

## **Speaker of the House Jay Lucas: Remarks to the House Education Review and Reform Task Force**

Thank you, Chairwoman Allison for that kind introduction. Superintendent Molly Spearman, my fellow colleagues, members of the business community, and educators, I sincerely appreciate your graciousness in agreeing to participate on this task force. I am genuinely excited about the opportunities that lie ahead for education in our state.

“Each of you is here for a very specific reason. You were carefully selected because of your skills, knowledge, expertise, leadership and dedication; but the main reason you were chosen to serve on this task force is because of your unwavering support for public education in South Carolina. I’ve heard it said that trying to find a solution to education is a fool’s errand. I don’t believe that and I know you don’t believe that either. Although the challenge ahead is great, your ideas and desires to improve our education system are far greater. I am confident you will exceed everyone’s expectations and make the tough decisions necessary to successfully ensure our students receive the educational opportunity they deserve.

“My own story is one of what educational opportunity can bring. My grandfather had a sixth grade education and worked at the mill. My grandfather believed that hard work was the only means to help his family. Years later, my father chose a different path, becoming the first member of his family to receive a high school diploma. Those four years of high school taught my father that education was the means to lift his family from poverty. My father would stop at nothing to further his education. He believed in the power of education so strongly he enlisted in the Army and fought in the Korean War, specifically to receive GI benefits to make his dream of going to college a reality. The day I was born, my father - at twenty-five years old - received a college diploma.

“This lesson was not lost on me. There would be no need to go to war to go to college. There would be no need to work in the mill to support my family. Because of my father, high school was now an expectation. High school led to college, college to a master’s degree and later law school. Now, here I stand as the Speaker of the South Carolina House, a single generation removed from my grandfather who never imagined how much four years of public high school would mean to his son and grandson.

“As a rural lawmaker and now Speaker, I have spent time reflecting on several areas which I believe need substantial improvement. The necessity for education reform is an issue teachers, politicians, and members of the business community have discussed for decades. We all know how South Carolina’s education system compares with the national standard. We also know that initiating these reforms is a complicated process that requires more than just the “spaghetti approach”. We can’t afford to simply throw a bunch of ideas up against the wall hoping that some stick. This is why I have brought all of you together to work towards a real solution.

“South Carolina is immensely blessed with a business-friendly climate that continues to bring thousands of jobs to our state. Every week, we hear of a new company looking to expand or relocate. However, the biggest concern for job creators is that their applicants are not educated enough to perform the tasks asked of them. At a time when opportunity for employment is readily available, it is a disservice to our young people and our state when our education system fails to equip them with the tools they need to succeed.

“When creating this task force, I outlined specific goals. Our teachers need to have the flexibility to help our students acquire a 21<sup>st</sup> century skillset, which outpaces the requirements mandated in the antiquated Carnegie unit system. We must give every individual school district the opportunity to maximize its potential. We must supply our teachers with updated, comprehensive curriculum standards at every level. And we must work to strengthen the relationship with our job creators so that our children learn the technological, mathematical, and scientific skills necessary to succeed in the workforce.

"Growing up and living in Hartsville, the "Corridor of Shame" is no stranger. I have seen firsthand the challenges our schools and teachers face in less affluent districts. But witnessing Darlington County schools soar to levels never thought possible; I know that effective leadership and consistent guidance are two of many ingredients that bring about change.

"The recent *Abbeyville* decision requires our state to provide a minimally adequate education. I disagree wholeheartedly with that standard because I do not think South Carolina should think in terms of minimums. I believe we should think in terms of maximizing our possibilities to achieve the highest standards.

"C.S. Lewis once stated, "The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles, but to irrigate deserts." I ask you to think about that as you continue on this journey to find key reforms that put our education system on a path to success. I ask that you take C.S. Lewis' approach. Cutting down a jungle does nothing but focus solely on correcting the current inadequacies in our system. Hacking away at ineffective policy will only yield minimally adequate results.

"Instead, focus on irrigating the desert. Focus on achieving what others think cannot be achieved. Make South Carolina's educational system competitive on the national scale. Think outside the box. Be innovative. If we have procedures and programs that work, keep them. If there is a program you believe is failing, then scrap it and find a new approach.

"As I said earlier, the task ahead of you is great, but I am confident that each of your input will revolutionize our methods so that our children will be ready for success. In doing so, you will fulfill my hope that every child educated in South Carolina will have the opportunity to receive a 21<sup>st</sup> century education which far exceeds the arbitrary "minimally adequate standard" articulated by our supreme court. Again, I would like to thank you in advance for the work you will do on behalf of our young people. I look forward to hearing your recommendations and wish you Godspeed.