, instead of initially focusing on the poorest performing schools across the state, entire school districts that consistently earn low report card scores could potentially be put under the jurisdiction of an ASD.

Recommendation 21

The South Carolina Virtual School program needs expansion in order to build capacity in the rural districts. Schools should examine flexibility in scheduling.

Recommendation 22

Collaboration and the sharing of best practices must be enhanced.

Recommendation 23

Perhaps the biggest change to the teaching profession is the proliferation of technology. More needs to be done to assist teachers in learning how to utilize and implement technology.

Recommendation 24

Teacher salaries--both for beginning and veteran teachers--need to be reexamined and probably increased.

Recommendation 25

SDE should explore the expansion of the adjunct teacher program, especially for Career and Technology and STEM positions.

Educator Recruitment, Retention, Effectiveness, and Professional Development Subcommittee

Recommendation 1

SDE will identify teachers who are successful in teaching children of poverty and recruit them to be classroom teachers, and implement professional learning for children of poverty. The State will further provide the technology and other state of the art instruments of remote learning proven to be effective when remote instruction is required in the classroom.

Recommendation 2

To improve the quality of teachers who are recruited and retained in the Plaintiff districts, the General Assembly should expand the Rural Teacher Initiative to include an allocation for Plaintiff districts. The allocation could be expended on a variety of best-practice strategies that address the specific hiring needs of each district. The effectiveness of the strategies employed would be evaluated and results provided to districts throughout the state as model initiatives. In addition, the General Assembly should review existing laws on the dismissal of ineffective teachers to guarantee that districts can expedite the dismissal process while guaranteeing due process of teachers.

An independent entity should set the desired salary levels and let the General Assembly fund them. This should be above the state funding given to other school districts for teacher salaries because other districts that are wealthier will increase salaries to keep/attract teachers.

In order to make a start, for the 2016-17 school year, the General Assembly shall provide a teacher/administrator salary supplement of \$5,000 for teachers and administrators in Plaintiff districts. Consideration should be given to allowing the districts flexibility in determining that only staff with demonstrated proficiency in Teaching Children of Poverty would receive this supplement. This should increase over the years as funding improves.

The State should pay the entire cost of the required Praxis examinations, background check, and tuberculosis test, for prospective teachers and for individuals in Plaintiff districts who are returning to school to become teachers. The costs for these are expensive and prohibitive for some students. Again, a contract to protect both the employee and district should be required.

Recommendation 3

Leadership in the classroom must be addressed. Research documents that, for school-related factors, the quality of the classroom teacher has the single greatest impact on student achievement. It is estimated that a teacher has two to three times more impact on a student's success in reading and mathematics than any other school factor, including services, facilities, and even leadership.

For Plaintiff districts, the General Assembly should increase teacher (and principal if appropriate) contract days by ten and fund accordingly. The purpose would be to provide staff development days where local experts in teaching children of poverty would assist other teachers, but not be removed from the classroom.

The General Assembly shall determine what incentives are necessary (and then fund them) to attract and retain top quality teachers into the Plaintiff Districts e.g. total loan forgiveness if the teacher works in such district for five years; housing allowance, free tuition for graduate courses, additional supplements for teachers in areas where supply is very low (math, science, special education etc). Funds for the Teacher Loan Program are not fully utilized; therefore, this program should be marketed more extensively to encourage greater participation. The candidates should receive larger loans, or have more rapid pay off of the loans for those in Plaintiff districts.

Recommendation 4

The State, working through SDE and CERRA and by offering enhanced compensation or other benefits, will establish a pool of well-qualified teachers to be employed in the Plaintiff districts sufficient to meet the districts' needs. Special consideration shall be given to teachers specially trained or proven to be effective in teaching students of poverty. The compensation and other benefits shall be sufficient to enable the Plaintiff districts to attract and retain teachers who are highly skilled and effective in teaching children of poverty.

For teachers who either have certification endorsements in teaching children of poverty or who are working towards such a certificate, provide an additional financial supplement. This should apply statewide as all districts have students in poverty. Also, the coursework for Teaching Children of Poverty should be provided by the colleges at no cost. The state would provide the funding to the colleges.

For districts that choose to employ retired teachers who are effective with children of poverty, the state should fund those teachers on the teacher salary schedule rather than a reduced salary. Also, the district could consider using the teacher on a part-time basis if appropriate. The State should provide funds for an expanded Teacher Cadet program to recruit students into teaching. CERRA should provide information as to the necessary costs.

Recommendation 5

The State will provide incentives and other resources for teachers in the Plaintiff districts to enable them to have access, time, and incentive to enroll in courses in higher education whose emphasis is teaching children of poverty, as well as earn graduate credit that will lead to an add-on certification for teachers trained to teach children of poverty.

The state should conduct a needs assessment of facility needs in the plaintiff districts and then fund those facility needs over a period of years. While facilities in themselves do not instruct, new, remodeled, non-leaking roofs, and technology ready buildings are essential to teacher and staff happiness and effectiveness.

Recent research on teacher retention suggests that having teachers feel ownership of their schools and programs is essential to having the teachers remain as teachers. The state should provide sufficient funds to Plaintiff districts to provide better mentoring and support for beginning teachers. However, the “good” teachers who are the experts should not be removed from the classroom for mentoring.

Recommendation 6

The State will provide financial incentives, such as the Homegrown Teacher Initiative, Rural Education Salary Supplement, and longevity bonuses sufficient to attract and retain top-notch superintendents and principals who, in turn, will be evaluated in part for their ability to attract and retain teachers or other leaders who are effective in teaching children of poverty.

The State shall provide Plaintiff districts with funds necessary to train their own teachers. This would be from teacher assistants (or other non-certified staff) who live (and likely will remain) in the districts and who show promise of becoming excellent teachers. Funds shall be provided for release time so these staff can leave work and attend college (possibly with some on line instruction as well as face to face. The semester required for student teaching should be funded at their present salary level with additional funds provided for the substitute teachers. To protect both the district and employee, suitable contracts should be developed to insure that the employee returns to the home district once the training is complete.

Recommendation 7

The State will establish employment standards for hiring and retaining qualified superintendents with sufficient incentives to attract them to the Plaintiff districts. These superintendents will be eligible for multi-year contracts of not less than five years to ensure stability and quality leadership. These superintendents shall receive annual evaluations based on objective criteria that includes, but is not limited to, increases in student outputs over time and their ability to recruit and retain effective principals and teachers. The contracts shall provide that they may be discharged only for just cause, and any district whose superintendent turnover rate is such that it creates instability within the district shall, at the sole discretion of SDE, have its superintendent appointed by SDE for not less than a five year period and have its annual evaluation performed by SDE. However, SDE will have the authority to terminate the employment contract at will based solely on its discretion, reserving the right to appoint another superintendent to fill the remaining years of the five year term under the same conditions.

Recommendation 8

The State will implement high-quality and embedded professional learning experiences that have been demonstrated to be effective and to increase student learning as well as preparing students to meet state academic and career standards. SDE shall establish criteria for demonstrated effectiveness based on state of the art knowledge and professional learning successes in similar settings. Educators shall be given the time, incentive, salary supplements, and support to undertake these professional learning experiences. Year-long contracts will be provided to teachers when needed to fully implement professional development.

Recommendation 9

The State will fund regional lead institutions of higher education (for example, Francis Marion University's Center of Excellence for Teachers of Children of Poverty) to develop and implement ongoing training for school district board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers on the issues of poverty and learning, develop and support community outreach and collaboration, improve leadership in turnaround schools to support teachers and principals to improve continuously, and work as a team with parents and the community.

Recommendation 10

The State will employ Francis Marion University's Center of Excellence for Teachers of Children of Poverty to convene meetings of community leaders, district board members, superintendents, principals and teachers, and experienced faculty from other colleges to deepen their understanding of the impact of poverty on achievement and methods of working collaboratively to institute educational achievement and learning based upon that knowledge.

Recommendation 11

SDE will require all teachers in their Goal Based Evaluations to include no less than one goal related to improving the achievement of children of poverty, and use action based research to document the achievement of that goal.

Recommendation 12

SDE and the Commission on Higher Education (CHE) will modify policies and practices based on research studies using systemic tools such as "Great Teachers and Leaders" and utilized by SDE to assess root causes related to teacher quality and turnover and effectiveness, and require state action to address root causes.

Recommendation 13

SDE and CERRA shall conduct an initial interview-based study of a sample of teachers in the Plaintiff districts. The purpose of the study is to identify school, district, and personal factors related to attracting and retaining teachers in the Plaintiff Districts. The sample should include four subsamples: a subsample of those new to teaching (Subsample 1), a subsample of those new to a Plaintiff District (Subsample 2), a subsample of those who have taught in the same district for a minimum of eight years (Subsample 3), and a subsample of those who are no longer teaching or no longer teaching in the Plaintiff districts (Subsample 4). Interview questions should focus on why a teacher chose to teach in their respective school, why a teacher chose to transfer to that school as well as reasons for leaving his or her previous school, why an experienced teacher chose to remain in that school and/or district for an extended period of time, and why a teacher left a school in the Plaintiff Districts.

Recommendation 14

CHE will identify, and the State will fund, a cadre of higher educational faculty across the state to work together and in collaboration with school district personnel and faculty at other institutions of postsecondary education to enhance the understanding and ability to work with children of poverty and to ensure their success. The cadre is further responsible for working with South Carolina professional associations to form a professional association focused on children of poverty.

Recommendation 15

SDE and CERRA will require school districts to utilize annual surveys of teachers, including queries on working conditions, to direct the work of school and district leaders in building a culture in which teachers want to work and feel supported in their efforts.

Recommendation 16

The State will establish regional early childhood development training centers in two or more of the Plaintiff Districts staffed by professors of early childhood education and their students. The practicum students will be provided full scholarships, to include tuition and travel allowances, for their training during that semester.

Recommendation 17

SDE, CHE, the State Board of Education, and teacher preparation institutions will modify regulations, policies, and practices to ensure more rigorous admission and exit requirements for teacher preparation programs, ensure that programs are consistent with state learning standards, and incorporate the principles of teaching children of poverty as well as practica with children of poverty in all programs.

Recommendation 18

Free the districts and schools of paperwork requirements, excessive testing, and give teachers time to prepare their lessons and collaborate with peers. The State should determine the proper balance between high stakes testing and accountability and loss of local control of the educational process and work toward improving this. Technology could possibly be of benefit here.

Recommendation 19

SDE shall specify the criteria for effective professional training programs implemented in the districts. Those criteria shall include, but not be limited to, alignment with performance expectations, demonstrated achievement, and effectiveness in similar districts. SDE will identify all state funds available for professional learning, evaluate the process, content and results of all professional learning experiences/programs to determine how successful they are in accomplishing their goals, and recommend improvements or elimination if the goals are not achieved.

Recommendation 20

CERRA will conduct a survey of educators and students majoring in education to determine which incentives could attract educators to rural and underperforming districts.

Recommendation 21

Revise the Teacher Fair Employment and Dismissal Act (S.C. Code of Laws Ann. §59-25-450, et.al) to remove the termination appeal process from the local school boards for teachers and principals who are dismissed. If the teacher or principal wishes to appeal, the proper venue should be the courts. Another option would be to have an independent arbitrator hear the dismissal case rather than the school board with the teacher having the option of appealing to the courts if decided against the teacher or principal.

Recommendation 22

Support should be provided to plaintiff school district human resource managers. Best practices regarding the recruiting and hiring of educators and other personnel should be shared with the managers.

Recommendation 23

School districts must find ways for teachers to experience professional growth without leaving the classroom full-time. Such opportunities can include hybrid roles and team teaching. North Carolina is examining legislation to provide funding to districts that establish new professional growth models.

Recommendation 24

Educators must become more engaged in teaching. Schools need to seek out and allow greater teacher engagement and input on decisions. Schools with the reputation of engaging teachers will have a better chance of recruiting excellent teachers.

Recommendation 25

Distance/virtual learning may be more fully utilized to bring excellent teaching into rural classrooms. Facilitators should be in the onsite classroom to facilitate student collaboration and learning.

Recommendation 26

Professional development must be improved. A twelve-month or extended teacher contract, especially for the Plaintiff districts, could be implemented to help close the content knowledge gap. This would allow for summer professional development designed around the adoption of textbooks, standards, or curriculum. Also, micro-credentialing could be implemented to recognize educators who obtain new skills. Professional development opportunities need to be audited in order to ensure effectiveness.

Recommendation 27

Educator preparation must be transformed. Technology can be a tremendous tool in training future educators by allowing them to observe diverse classrooms (e.g., rural, special education, high minority, and high poverty). The state must examine the exit requirements of graduates, i.e. what does the state want teacher preparation graduates to know in order to be effective on their first day in the classroom (classroom ready teachers).

Recommendation 28

Transforming education is not just a school issue, it is the responsibility of the entire community. South Carolina should consider efforts like those in Washington State to turn schools into community hubs. Non-educators such as pastors and farmers can be recruited to serve as substitutes, bus drivers, etc.

College and Career Pathways of High Quality Learning Opportunities in Elementary, Middle, and High Schools**Recommendation 1**

In order to provide greater access to college-level courses, SDE, CHE, and the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education (SBTCE) should be required to establish cut scores on admission tests that would allow students to avoid having to take remedial classes.

Recommendation 2

The Central Carolina Technical College scholarship model should be examined and expanded across the state in a more uniform service model starting in the Plaintiff districts. [Students who graduate high school with at least a C+ average, and who meet the necessary scores on a college assessment, can attend a technical college for two years without expense to the students.]

Recommendation 3

SBE and SBTCE should be appropriated funding and required to increase the availability of dual enrollment courses throughout the state. This includes making dual enrollment more available and affordable for students and their families, starting in the Plaintiff districts, without expense to the students.

Recommendation 4

In addition to offering many more dual enrollment courses, the State shall enable each high school in a Plaintiff district to offer a full array of courses leading to workforce, career, and college access, as well as youth apprenticeships, to prepare more students to meet the goals of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. This shall include dual enrollment courses, career and technical preparation, full access to technical college programs, course recovery mechanisms leading to high school graduation, access to all EEDA career clusters and Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and/or similar advanced course offerings during the school day, afterschool, and summer. SBTCE and SDE, working with local technical colleges and school districts shall do the following:

- A. Conduct a curriculum review in the Plaintiff middle and high schools to determine availability and success in courses preparatory for high school and beyond;
- B. Audit the implementation of the provisions of the EEDA with an emphasis on improving guidance and counseling and providing assistance for full and effective implementation;
- C. Develop engaging, rigorous, state-approved models of teaching and learning;
- D. Recommend changes in state law, regulation, funding, and transportation systems so that high school students successfully achieve the level of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. All changes and programs should be developed with representatives of local workforce development boards and district coordinators of advanced learning; and,
- E. Incorporate strategies to equip and support teachers of advanced courses to engage students.

Recommendation 5

The General Assembly should fully fund counselors and career specialists established within the EEDA with primary focus on the Plaintiff districts.

Recommendation 6

In areas where there is a shortage of highly-qualified educators, SDE, through its virtual education program, should initiate an online series of courses that are taught remotely by expert teachers. In-class assistance should be provided by existing classroom teachers until those teachers also become highly-qualified. Course offerings should be enhanced, and seventh and eighth grade exploratory courses should be expanded.

Recommendation 7

Because the Plaintiff districts have high concentrations of students living in poverty, the General Assembly should fund, or phase-in funding over three years, an additional allocation to districts of \$1,500 per student (which equates to 0.5 of the base student cost) for students in kindergarten through grade 5 who are enrolled in public schools in the Plaintiff districts. The additional funds would be used to provide after-school programs, arts enrichment, extended day or extended-year learning opportunities, or other initiatives aligned to the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. Accountability for the expenditure and effectiveness of the programs would be required.

Recommendation 8

SDE, working with a District Coordinator for Family Involvement, Afterschool and/or Summer Learning Programs, will design and implement extended time learning programs. The State will seek other funds in addition to State funds to support programs in all elementary and middle schools in the Plaintiff Districts. The coordinators will build partnerships to design and provide quality afterschool and/or summer learning opportunities in or near their school. Coordinators will work with the principal and superintendent as well as the Federal Funds Coordinator to allocate Title I and other funds to develop comprehensive afterschool and/or summer learning programs, but, to provide for certainty and insure a long term solution, the State will ensure that these programs are fully funded irrespective of the success in obtaining outside resources. Partnerships with identities such as the SC Afterschool Alliance, Boys and Girls Clubs, literacy, STEM, arts and cultural and community organizations, employers, and faith-based, youth-serving and workforce groups, and technical colleges and other higher education institutions should be leveraged to expand and improve the afterschool and/or summer learning opportunities and to engage more families in the education of their students and improve the parents' own education levels. To maximize the impact and minimize costs, the afterschool and summer learning opportunities, should employ master teachers from the region and local schools and use community teachers—tutors, mentors, artists, retirees and college students—to inspire the students and involve families in the planning and delivery of the programs.

Recommendation 8

Districts should investigate whether facilities can be shared with other districts or entities such as Technical Colleges.

Recommendation 9

SDE should continue its work with institutions of higher education in order to ensure that new educators receive the proper pre-service coursework.

Recommendation 10

The South Carolina Arts Commission and SDE shall provide leadership and support to school districts to implement engaging comprehensive and integrated arts education programs within the school day and through opportunities after school and during summer. Districts and schools shall be eligible to receive grants for curriculum development, coordination with other community and education providers, and professional development for providers. Instructional implementation may include acquisition of materials and access to arts learning experiences in the school day, afterschool, and summers. Priority shall be given to starting STEAM summer learning camps (integrating science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) and developing and expanding Arts in Basic Curriculum in the Plaintiff schools and districts. A STEAM grant fund shall be established to support the development and on-going implementation of one hundred STEAM summer learning sties, twenty Arts in Basic Curriculum sites, and teaching artists residencies to be phased-in over five years in interested Plaintiff districts.

Recommendation 11

SDE in partnership with interested Plaintiff schools and teacher preparation programs shall help recruit and prepare teacher education students and teacher education graduates to give personalized attention to struggling students in summer programs, and give prospective teachers opportunities to work in engaging learning setting in high poverty or rural communities.

Recommendation 12

Each Plaintiff district, with leadership from SDE and state funding, shall provide systemic student and family outreach to enable planning for future successful workforce, career, and postsecondary education experiences. This system should include, but not be limited to, the following: space, staffing, and resources sufficient for regular parent and student workshops; a minimum of two meetings annually among students, families, and counselors; organized visits for families and student to institutions of higher education and/or workspaces; and involvement of businesses and employers in design and implementation of visits to workplaces.

Recommendation 13

The Education Oversight Committee, in communication with the South Carolina School Boards Association, the South Carolina Association of School Administrators, Palmetto State Teachers Association, South Carolina Education Association, SDE, and other appropriate entities will convene a task force to review school and district disciplinary polices to determine the policies' effectiveness in reducing problem behavior, their fairness to all students, their impact on instructional time, and shall report and recommend policies and practices that are successful.

Recommendation 14

SDE shall support, with funding from the General Assembly, districts through regional education centers or consortia. Existing consortia may be utilized to provide assistance, and consortia will be coordinated to serve districts that are not currently working with other districts through this regional approach.

Recommendation 15

Additional professional development staffing, coordination, and assistance may be provided through these centers. District will be able to better coordinate services.

High Quality Early Childhood Education and Family Engagement Subcommittee

Recommendation 1

Children from birth through age five, and their families who live in poverty in the plaintiff districts and throughout the state, should receive high-quality, effective interventions to children and their families in poverty from birth through age 5. Recent research in brain development has documented that quality early childhood programs, those with close interactions between teachers and children and those that engage families and communities, are the key to long-term cognitive development, especially for children living in poverty. While South Carolina has many state agencies and programs serving these children, coordination of efforts are limited, accountability is lacking, and quality suffers. The goal must be to mitigate the potential damages of poverty as soon as possible with coordinated efforts beginning with prenatal services and continuing throughout the child's early development.

The example of Florence School District One's Start SMART initiative must be replicated at the state and local levels of government. Schools, private child care centers, families, communities, pediatricians, employers, and state agencies must work together to ensure all children are ready for success in public education.

At the state level, to improve the effectiveness of all state-funded early childhood programs that serve children and families in poverty, the state should consider the recommendations of the Southern Regional Education Board's Commission on Early Childhood. The Commission's report highlighted best practices from other SREB states and made specific state policy recommendations that focus on: Program Quality, Teacher Quality, Accountability, Access, and Governance. While South Carolina has greatly expanded access to full-day 4K for children in poverty, the state has to improve the quality, accountability and governance surrounding all early childhood programs that serve children in poverty.

Recommendation 2

Develop and regularly update the following: standards for programs for children from birth to third grade, learning guidelines for children, and practice standards for teachers and classrooms.

Recommendation 3

Align quality standards for early childhood programs to each other and to K-12 programs, with special attention to aligning standards from pre-K to third grade.

Recommendation 4

Coordinate funding streams across public and private settings to achieve efficient use of resources and promote high-quality programs for children and families.

Recommendation 5

Promote effective, evidence-based and developmentally appropriate curricula in early childhood programs.

Recommendation 6

Establish systematic quality improvement initiatives, such as quality rating systems for child development programs, as well as incentives that reward and improve performance.

Recommendation 7

Develop and sustain a high-quality early childhood program workforce with the competencies to foster the social, emotional and cognitive development of young children.

Recommendation 8

Ensure that pre-service early childhood practitioner-training programs at postsecondary institutions provide opportunities for future teachers to develop the specialized competencies they will need to work effectively with young children.

Recommendation 9

Regularly review, and improve as needed, licensing and professional development requirements for practitioners in order to ensure that workforce standards are continuously realigned with program standards.

Recommendation 10

Ensure that practitioners in early childhood programs have access to high-quality and affordable professional development and that high-impact strategies such as coaching are available for those who need skills to meet program standards or licensing requirements.

Recommendation 11

Enact a state accountability system that assess program performance and reward quality.

Recommendation 12

Establish an assessment system and strategies that support teachers' and caregivers' instruction, measure children's progress in essential domains of growth and development, and are developmentally appropriate for young children.

Recommendation 13

Set expectations and performance targets for publicly funded programs, and report outcomes to policymakers and education leaders regularly.

Recommendation 14

Enact performance-based financing policies that promote continuous improvement and reward quality in early childhood development programs and services.

Recommendation 15

Align standards, curricula and assessment both vertically (within a grade level) and horizontally (from prekindergarten to the third grade) to maximize the gains for young learners.

Recommendation 16

Ensure that financing policies call for a full analysis of the various sources of available funding— which can inform policy and future investment.

Recommendation 17

Incorporate early childhood program data — taking appropriate steps to ensure full security of information about individual students — into states’ longitudinal data systems to enhance capacity to track results.

Recommendation 18

Establish cross-agency data analytics systems and processes that inform long-term policy and financing solutions.

Recommendation 19

Conduct cost-benefit analyses of programs and services to determine effectiveness of interventions.

Recommendation 20

Provide high-quality early learning services to the groups of young children most likely to benefit from interventions.

Recommendation 21

Identify general demographic and economic factors that most interfere with school readiness in the state, and ensure services are available to address the needs of children at risk — and their families.

Recommendation 22

Devise early-warning systems to identify specific groups of children who may benefit from early and sustained interventions — those born at low birth weight, for example, and those living with single parents in disadvantaged homes — and coordinate networks of support services for them and their families.

Recommendation 23

Set a goal to serve a high proportion of at-risk children in the state and establish a plan and timetable for reaching the goal.

Recommendation 24

Establish eligibility priorities for participation in early childhood programs to target services to the most at-risk students so the available resources meet the greatest need.

Recommendation 25

Assess statewide needs and survey programs periodically to determine if the state’s early childhood programs are geographically and socioeconomically distributed to meet the state’s highest needs.

Recommendation 26

Establish a comprehensive and integrated framework of policies and programs that supports early childhood development in the state.

Recommendation 27

Establish a policy and fiscal framework for early childhood development, from birth through eight years old, as a strategic priority.

Recommendation 28

Create a statewide cabinet or coordinating council responsible to the governor, legislature or key education or human services leader to provide policy direction and coordinate overall planning for early childhood education in the state. This entity should focus on assisting children and families living in poverty.

Recommendation 29

Conduct a comprehensive budget analysis of all funding streams related to early childhood development, and use the results to coordinate among multiple agencies and maximize the federal, state, local and private resources available for young children and their families.

Recommendation 30

Recognize early childhood programs as strategic elements of the state's overall economic and cultural development efforts, and include improvement and targeted expansion of these programs as part of any strategic state effort.

Recommendation 31

An inventory of early childhood education resources that are offered in other states, but not South Carolina, should be compiled.

Recommendation 32

SDE, Office of First Steps, Children's Trust of South Carolina, and other applicable agencies and entities should conduct a study of early childhood funding streams in order to identify the sources of revenue.

Recommendation 33

According to a June, 2015 SREB report entitled *Confronting the Fade-Out Debate: Children Flourish and Gains Do Last in High-Quality Pre-K Programs*, children who are provided with high-quality pre-K programs are more likely to avoid remediation and special education than their peers who did not have access to such programs. In order to ensure that programs are high-quality, South Carolina needs to adopt a statewide quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) that applies to both state programs and private programs funded by the state.

Recommendation 34

The South Carolina Department of Education (SDE) and the Office of First Steps to School Readiness should adopt the ten national standards of program quality issued by NIEER and apply them to all programs receiving state funding.

Recommendation 35

Working with the colleges of education, SDE should ensure that teacher credentialing programs are offered that are tailored to early childhood education teachers. The State will establish regional early childhood development training centers in two or more of the Plaintiff Districts staffed by professors of early childhood education and their students. The practicum students will be provided full scholarships, to include tuition and travel allowances, for their training during that semester. The training centers will train childcare providers and early childhood teachers, with specific focus on high-quality teacher-child interactions.

Recommendation 36

SDE and the Office of First Steps should ensure that pre-K curricula is appropriate and aligned to early learning standards.

Recommendation 37

South Carolina's early childhood services and programs are scattered throughout numerous agencies, e.g. First Steps, SDE, DSS, DDSN, etc. The General Assembly should ensure that there is better coordination among the agencies to prevent overlapping and to promote greater efficiency.

Recommendation 38

In order to serve more at-risk children, SDE, First Steps, and Head Start should be required to collaborate in order to avoid overlap and create greater access to high-quality child care and parenting programs.

Recommendation 39

In school year 2015-16, the state is administering an early literacy assessment to all students entering public schools in kindergarten. Pursuant to Act 287 of 2014, the General Assembly has already charged the State Board of Education with implementing a comprehensive readiness assessment in school year 2016-17. The General Assembly will fund the cost of the assessment(s) and the professional training for kindergarten teachers who will administer the readiness assessment(s) and complete the observation checklists. Using this information, the General Assembly will then require that EOC (or whomever is designated) annually report on the early readiness indicators by state and county. The report will require that a statewide longitudinal data system be implemented and all responsible agencies and programs will be required to contribute data. The states of Maryland and Kentucky produce such reports that guide policy decisions and resources.

Recommendation 40

This past session the General Assembly funded additional FTEs for a community engagement and outreach office at the Department of Education. This office should be charged with the following: SDE, in collaboration with DSS, DHEC, EOC, and First Steps, will provide guidance and support for district and/or regional meetings of early childhood collaborative work groups, including educators, parent liaisons, health care providers, and family services providers, to promote communication, continuous learning and the evaluation of children's progress and development.

APPENDICES

Appendix I	Framework and Summary Submitted by the Plaintiff Districts
Appendix II	Plaintiff Districts' Recommendations
Appendix III	Staff Recommendations
Appendix IV	District Data Provided by the Education Oversight Committee