

EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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# AGENDA



SOUTH CAROLINA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY &  
LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

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Education and Cultural Affairs  
Subcommittee

Chairman Tim McGinnis

The Honorable Phillip Bowers

The Honorable Michael F. Rivers, Sr.

The Honorable Paul B. Wickensimer

The Honorable Robert Q. Williams

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AGENDA

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Wednesday Oct. 8, 2025

10:30 A.M.

Room 516 – Blatt Building

- I. Approval of Minutes of September 3, 2025 Meeting
- II. Discussion of the study of the SC Department of Education
- III. Adjournment

# MINUTES



**SOUTH CAROLINA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY &  
LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

**Chair Jeffrey E. “Jeff” Johnson**

**Vice-Chair Chris Wooten**

|                                    |                                           |                                  |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Lucas Atkinson                     | Wendell K. Jones                          | Scott Montgomery                 |
| William H. Bailey                  | Kathy Landing                             | Michael Rivers                   |
| Phillip Bowers                     | John R. McCravy III                       | Richard B. “Blake” Sanders       |
| Gary S. Brewer Jr.                 | Annie E. McDaniel                         | Marvin “Mark” Smith              |
| Kambrell H. Garvin                 | Timothy A. “Tim” McGinnis                 | Robert Williams                  |
| Leon Douglas “Doug” Gilliam        | Travis A. Moore                           | Paul B. Wickensimer              |
| Lewis Carter<br>Research Director  | Cathy Greer<br>Administrative Coordinator | Roland Franklin<br>Legal Counsel |
| Charlie LaRosa<br>Research Analyst | Riley McCullough<br>Research Analyst      |                                  |

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Room 228 Blatt Building

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## MEETING MINUTES

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Wednesday, September 3, 2025

10:30 a.m.

Room 110 – Blatt Building

### Archived Video Available

- I. Pursuant to House Legislative Oversight Committee Rule 6.7, South Carolina ETV was allowed access for streaming the meeting. You may access an archived video of this meeting by visiting the South Carolina General Assembly’s website (<http://www.scstatehouse.gov>) and clicking on Committee Postings and Reports, then under House Standing Committees click on Legislative Oversight. Then, click on Video Archives for a listing of archived videos for the Committee.

### Attendance

- I. The Education and Cultural Subcommittee meeting was called to order by Chair Timothy A. “Tim” McGinnis on Wednesday, September 3, 2025, in Room 110 of the Blatt Building. All subcommittee members (Chair McGinnis; Representative Phillip Bowers; Representative Michael Rivers; Representative Paul Wickensimer; Representative Robert Williams) were present for all or a portion of the meeting

### Minutes

- I. House Rule 4.5 requires standing committees to prepare and make available to the public the minutes of committee meetings, but the minutes do not have to be verbatim accounts of meetings.

### Approval of Minutes

- I. Representative Wickensimer made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from prior meeting. A roll call vote was held, and the motion passed.

| <b>Rep. Wickensimer's motion to approve meeting minutes.</b> | Yea | Nay | Not Voting |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|------------|
| Rep. Bowers                                                  | ✓.  |     |            |
| Rep. McGinnis                                                | ✓.  |     |            |
| Rep. Rivers                                                  | ✓.  |     |            |
| Rep. Wickensimer                                             | ✓.  |     |            |
| Rep. Williams                                                | ✓.  |     |            |

### Discussion of the Department of Education Overview

- I. Chair McGinnis acknowledges that the Department of Education, Superintendent's Chief of Staff, Dr. Rebecca Gunnlaugsson and any other members of the agency's executive team must be sworn in before giving testimony.
- II. Topics of Discussion Include:
- a. Agency operations division
  - b. Division goals
  - c. Staffing
  - d. Division organization
  - e. Legal affairs division

Members ask questions to Dr. Gunnlaugsson and Todd Atwater, throughout their testimony, and they respond accordingly.

### Adjournment

- I. There being no further business, the meeting is adjourned.

# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OVERVIEW

# SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION OVERVIEW

## MISSION

The mission of the South Carolina Department of Education is to serve students, support teachers, empower parents, and engage the community so that every student graduates prepared to reach their full potential.



## VISION

Ensure every South Carolina graduate is college, career, and/or military ready. By 2030, the goal is to have at least 75% of students at or above grade level in reading and math.

## STATE SUPERINTENDENT of EDUCATION

Ellen E. Weaver

- Earned B.A. in Political Science, as well as a Master's in Educational Leadership, from Bob Jones University
- Worked in Senator Jim DeMint's office for 12 years
- Founded Palmetto Promise Institute
- Chaired Education Oversight Committee
- Sworn in as South Carolina's 19<sup>th</sup> State Superintendent of Education on January 11, 2023

## DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION GOALS

1. Develop and implement systems and supports to ensure a safe and a healthy school culture.
2. Align state standards, curriculum, assessment, and professional development for maximum learning impact as evidenced by student achievement outcomes.
3. Recruit and retain the highest quality teachers and administrators.
4. Develop and deploy HOPE Network infrastructure and support for districts currently or recently under state takeover state.

## STATE BOARD of EDUCATION

The State Board of Education is established in Article XI § 1 of South Carolina Constitution. The Board consists of 17 members, one appointed from each of the state's 16 judicial circuits by the legislators representing the various circuits, and a 17th member appointed by the governor. Members are appointed for four-year terms.

## EMPLOYEES

AS OF JULY 2025

893

## TOTAL FUNDING

FY 25-26

\$7,611,068,522

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- Superintendent's Division
  - Office of Audit Services
  - Office of the Chief Information Officer
  - Office of the Chief Information Security Officer
  - Office of Human Resources
  - Office of Finance
- Division of College, Career, and Military Readiness
  - Office of Assessment and Standards
  - Office of Career and Technical Education
  - Office of Educator Effectiveness and Leadership Development
  - Office of Instructional Materials
  - Office of Instructional Supports
  - Office of Adult Education
  - Office of Educator Services
  - Office of Federal and State Accountability
  - Office of School Transformation
  - Office of Special Education Services
  - Research and Data Analysis
  - Office of Virtual Education
- Division of District Operations and Support
  - Office of Health and Nutrition
  - Office of Medicaid Services
  - Office of School Facilities
  - Office of Transportation
- Division for Legal Affairs
  - Office of Emergency Programs
  - Office of Governmental Affairs
  - Office of General Counsel
  - Grants Program
  - Office of Procurement
- Division of Strategic Engagement
  - Office of Communications
  - Office of Community Engagement
  - Office of Education Choice and Family Engagement
  - Office of Safe Schools
  - Office of Student Support

# AGENCY PRESENTATION



# House Legislative Oversight Education and Cultural Subcommittee

October 8, 2025

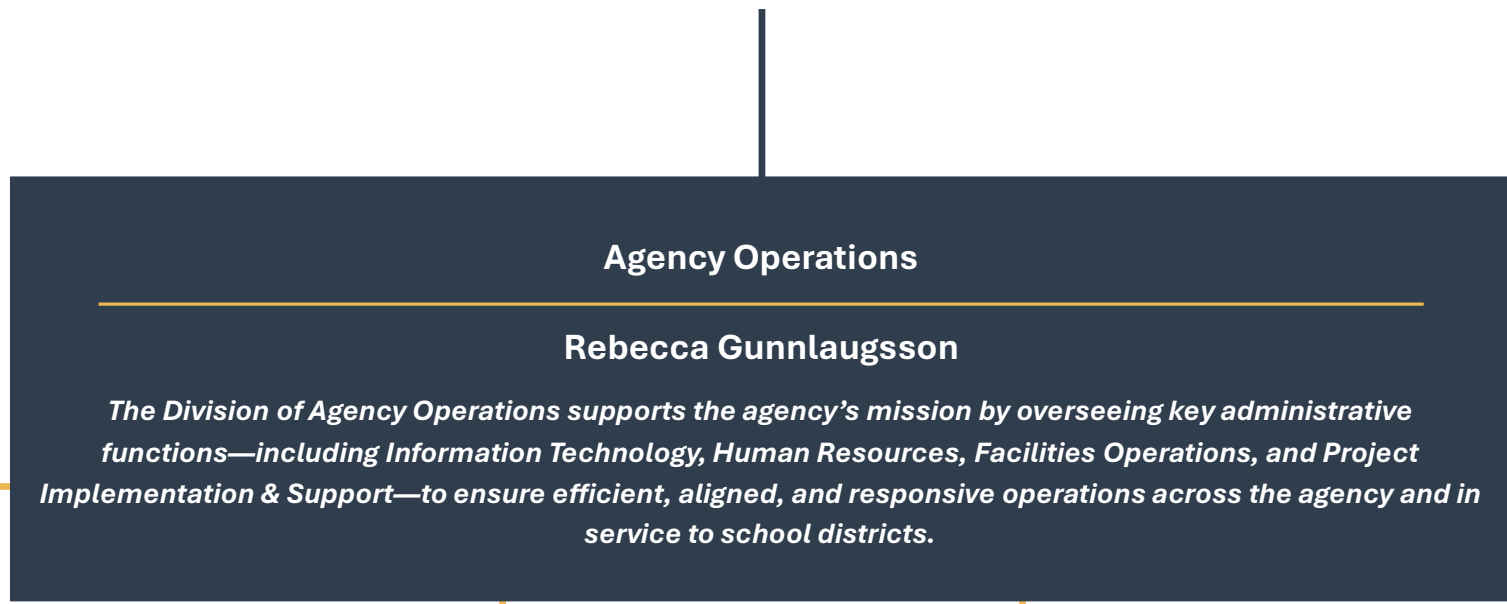


# Agency Divisions

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## Agency Operations





**Information  
Technology**

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**Dan Ralyea**

**FTEs: 58**  
**Hiring in Process: 3**

**Implementation  
& Support**

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**Alex Farquharson**

**FTEs: 7**  
**Hiring in Process: 2**

**Facilities  
Operations**

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**Jered Wooten**

**FTEs: 3**  
**Hiring in Process: 0**

**Human  
Resources**

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**Lisa McCloud**

**FTEs: 8**  
**Hiring in Process: 0**

**Turnover Rate:\* 13.3%**

\*Turnover rate calculated for FY23-24.

## Information Technology

### Dan Ralyea

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Information Technology oversees the agency's technology infrastructure, cybersecurity, and internal systems, while also leading research, data management, and district technology support. In addition to maintaining secure and reliable operations for SCDE staff, the office provides districts with guidance and tools related to data systems and reporting. It also supports research and analytics functions that inform policy, track progress on strategic goals, and promote data-driven decision-making across the agency.*

#### Services:

- Maintain and support agency and district IT infrastructure, hardware, and software.
- Protect agency systems and data through secure network access and cybersecurity tools.
- Support student information systems, including PowerSchool, Ed-Fi Data Collection, and SUNS.
- Collect, analyze, and report education data for state and federal compliance.
- Publish annual state and federal school report cards.
- Assist other SCDE programs with data access, reporting, and analytics.

#### Customers:

SCDE Staff | School Districts

#### Accomplishments:

- Maintained uninterrupted IT operations and cybersecurity for all SCDE systems.
- Supported 1,300 school, district, and state report card publications annually.
- Processed more than 300 public data requests and published reports.
- Ensured federal and state data reporting compliance across 83 school districts.
- Expanded support for unique student identifiers across 98 entities including DSS, First Steps, and RFA.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Implementing the Growing Pathways for Students (GPS) platform, a modern statewide education data ecosystem using Ed-Fi standards to unify data, improve reporting, and support career and postsecondary pathway planning.
- Advancing the SAFE K-12 cybersecurity initiative by strengthening district protections and monitoring systems.
- Streamlining agency-wide access to data dashboards and automating internal reporting tools.
- Enhancing infrastructure support for new applications, cloud services, and AI-enabled analytics.

# How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

Information Technology is a newly integrated office formed from Research and Data Analysis and Chief Information Office.

The mission of the South Carolina Department of Education's Information Technology program is to design, implement, and support secure, innovative, scalable, and interoperable technology solutions that enable every student, educator, parent, policymaker, and community member to thrive.

We are committed to:

- **Providing reliable digital infrastructure and tools** that support teaching, learning, and efficient operations statewide.
- **Facilitating seamless collaboration and data-driven decision-making** among all educational stakeholders.
- **Ensuring reliability, security, and sustainability** in every technology initiative.
- **Partnering with schools, families, and policymakers** to anticipate needs, close gaps, and foster continuous improvement.

*Through these efforts, we advance educational excellence, operational efficiency, and lifelong learning for all South Carolinians*

**>\$800,000**

Recouped via updated  
Medicaid Reimbursement  
Application

**>\$100,000**

Contract negotiation  
savings due to  
implemented True-Up  
Clause to reconcile  
billing with usage

**>300**

Data  
Requests/FOIA  
Processed

**>1800**

Work-Stations  
Deployed

BY **2030** **75%** OF STUDENTS AT OR  
AT LEAST **ABOVE GRADE LEVEL**

Office of Information Technology Strategic Plan

## Three-Year Milestones

Review, update, and align processes  
and policies with Agency Goals  
IT1 O2

Expand culture around people,  
mission, and support  
IT3 IT4 O1

Implement standard processes &  
procedures for communication  
O3

Align & modernize agency security,  
research, and application architecture  
IT2 O4

## One-Year Goal

Implement IT/ORDA communication strategy including regular all-hands meetings, common SharePoint sites with status and updates, and regular messaging regarding alignment to Agency goals.

# Building a Unified Data and Technology Office

*SCDE merged the Information Technology and Research & Data Analysis offices into a unified team to eliminate duplication, improve coordination, and deliver faster, more effective technology solutions for the agency and districts.*

## Duplicative and Split Responsibilities

Previously, IT and ORDA split duties for key systems—some functions siloed, others overlapped—resulting in inefficiencies and duplicate work. Examples are:

- **Data Systems:** Managed separate platforms but shared datasets, creating confusion and redundant handling.
- **Dashboards:** Built separate tools for similar data—IT for internal use, ORDA for districts—without coordination.
- **SIS Data (PowerSchool):** IT managed systems and vendors; ORDA handled reporting—misaligned timelines and validations.
- **Governance & Reporting:** Both handled data definitions and external requests, resulting in inconsistent outputs and duplicated efforts.

## Benefits Already Realized

1. **Faster Project Execution:** Co-located developers, analysts, and infrastructure staff have accelerated project delivery.
2. **Streamlined Reporting:** Aligned SIS, Power BI, and other systems efforts enable faster application, dashboard and report development.
3. **Improved Data Security:** Unified data governance and monitoring has reduced gaps and improved compliance.
4. **Enhanced District Support:** Shared tools, aligned workflows, and cross-trained teams have strengthened frontline assistance.

# Building Research Capacity to Inform Policy & Practice

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## Leadership

Appointed SCDE's first Chief Research Officer to lead internal research and connect data, policy, and operations.

## Research Function

Developed a structured research agenda focused on:

- Evidence-Based Instruction (Reading & Math)
- High-Quality Instructional Materials
- Effective Character Education Programs
- Attendance & Absenteeism Impacts
- PK-12 Career Readiness & Post-secondary Outcomes
- State Policy Impacts (e.g., Free to Focus, Strategic Compensation)
- School/System Improvement Initiatives
- Educational Technology Use & Impact

## Strategic Partnerships

Collaborations with:

- University of Pennsylvania & Stanford University – analyzing Free to Focus policy outcomes
- University of Rochester – linking cell phone data to policy implementation and student outcomes
- USC Darla Moore School of Business – studying attendance practices and post-secondary impacts (e.g., wages, health, crime)





**GPS** Growing  
Pathways  
for Students  
GUIDING PROGRESS, UNLOCKING POTENTIAL



SOUTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# Revolutionizing K-12 Education in South Carolina

## Overview

**GPS** serves as South Carolina's modern, data-driven K-12 decision-support system, aimed at enhancing student outcomes. By seamlessly integrating data from various educational facets—such as academic performance, teacher preparation quality, and financial resources—**GPS** streamlines analyses and visualizations. This enables informed timely decision-making, promotes transparency, and facilitates collaborative efforts among educators, policymakers, and parents. Ultimately, it supports South Carolina's goal of achieving 75% of students at or above grade level by 2030 and preparing every child to be college, career, or military ready.



### Data Analytics Engine

Connects previously siloed data from multiple systems (such as Student Information Systems (SIS), assessment platforms, and financial systems).



### Visualization & Reporting Platform

- Supports strategic planning and accountability for superintendents and principals.
- Provides student and classroom-level insights for teachers with real-time alerts.



SOUTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# GPS In Action

## Skill Analysis and Differentiation

Student-level and class-level data enable teachers to tailor small group instruction based on demonstrated academic needs.

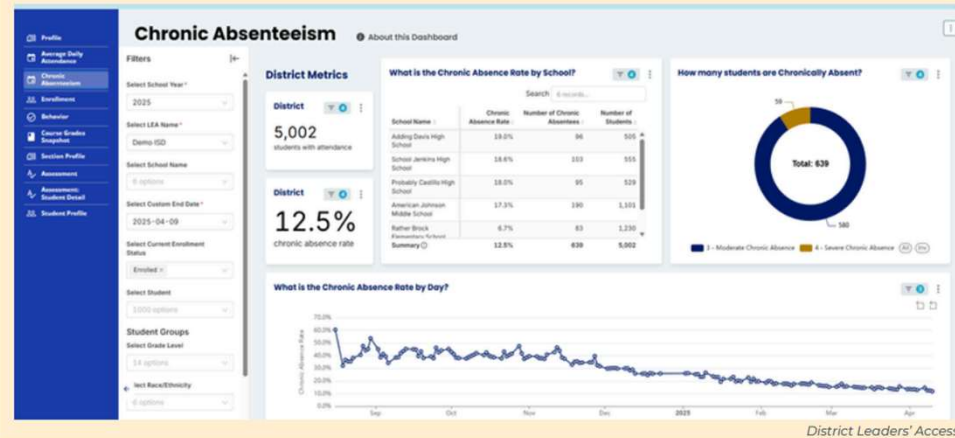


Educators' Access

## Identifying Chronic Absenteeism

Early identification of trends can mitigate long-term effects of poor attendance.

**EX:** Ms. Smith, a dedicated teacher, utilizes **GPS** to view her students' attendance records, identifying trends in absenteeism that require administrative intervention. This proactive approach ensures timely support for students, fostering academic success.



District Leaders' Access

## Recovering Funding Through Accuracy

Data visualization capabilities help administrators quickly identify financial trends and effectively deploy resources for student support.

**EX:** Spero School District utilizes **GPS** to verify student data uploads essential for securing funding. By identifying an issue with their fourth-grade data submission, they recovered \$150,000 in funding critical for student support.



# SAFE K-12

South Carolina's Assurance Framework for Education Cybersecurity

Helping school districts plan and implement cybersecurity effectively and efficiently.



## What is SAFE K-12

SAFE K-12 is a statewide cybersecurity support program led by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) to help public school districts implement foundational cybersecurity protections, effectively, affordably, and with local control.



## How it Works

SAFE K-12 offers a menu of vetted services negotiated by SCDE at discounted rates to reduce costs.

Districts can:

1. Use their own systems and tools;
2. Adopt all tools from the SAFE K-12 vendor catalog;
3. Combine both in a tailored hybrid approach.

All districts must meet minimum cybersecurity requirements under S.C. Code §59-1-490(G).



## What SAFE K-12 Provides

| Category                                | What Districts Receive                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Statewide Cybersecurity Framework       | Standardized cybersecurity base using CIS Controls (v8 IG1), overseen by SCDE/DDGG.  |
| Expert Support & Shared Resources       | Guidance, templates, training, and assessment tools to support local implementation. |
| Affordable, Scalable Solutions          | Affordable, scalable cybersecurity services at discounted state rates.               |
| Ongoing Monitoring & Compliance Support | Affordable, scalable cybersecurity services at discounted state rates.               |



# SAFE K-12

## Affordability & Cost Savings

SAFE K-12 offers lower costs through statewide participation, with SCDE covering onboarding expenses.

Many districts currently pay up to **\$15 per endpoint**, but SAFE K-12 reduces that to **\$2.76**, saving a district with **15,000 students** about **\$550,000 annually**. Statewide, savings could exceed **\$7 million**.

### **Recommended Budgeting Model:**

$\$45,000 + \$15 \text{ per student over } 3,000.$

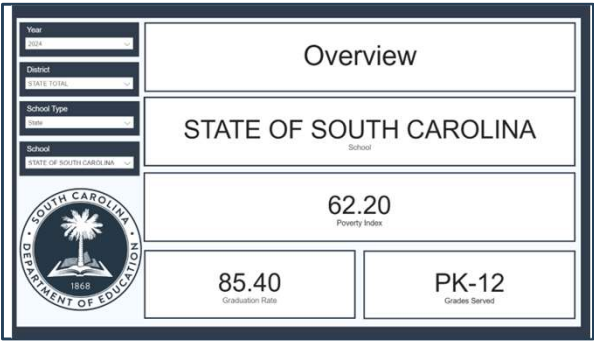
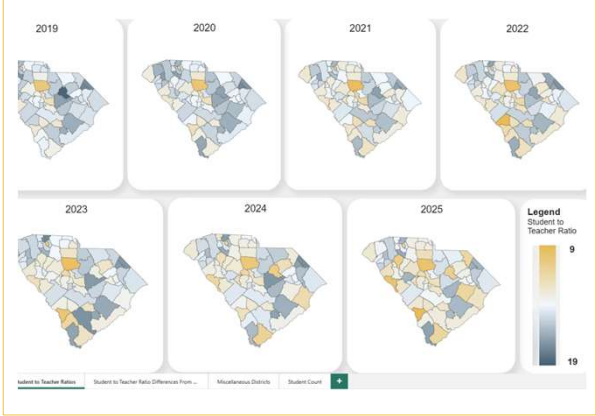
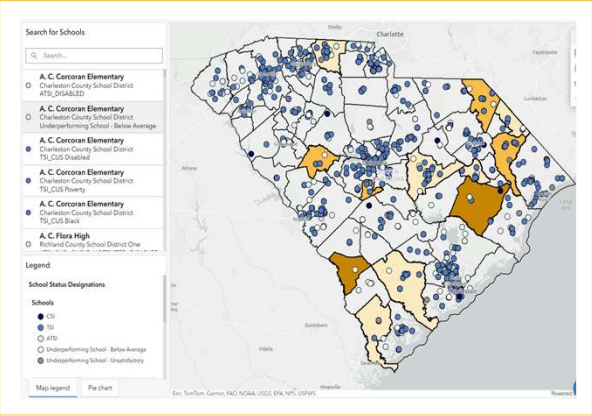
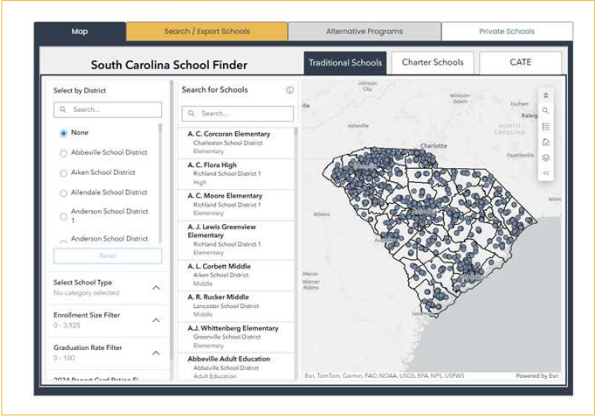
Example: a district with 20,000 students should plan for around \$300,000 annually.

## Implementation Schedule

| Implementation Timeline      |                                                      | Year           |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Phase 1</b><br>Foundation | Launch assessments, tools, governance, and MOUs      | <b>2025-26</b> |
| <b>Phase 2</b><br>Expansion  | Broaden implementation, expand services and training | <b>2026-27</b> |
| <b>Phase 3</b><br>Maturity   | Sustain IG1 controls, audit and refine practices     | <b>2027-28</b> |

# Data Access & Modernization

## School Directory



## Implementation & Support

### Alex Farquharson

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Implementation & Support leads cross-agency project execution, providing structure, tools, and capacity to translate strategic priorities into action. It supports the successful rollout of major initiatives by coordinating timelines, aligning resources, and maintaining project accountability across divisions.*

#### Services:

- Facilitates agency-wide and office-level project planning aligned with the SCDE Strategic Plan.
- Brings together cross-functional teams to drive collaboration, remove roadblocks, and ensure progress.
- Builds capacity in project management by coaching office teams and providing tools, templates, and support.
- Develops and maintains processes for consistent tracking and communication of objectives, milestones, and outcomes.

#### Customers:

SCDE Offices

#### Accomplishments:

- Established the agency's first formal project management office and defined its mission and operating structure.
- Supported multiple SCDE offices in developing and aligning their individual strategic plans to the agency's 3-year goals.
- Led recurring implementation meetings to ensure cross-office follow-through and performance tracking.
- Created processes, templates and workflows for task planning, goal alignment, risk management, and status reporting.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Implementing the Asana project management platform to track agency-wide strategic goals, office-level plans, and individual project tasks.
- Expanding support and education to additional offices and programs to scale effective project planning and execution tools.
- Upskilling team members in using new process, procedures and tools

# How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

The Project Implementation and Support Team drives strategic alignment, operational discipline, and measurable impact across agency initiatives. We foster accountability, continuous improvement, and collaboration to ensure every effort delivers value, scales effectively, and advances the agency's mission.

The team knows it is achieving its mission when:

- Strategic goals are met within defined timelines.
- Project outcomes are tracked and show improvement.
- Stakeholders are engaged and satisfied.
- Team culture supports learning, innovation, and accountability.
- Decisions and risks are documented and revisited.
- Reflective practices are embedded in weekly operations.

Percentage of projects completed on time and within budget.

Number of staff trained and certified in project management.

Improvement in project success rates over the year.

Utilization rate of project management tools and methodologies.

BY **2030** **75%** OF STUDENTS AT OR  
AT LEAST **ABOVE GRADE LEVEL**

Office of Implementation and Support Strategic Plan

### Three-Year Milestones

Achieve Full Integration of PMO  
Practices Across the Agency

Enhance Project Success Rates and  
Efficiency

Foster a Culture of Collaboration  
and Innovation

Establish a Robust Knowledge  
Management System

### One-Year Goal

Establish a Fully Functional Project Management Office(PMO)

# Aligning Action with Strategy: 1-4-1-4 Rollout Across Offices

*SCDE launched a department-wide rollout of the 1-4-1-4 strategic planning framework to align daily work across all offices with the agency's long-term goals.*

## 1-4-1-4 Process Adoption

- All SCDE offices now use the 1-4-1-4 framework to create work plans grounded in the agency's strategic goals—anchored in one vision, four strategic goals, one-year priorities, and four quarterly milestones.

## Collaborative Rollout in FY25

- Facilitated planning workshops and leadership coaching promoted shared ownership and consistent understanding across teams.
- The Implementation & Support team provides one-on-one facilitation, coaching, and documentation tools to help offices clarify roles, goals, and measurable deliverables.

## Integrated Tracking and Reporting

- The Implementation & Support Office is in the process of rolling out new tools and systems to ensure real-time tracking, cross-office visibility, and clear connection between daily work and agency-wide outcomes.

*This unified approach creates visibility across the agency, strengthens collaboration, and ensures every team contributes meaningfully to SCDE's 2030 goal.*

## Facilities Operations

### Jered Wooten

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Facilities Operations manages the agency's physical workspace and maintenance needs. It ensures that SCDE offices are safe, accessible, and equipped to support staff and public service. The office also provides logistical and operational support for events, building services, and office relocations.*

#### Services:

- Oversee building operations for SCDE headquarters, including maintenance, safety, janitorial, and security services.
- Manage day-to-day functions of the mailroom and print shop, ensuring timely agency-wide distribution and production support.
- Develop and enforce fire, safety, and emergency protocols for staff and visitors.
- Coordinate facility setup and improvements, including space planning, signage, and vendor management.

#### Customers:

SCDE staff | Agency visitors

#### Accomplishments:

- Successfully planned and executed the agency's relocation to a new building, including coordinated build-out and phased staff move-in.
- Established and documented fire and safety protocols to meet compliance standards.
- Developed consistent internal procedures for facility requests and vendor coordination.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Implementing an agency-wide online maintenance request platform to streamline service delivery and response times.

# How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

Due to contractually obligated duties to the landlord, SCDE is directly responsible for maintaining the facility. The Office of Facilities Operations is a newly established office tasked with maintaining the facility and related services directly for the Agency. Facilities Operations is committed to serving the Agency's needs and mitigating any potential liabilities associated with the lease agreement while maintaining a safe and healthy work environment for staff and guests.

**>99%**

Facility uptime  
greater than 99%

All work requests are  
completed within  
industry standard  
benchmarks

Facility is maintained  
within contractual  
obligations

Operating budgets  
are accurate,  
predictable, and  
regularly reviewed for  
cost savings

BY **2030** **75%** OF STUDENTS AT OR  
AT LEAST **ABOVE GRADE LEVEL**

Office of Facilities Operations Strategic Plan

### Three-Year Milestones

All staff are well-trained and highly proficient in their job duties.

All processes and policies are implemented, regularly reviewed, and easily accessible.

All Facilities Operations work requests are completed in alignment with benchmarks, and facility downtime is minimal.

All facility components, warranties, manuals, and documentation are maintained with precision.

### One-Year Goal

Align Facilities Operations goals and output to establish accountability and support Agency goals.

# Facilities Operations Office: Modernizing Agency Infrastructure

*SCDE created a new Facilities Operations Office to unify oversight of agency-wide facilities, security, and maintenance, repurposing existing FTEs from former mail and print services without increasing headcount.*

## Security and Safety Upgrades

- Implemented critical infrastructure improvements, including digital badge access, enhanced camera systems, and updated internal safety protocols to protect staff, assets, and operations.

## Tech-Ready Conference Environment

- Modernized conference rooms with integrated AV technology and seamless video conferencing to support collaboration and boost team productivity.
- These rooms also serve as in-house training hubs, eliminating the need to lease external facilities and enabling more cost-effective professional development for programs that serve districts.

## Scalable, Efficient Operations Model

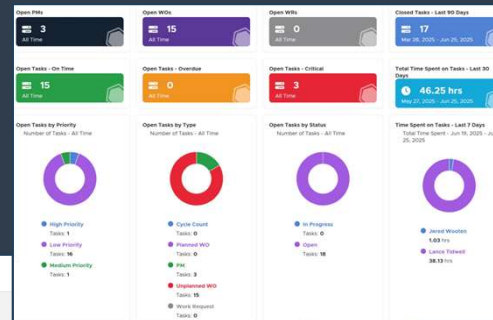
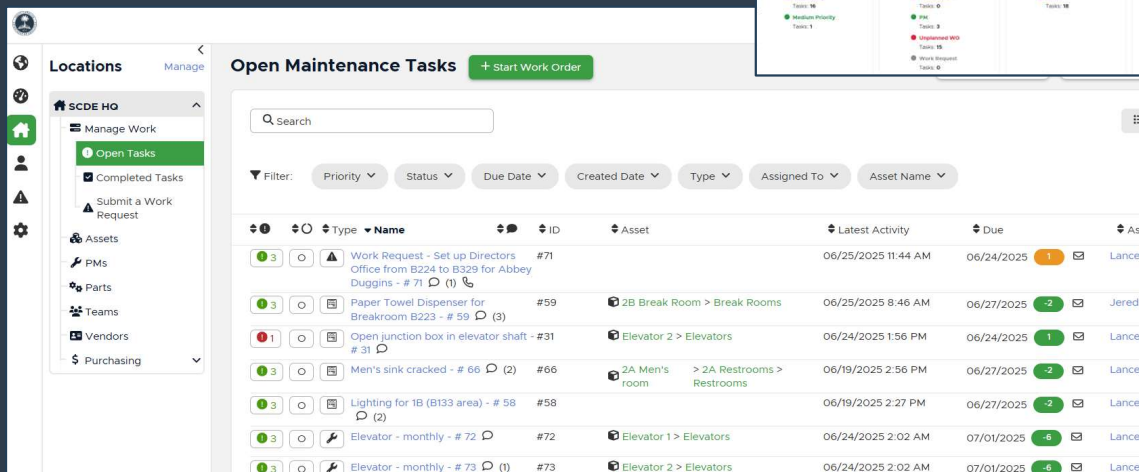
- This office reflects a shift toward a digitally enabled, centralized, and forward-looking model for facilities management—leveraging tools like Limble CMMS for maintenance tracking, QR-coded asset inventory, and integrated security systems to streamline service delivery and improve operational agility agency-wide.

## Print Services Redesign

- Currently overhauling in-house printing to deliver higher-quality, cost-effective support across the agency using reallocated internal resources.

# Tech-Powered Facility Management

*The Office of Facilities Operations launched the agency's maintenance management system to automate and enhance processes, aiding in the conservation of time and resources while ensuring all new systems and contracts at the SCDE facility are managed efficiently.*



## Streamlined Processes

SCDE's Maintenance Management System helps streamline processes, providing an organized platform for work order and asset management, enhancing workplace efficiency.

## User-Friendly Work Request Portal

The system features a user-friendly work request portal for occupants, allowing easy submission and management of maintenance requests.

## Customizable Preventive Maintenance

Customizable preventive maintenance schedules help extend the life of building components and reduce unexpected failures.

## Robust Reporting Tools

The system offers robust reporting tools that ensure effective resource management and data-driven decision-making in facility operations.



## Human Resources

### Lisa McCloud

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Human Resources oversees all personnel functions, including recruitment, hiring, benefits, employee relations, professional development, and performance management. It supports a strong agency workforce and helps foster a positive, productive workplace aligned with the agency's mission.*

#### Services:

- Manage all human resources functions for SCDE, including recruitment, onboarding, classification, employee relations, benefits, and performance management.
- Support agency leadership in workforce planning, organizational development, and succession planning.
- Oversee employee training programs, professional development, and policy compliance.
- Advise SCDE offices and statewide partners on HR procedures, staffing models, and employment best practices.

#### Customers:

SCDE employees and leadership

#### Accomplishments:

- Supported agency-wide reorganization and succession planning strategies.
- Implemented a centralized system for telecommuting and hybrid work requests, balancing operational needs with flexibility.
- Deployed online workforce profile dashboard to monitor agency vacancies and workforce trends.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Leading multi-year initiative to modernize the classification and compensation system for state-maintained school bus shop personnel.
- Enhancing internal HR processes to support strategic plan alignment, leadership growth, and workforce retention.
- Streamlined the employee onboarding experience, aligning processes across divisions and launching a new orientation framework with a focus on mission alignment and compliance.

# How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

The Office of Human Resources supports the agency by reviewing and implementing requests to support initiatives and goals. The office is responsible for following regulations and guidelines as established by state government. Successful reviews and audits are the standards for effectiveness. Human Resources collaborates with offices on staffing needs, staff development and employee relations matters. Successfully onboarding staff and ensuring new and current staff are trained is a pivotal role in the agency. Data related to employees is critical in decision making and the office manages the information and communicates to directors and managers to assist with business decisions.

Successful external audits and reviews based on implementing process and procedures

FTE Management: turnover rate analysis, correct allocation by fund, fulfilling requests of offices

Tracking training completions that successfully equip employees to perform, which impacts retention

Current compensation comparison with market rate

BY **2030** **75%** OF STUDENTS AT OR  
AT LEAST **ABOVE GRADE LEVEL**

Office of Human Resources Strategic Plan

### Three-Year Milestones

Training-universally adopted training platform that tracks HR and specialized office trainings

Communication-effective and efficient workflows maximizing HR support

Compensation-ongoing assessment & realignment process

Activated dashboard for HR needs and priorities

### One-Year Goal

Effective workflow platform that tracks process & progress for hiring and training for universal Agency use

# Hiring 101: Modernizing Recruitment

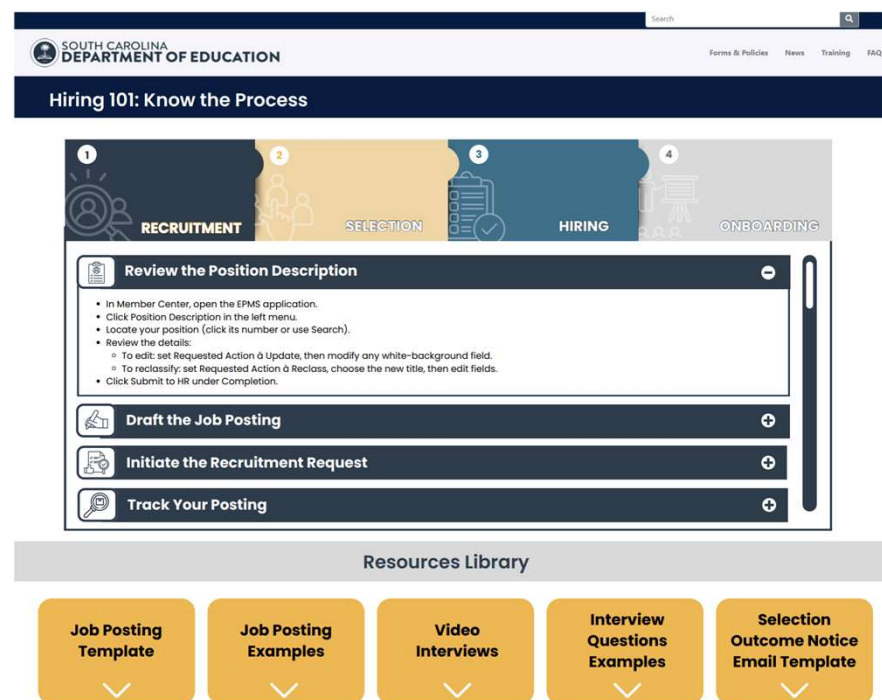
*The Hiring 101 initiative streamlines and strengthens the agency's hiring process by providing standardized tools, guidance, and training to help offices recruit, interview, and onboard staff more effectively and consistently.*

## Standardized Recruitment Tools

- The toolkit includes job posting templates, interview question banks, and scoring rubrics to standardize hiring. These resources ensure consistency and fairness in candidate evaluation.

## Streamlined Hiring Process

- Workflow checklists reduce administrative burden and guide staff through each hiring phase efficiently. This helps save time and minimizes errors in the recruitment process.
- The initiative empowers staff to conduct timely, effective hiring aligned with agency needs.



# Profile of the SCDE Employee



## Knowledge

- Applies relevant laws, policies, and processes to ensure compliance and alignment.
- Leverages knowledge of educational systems to strengthen district and school support.
- Demonstrates subject matter expertise and pursues ongoing learning.
- Builds strong relationships by supporting the growth of colleagues and stakeholders.
- Uses technology and agency tools effectively to enhance daily work.



## Skills

- Demonstrates flexibility and resilience in navigating evolving challenges.
- Uses multiple data sources and input to make sound decisions and solve problems.
- Drives momentum by prioritizing projects, organizing tasks, and owning execution.
- Handles sensitive information with discretion and professionalism.
- Builds expertise through continuous learning and applying best practices.



## Values

### **Hope**

- Belief in an exceptional education for every student
- Mission-driven communication and collaboration

### **Excellence**

- Work ethic, "Yes I can."
- Accountability
- Continuous improvement

### **Leadership**

- Integrity
- Transparency, patience, and humility



# Agency Divisions

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## Financial Services





**Finance**

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**Melanie Cooper**

**FTEs: 27**  
**Hiring in Process: 1**

**Grant Services**

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**Audrey Shifflett**

**FTEs: 2**  
**Hiring in Process: 0**

**Auditing Services**

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**Hershula Davis**

**FTEs: 10**  
**Hiring in Process: 0**

**Procurement**

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**Kathy Santandreu**

**FTEs: 5**  
**Hiring in Process: 0**

**Turnover Rate:\* 21.1%**

\*Turnover rate calculated for FY23-24.

## Finance

### Melanie Cooper

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Finance manages the agency's budgeting, accounting, and financial reporting functions. It ensures compliance with state and federal financial regulations, supports internal resource allocation, and provides fiscal oversight to help agency leaders and school districts make sound financial decisions.*

#### Services:

- Disbursements Management: Processes state funding disbursements to school districts, state agencies, and local governments based on formulas.
- Financial Reporting and Transparency: Submits year-end, debt, and travel expenditure reports as required by the CG's Office and legislative bodies.
- Guidance Development: Publishes key documents (Funding Manuals, School District Budget Projections, etc.)

#### Customers:

School districts | State agencies receiving pass-through education funds | SC General Assembly | Oversight entities (e.g., Comptroller General's Office)

#### Accomplishments:

- Successfully processed over \$4.86 billion in funding disbursements to school districts in FY 2023–24.
- Maintained consistent and timely payments to state agencies and local governments.
- Delivered all required financial transparency reports to the legislature and state fiscal offices in alignment with state deadlines.
- Completed and published key financial resources, and federal finance reports for clear fiscal guidance.
- Transitioned school district budget projections from static PDF format to an interactive online Power BI dashboard, improving accessibility, transparency, and real-time data analysis.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Supporting the DASBP Committee's 3-year plan to launch a statewide financial reporting platform for increased transparency and oversight.
- Modernizing the Fiscal Practices unit to improve district support and streamline compliance.
- Leveraging Business Intelligence platform to provide tailored insights for district leaders, identify trends more quickly, and support more data-driven decision-making.
- Enhancing funding systems for better tracking, automation, and audit readiness.
- Implementing Annual Finance Boot Camp which builds foundational knowledge, promotes consistency in financial practices, and strengthens statewide collaboration.
- Developing internal dashboard for SCDE offices to track budgets and expenditures in detail in real time.

BY **2030** **75%** OF STUDENTS AT OR  
AT LEAST **ABOVE GRADE LEVEL**

Office of Finance Strategic Plan

### Three-Year Milestones

Clear, documented procedures, scalable and sustainable, for onboarding & retention

Working data dashboard with quick access, user friendly, regularly accessed data

Fully staffed with clearly defined roles that are KPI driven and evaluated annually

Available training for internal and external customers in both digital and in-person

### One-Year Goal

Have all procedures documented for/by all finance staff, with beta testing of procedures complete

## How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

Through clear processes, skilled people, and responsive communication, the Finance Division ensures every action moves us closer to our mission, of supporting districts, empowering staff, and safeguarding public funds with integrity.

**85%** of  
agency/district report  
requirements captured  
in master list.

**90%** of  
recurring finance  
tasks documented.

Identified **20%** of  
staff as high potential.

Faster district inquiry  
response time.

# Enhancing Agency Budget Oversight and Transparency

SCDE has implemented a comprehensive, office-level budgeting and reporting process to increase financial transparency, improve decision-making, and align spending with operational priorities across the agency.

## Annual Budget Review Meetings

- The CFO leads structured budget reviews with Office Directors to align financial planning with operational needs, including ongoing evaluation of vendors, subscriptions, travel, and conference expenditures.

## Monthly Budget Monitoring Tools

- Offices receive monthly budget updates to evaluate progress toward their annual spending plans and identify adjustments early.
- Office-level dashboards are being finalized in Power BI to give directors real-time, visual access to their financial data—improving readability and transparency.

## Office-Level Budget vs. Actuals Dashboard

| Financials                                                           |                    |                  |                |                    | Revenue | Financials by Fund | Admin Tool |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------|--------------------|------------|
| Division                                                             | Budget             | YTD Actual       | Encumbered     | Remaining          |         |                    |            |
| ▣ District Operations and Support                                    | \$1,226,903,342.88 | \$889,312,607.60 | \$6,856,955.75 | \$330,733,779.53   |         |                    |            |
| ▣ District Ops Leadership                                            | \$236,593,169.94   | \$110,708,928.52 | \$0.00         | \$125,884,241.42   |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Health & Nutrition                                                 | \$614,955,013.54   | \$484,757,214.31 | \$30,864.60    | \$130,166,934.63   |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Health & Nutrition - H630JC00                                      | \$614,750,933.30   | \$0.00           | \$0.00         | \$614,750,933.30   |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Health & Nutrition - H630JC0010                                    | \$204,080.24       | \$484,757,214.31 | \$30,864.60    | (\$484,583,998.67) |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Personal Services                                                  | \$136,405.88       | \$1,962,846.18   | \$0.00         | (\$1,826,440.30)   |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Fringe Benefits                                                    | \$52,674.36        | \$864,774.27     | \$0.00         | (\$812,099.91)     |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Operating                                                          | \$15,000.00        | \$1,602,169.75   | \$30,864.60    | (\$1,618,034.35)   |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Contractual Services - 502000                                      | (\$0.00)           | \$1,305,420.66   | \$30,495.00    | (\$1,335,915.66)   |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Supply And Materials - 503000                                      | \$0.00             | \$79,123.06      | \$0.00         | (\$79,123.06)      |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Supply And Materials - 503000                                      | \$0.00             | --               | --             | \$0.00             |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Office Supplies - 5030010000                                       | --                 | \$22,128.47      | --             | (\$22,128.47)      |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Printed Items - 5030030000                                         | --                 | \$401.76         | --             | (\$401.76)         |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Equipment & Supplies - Computers & Laptop Accessories - 5030067130 | --                 | \$39,782.60      | --             | (\$39,782.60)      |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Equipment & Supplies - Paper, Toner & Repair Parts - 5030067170    | --                 | \$1,321.60       | --             | (\$1,321.60)       |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Gasoline - 5031530000                                              | --                 | \$7,748.02       | --             | (\$7,748.02)       |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Educational Supplies - 5032810000                                  | --                 | \$190.33         | --             | (\$190.33)         |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Food Supplies - Food - 5033010000                                  | --                 | --               | --             | --                 |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Promotional Supplies - 5033030000                                  | --                 | \$7,301.24       | --             | (\$7,301.24)       |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Other Supplies - 5033990000                                        | --                 | \$249.04         | --             | (\$249.04)         |         |                    |            |
| ▣ Fixed Charges, Fees & Memberships - 504000                         | (\$0.00)           | \$3,025.00       | \$0.00         | (\$3,025.00)       |         |                    |            |

# Improving School Finance: The DASBP Committee

*The District Accounting Systems and Best Practices (DASBP) Committee was established under Proviso 1.104 (FY24–25) to evaluate and recommend reforms to improve school district accounting systems and financial reporting statewide.*

## Committee Work

- The committee included appointees from the Governor, General Assembly, SCDE, RFA, and professional associations (e.g., SCASBO, SCSBA), with broad representation across financial oversight stakeholders.
- Over four structured meetings from November 2024 to April 2025, the committee examined challenges including inconsistent coding, duplicative reports, burdensome audit procedures, and outdated fiscal guidance.
- Activities included software demonstrations, national best practice reviews, CFO feedback sessions (SCASBO), and analysis of current financial reporting laws and processes.

## Final Report

- The final May 2025 report outlines a three-year implementation plan grounded in six driving goals:
  - **Increase transparency** for district personnel, stakeholders, and policymakers
  - **Align accounting standards** across all districts
  - **Simplify reporting processes** and reduce duplication
  - **Consolidate reports** into a unified submission system
  - **Promote consistency** of data across districts
  - **Increase efficiency** for school district finance staff through training and support
- This work provides the roadmap for statewide modernization of school finance systems, improving both compliance and decision-making.

# Year 1 Workplan: Building the Foundation

*Year 1 tasks (2025–26) focus on foundational work in four core areas: standards, reporting, training, and system design.*

## Major Tasks

- Handbook Revision:** Launch major update of the Financial Accounting Handbook with input from district CFOs, auditors, and state finance staff.
- Reporting Calendar & Redundancy Review:** Create a consolidated calendar of state/federal reporting requirements and identify redundant reports to eliminate.
- Platform Vendor Selection:** Begin development of an RFP to develop a unified financial reporting platform, with emphasis on automation, data validation, and compatibility with district accounting systems.
- Training & Support:** Develop a new “District Finance 101” bootcamp, targeted CFO/auditor training, and pilot a mentorship program for new district finance staff.  
**DONE!**
- Governance:** Convene a Financial Best Practices Advisory Group to guide implementation and ensure statewide representation.

| Task                                                     | DASBP Recs | Lead                           | Due Date                    | Key Actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Deliverable                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Revise the Financial Accounting Handbook                 | 5          | Hershula                       | November<br>December        | 1. Collect feedback (district CFOs, finance staff, external auditors);<br>2. Draft revisions;<br>3. Release working draft for feedback (November)<br>4. Finalize and distribute                                                                                      | 1. Financial Accounting Handbook                                                                        |
| Clarify Key Financial Definitions and Align Codes        | 8          | Melanie                        |                             | 1. Develop inventory of definitions (e.g., per-pupil, fund balance)<br>2. Draft standard definitions<br>3. Release working draft of definitions for feedback<br>4. Finalize and distribute                                                                           | 1. Standardized Financial Definitions Guide<br>2. State and Federal Object and Function Codes Crosswalk |
| Create Consolidated Financial Reporting Calendar         | 9          | Melanie                        | November<br>December        | 1. Catalog all state/federal reports and requirements<br>2. Design unified calendar and timeline by report and audience<br>3. Release working draft at SCASBO Nov 10 Meeting<br>4. Finalize and distribute                                                           | 1. Presentation at SCASBO Nov 10 Meeting<br>2. Statewide Financial Reporting Calendar                   |
| Identify Redundant Reports and Unused Data Fields        | 10         | Melanie<br>(Dawn and IT)       | December                    | 1. Audit existing reporting systems and forms<br>2. Recommend eliminations or consolidations<br>- What to eliminate NOW vs when state data platform is in place<br>3. Release working draft for feedback<br>4. Implement report consolidation/elimination for 26-27. | 1. Report streamlining Recommendations<br>2. Implemented consolidations & eliminations                  |
| Initiate Vendor Procurement for Reporting Platform       | 13, 14     | Rebecca<br>(Dan)               | December<br>January<br>June | 1. Draft Scope of Work<br>2. Release working draft for feedback<br>3. Issue RFP<br>4. Select vendor                                                                                                                                                                  | 1. Scope of Work (December 2025)<br>2. Vendor selected (May 2026)                                       |
| Create Statewide Financial Data Standards and Crosswalks | 16         | Rebecca<br>(Dan)               | November<br>April           | 1. Define core standards and formats<br>2. Map district software to standards                                                                                                                                                                                        | 1. Documented standards<br>2. Mapped district software crosswalks                                       |
| Convene Financial Best Practices Advisory Group          | 17         | Kendra                         | December                    | 1. Finalize membership (districts of varying size, audit firms)<br>2. Draft advisory group scope and deliverables<br>3. Host initial meeting<br>4. Create annual meeting schedule with planned topics and goals                                                      | 1. Operational advisory group<br>2. Scheduled meeting cadence and goals                                 |
| Launch 'District Finance 101' Bootcamp                   | 20         | Melanie                        | August 21                   | 1. Develop curriculum and select trainers (June–July)<br>2. Host first bootcamp<br>3. Design and disseminate feedback survey                                                                                                                                         | 1. Bootcamp curriculum<br>2. Completed bootcamp (Fall 2025)<br>3. Participant evaluations               |
| Develop Targeted CFO and Auditor Training                | 21         | Melanie<br>Hershula            |                             | 1. Identify content aligned to new Handbook and audit findings<br>2. Develop draft curriculum for feedback<br>3. Schedule and conduct sessions                                                                                                                       | 1. Training materials<br>2. Session schedule<br>3. Completed sessions                                   |
| Pilot Mentorship Program for New CFOs and Staff          | 22         | Melanie<br>Jinnette<br>/SCASBO |                             | 1. Identify pilot participants and mentors (CFOs, district staff roles)<br>2. Identify methods to tracking feedback and success<br>3. Launch limited mentorship pilot with tracking tools                                                                            | Pilot mentorship program launched                                                                       |

# Building Capacity for District Financial Success

*The Fiscal Practices function is critical in supporting districts by delivering targeted support, strengthening oversight, and implementing key DASBP reforms across districts.*

## Fiscal Practice Expansion

- To effectively implement DASBP recommendations and better support district fiscal health, SCDE is expanding the scope and capabilities of its Fiscal Practices function.
- This expansion is designed to strengthen technical assistance, enhance data validation processes, and increase proactive monitoring and guidance for districts.
- This evolution aligns with the legislative intent of S.C. Code § 59-20-90 and ensures districts have access to timely, high-quality fiscal guidance and support.

## Key Enhancements

- **New Specialized Roles:** Staff dedicated to early warning systems, statewide training coordination, data reporting, and mentorship programming for district finance teams.
- **Improved Cross-Office Collaboration:** Formalized protocols to align Fiscal Practices with Grants, Auditing, and Program Offices for better issue detection and response.
- **Guideline Modernization:** Updating the 2018 Fiscal Integrity Guidelines to reflect current law, audit criteria, and expectations for district compliance and support.
- **Expanded Oversight Tools:** Committee recommendations include authorizing SCDE to initiate performance or forensic audits when warranted, enabling timely intervention.

# Modern Budget Planning Dashboard for Districts

SCDE's Finance Office launched a new interactive dashboard to support districts in budget forecasting and financial planning for the upcoming school year.

## Fiscal Year 2025 – 2026

**SOUTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**Budget Planning 2025-26**  
State Projections

 **Information**

During the budget deliberation process of the legislative session, budget projections are provided to South Carolina school districts in preparation for the upcoming school year. Please note the following data sources used to calculate these projections.

- Weighted Pupil Units (WPU) are based on either the 45th- or 135th-day student counts (depending on the timing of the budget version), plus the estimated WPUs for new charter schools in the statewide authorizers expected to open at the beginning of FY26. The charter estimates include the base student classifications and the virtual or brick and mortar weightings only. Add-on weightings were not included in these estimates.
- The projections for special schools currently maintain FY22 allocations.
- The funding projections for Revenue 3529 CTE reflect student enrollment from FY24.

Budget Version

Final Appropriations

Budget Projections FY26

| Revenue      | Revenue Name                    | Budget Version       | FY25 Allocation           | FY26 Projection           | Method of Allocation                                         |
|--------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3103         | State Aid to Classrooms (GF)    | Final Appropriations | \$3,582,638,609.00        | \$3,662,638,609.00        | State To Aid Classrooms Based On FY25 135-Day Student Counts |
| 3103H        | Health Insurance                | Final Appropriations | \$96,509,373.00           | \$145,988,927.00          | FY25 135-Day Student Counts WPU                              |
| 3135         | Reading Coaches                 | Final Appropriations | \$39,405,656.00           | \$39,405,656.00           | FY25 Eligible Elementary/Primary Schools                     |
| 3181         | Retiree Insurance               | Final Appropriations | \$298,204,284.00          | \$328,623,798.00          | FY24 District Payroll                                        |
| 3503         | State Aid to Classrooms (EIA)   | Final Appropriations | \$738,826,434.00          | \$770,826,434.00          | State To Aid Classrooms Based On FY25 135-Day Student Counts |
| 3529         | Career and Technology Education | Final Appropriations | \$26,122,135.00           | \$21,872,135.00           | FY24 CTE Membership                                          |
| 3529C        | MDCC Funding                    | Final Appropriations | \$2,750,000.00            | \$2,750,000.00            | Proviso 1A.51                                                |
| <b>Total</b> |                                 |                      | <b>\$4,784,456,491.00</b> | <b>\$4,972,105,559.00</b> |                                                              |

Budget Planning

House 1

Senate

Conference

Final Budget

- This tool replaces outdated PDF-based projections with a dynamic, user-friendly interface that allows districts to model funding scenarios in real time.
- The dashboard improves accuracy, saves time, and gives district finance teams a clearer view of expected revenues, allocations, and planning variables.
- Built with end-users in mind, the tool enhances transparency, supports local decision-making, and aligns with SCDE's broader efforts to modernize financial operations.

## Grant Services

### Audrey Shifflett

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Grants Services provides specialized technical assistance and resources to offices administering state and federal grant programs. It provides guidance to agency offices on grant management and compliance and maintains grant-related resources for use by the SCDE and districts to help maximize impact and minimize risk.*

#### Services:

- Provides pre-award technical assistance to offices, including grant application planning and submission.
- Maintains agency's [Grant Opportunities webpage](#) of current funding opportunities.
- Assists agency programs with administering grant and subgrant competitions.
- Administers quarterly federal grant meetings and provides guidance on grant management.
- Reviews agency's state grant and federal subgrant awards for compliance.
- Maintains agency's Grants Policy, Grants Manual, and other resources.

#### Customers:

SCDE Offices | Public seeking grants | School Districts | Other Grant Recipients | Federal Agencies awarding grants to SCDE

#### Accomplishments:

- Delivered more than 60 technical assistance sessions annually.
- Supported administration of more than \$2 billion in emergency federal grants to districts from 2020-24.
- Provided regular updates and training to SCDE staff on grant management.
- Assisted 10 SCDE program offices in conducting 29 distinct agency grant competitions in 2024-25.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Staffing to meet ever growing need for services
- Updating agency resources and tools to align with regulatory requirements
- Using technology to enhance grant compliance support tools for SCDE offices
- Improving internal planning systems for grant and subgrant competitions
- Enhancing external communication to districts and other grant recipients on grant management.

## How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

The Office of Grant Services provides specialized technical assistance and resources to program offices within the SCDE that administer both state grant and federal grant programs. This assistance includes helping offices write grant applications and apply for grant funding, and helping program offices that are required to run a competition to issue state grants or federal subgrants. The office also maintains the agency's [Grant Opportunities webpage](#) that provides information to the public on available grant opportunities.

### # of SCDE Grant & Subgrant Competitions

FY 2022-23: 18

FY 2023-24: 21

FY 2024-25: 29

### SCDE's Current Federal Grants

19 Formula Grants

4 Discretionary (competitive) Grants

### SCDE's Grant Resources include

- SCDE Grants Policy
- SCDE Grants Manual
- Application Forms

### Technical Assistance

Grant Services staff deliver more than 60 technical assistance sessions annually.

BY **2030** **75%** OF STUDENTS AT OR  
AT LEAST **ABOVE GRADE LEVEL**

Office of Grant Services Strategic Plan

### Three-Year Milestones

Robust and regular training on grants management.

Increased and stable grant services staffing: \*Up at least 1 staff person.

Stronger internal controls as evidenced by lower monitoring/audit findings.

Increased communication to non-LEA subgrantees.

### One-Year Goal

Grant Services is working more coherently around a plan for grant/subgrant competitions.

## Audit Services

### Hershula Davis

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Audit Services conducts financial and compliance audits to ensure accountability and transparency in the use of public education funds. It monitors both internal agency operations and school district expenditures, offering guidance on internal controls, risk mitigation, and corrective action planning.*

#### Services:

- Conducts internal audits of SCDE offices for compliance and inventory control.
- Performs external audits of federal fund subrecipients to ensure compliance.
- Performs external audits of school districts' use of state funds to ensure compliance
- Calculates annual risk scores for all school districts to guide monitoring priorities.
- Provides technical assistance to school districts and other subrecipients.
- Offers guidance and training for external auditors on SCDE audit requirements.

#### Customers:

SCDE Offices | School Districts | Subrecipients of  
Federal Funds | External Auditors

#### Accomplishments:

- Completed 3 internal audits in FY 2023–24, maintaining oversight of SCDE and bus shop operations.
- Completed 12 external audits of federal fund subrecipients to ensure compliance with ESSER and other funding requirements.
- Calculated risk assessment scores for all school districts annually to inform monitoring strategies.
- Calculated indirect cost rates for all school districts and for other subrecipients of federal funding.
- Delivered technical assistance to school districts, other subrecipients, and SCDE offices.
- Provided guidance to external auditors, supporting a consistent understanding of SCDE audit expectations.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Expanding use of risk scoring to better prioritize audits and support services.
- Developing tools to track audit findings and district responses over time.
- Strengthening collaboration with the Office of Finance on shared fiscal oversight.
- Preparing protocols to streamline future recovery plan reviews and follow-ups.

# How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

Currently, our office is fully staffed and has begun to provide internal training to our audit team members. We are also in the process of updating our office's audit procedures manual. In addition, we are reviewing and issuing pending audits and have established a 120-day audit completion standard that we hope to begin achieving consistently by the third quarter of this fiscal year.

7

Our office is comprised of 7 senior auditors, an audits manager, an audits director, and an administrative assistant.

8

8 audit types - internal, external (federal and state), fiscal practices, pre-award, federal desk reviews, procurement, and forensic.

Audit Services provides technical assistance to school districts and internal program offices.

Other functions – indirect cost calculations, recoupment of funds, federal reporting, risk assessment, subrecipient audit compliance and data collection.

BY **2030** **75%** OF STUDENTS AT OR  
AT LEAST **ABOVE GRADE LEVEL**

Office of Audit Services Strategic Plan

### Three-Year Milestones

Issuing at least 20 audits per year.

Routinely training audit team members.

Updated audit procedures.

A standard timeline for audit completion.

### One-Year Goal

To complete 20 audits with a fully staffed office.

## Procurement

### Kathy Santandreu

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Procurement oversees the acquisition of goods and services in accordance with the South Carolina Procurement Code. It manages vendor contracts, purchasing processes, and competitive solicitations, ensuring that agency and district procurement practices are cost-effective, transparent, and compliant.*

#### Services:

- Procures requested items and provides guidance on procurement rules and processes for both SCDE offices and school districts.
- Assists vendors and staff with questions and concerns related to bidding, contracts, and state procurement compliance.

#### Customers:

SCDE Offices | School Districts

#### Accomplishments:

- Responded to 156 procurement requests or inquiries in each of the past three fiscal years, providing consistent support to all districts.
- Maintained year-over-year responsiveness to ensure timely purchasing and vendor coordination.
- Supported districts in navigating state procurement rules and resolving vendor issues.
- Completed the SC Fiscal Accountability Authority's comprehensive agency audit.
- Played an important role of the major relocation effort to SCDE's new location.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Reviewing and streamlining internal procurement procedures to improve efficiency and consistency across SCDE offices.
- Implementing an automated workflow system to manage procurement requests and approvals more effectively.
- Enhancing guidance and communication tools to support SCDE staff in navigating procurement processes.

# How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

By developing clear instructions, promoting transparency in processes, and strengthening relationships with program offices, the Procurement Services team will see an increase in capacity, and efficiencies in daily operations while ensuring compliance with procurement code.

33

Procurement support  
for Department's 33  
programs

Agency procurement  
tracking project  
started

1

Additional  
procurement  
manager onboarded

Procurement support  
for all 75 public and  
charter school  
districts

BY **2030** **75%** OF STUDENTS AT OR  
AT LEAST **ABOVE GRADE LEVEL**

Office of Procurement Services Strategic Plan

### Three-Year Milestones

Invest in human capital to increase capacity

Identify opportunities to combine like procurements across programs for streamlining and potential cost savings

Relationship building with program offices to ensure better transparency and planning

Fully implemented training for onboarding within Procurement Services and program staff

### One-Year Goal

Review and document all procurement processes

# Streamlining Procurement: Intake, Tracking, and Workflow

*Initiated a full-scale reorganization of internal procurement workflows to streamline intake, reduce bottlenecks, and improve transparency across agency purchasing activities.*

## Workflow Mapping and Optimization

- Mapped key procurement processes (e.g., sole source, change order, P-card) to identify and resolve bottlenecks.
- Simplifying procedures to align with state requirements and eliminate unnecessary steps.
- Building internal KPIs to track turnaround time, workload, and pain points.

## Intake and Project Tracking

- Centralized tracking of project status, deadlines, and ownership to improve visibility and accountability.
- Standardizing intake with built-in guidance and assigned workflows.

## Team Coordination

- Launched weekly team stand-ups to triage requests, adjust priorities, and resolve blockers.
- Improved collaboration across reviewers to support faster decisions and better workload management.

## Training, Resources, and Communication

- Developing “Procurement 101” resources, including cheat sheets and how-to guides for common tasks.
- Embedding reference materials into workflows for self-service support.
- Planning development of a shared license and contract renewal tracker to streamline compliance across offices.



# Agency Divisions

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## Legal Affairs



```
graph TD; A[ ] --- B[Legal Affairs]; B --- C[General Counsel];
```

## Legal Affairs

**Todd Atwater**

*The Division of Legal Affairs ensures the agency operates within state and federal laws through legal guidance, policy interpretation, and regulatory oversight. It includes the Offices of General Counsel and Government Affairs and supports agency and district leaders on legal, legislative, and compliance matters.*

### General Counsel

**Todd Atwater**

**FTEs: 7**

**Hiring in Process: 2**

**Turnover Rate:\* 0%**

\*Turnover rate calculated for FY23-24.

# General Counsel

## Todd Atwater

**Responsibility:** *The Office of General Counsel serves as the chief legal advisor to the State Superintendent and agency leadership. It provides legal counsel on state and federal education laws, oversees the development and interpretation of regulations, manages administrative hearings, and ensures legal compliance across all agency programs. The office handles contract review, ethics guidance, and dispute resolution while supporting districts with complex legal issues. By promoting sound legal practices, the office safeguards the agency’s operations and maintains public trust in the integrity of South Carolina’s education system.*

### Services:

- Legal guidance on IDEA, FERPA, FOIA, and all educational laws.
- Oversight and legal defense of educator certification disciplinary cases.
- Advisory services on legal compliance for students in foster care, group homes, etc.
- General counsel services for the State Superintendent and SCDE divisions.
- Legal review and advisory services for federal education programs.
- Legal and administrative support to the State Board of Education.

### Customers:

School Districts | Educators |  
State Superintendent | SCDE offices | State Board of  
Education | General public (e.g., FOIA)

### Accomplishments:

- Strong support for the State's litigation regarding overreaching Title IX Regulations.
- Successful implementation of SC Code Reg. 43-170, the Uniform Procedure for Selection of Instructional Materials.
- 82 legal service engagements with LEAs annually (IDEA/FERPA/FOIA/general guidance)
- 210 educator disciplinary matters presented to the State Board in FY24 (up from 186 in FY22, showing increasing demand for legal intervention).
- Responsiveness to federal program inquiries and SCDE executive requests.

### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Hiring and retention of attorneys.
- Staffing to investigate educator misconduct in a manner that is both thorough and timely.
- Funding, rates, and insurance coverage issues for third-party hearing officers.
- SC Supreme Court's 2024 opinion in *Eidson* striking significant portions of the ESTF program.
- 4th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals rulings inconsistent with the policies and laws of South Carolina.

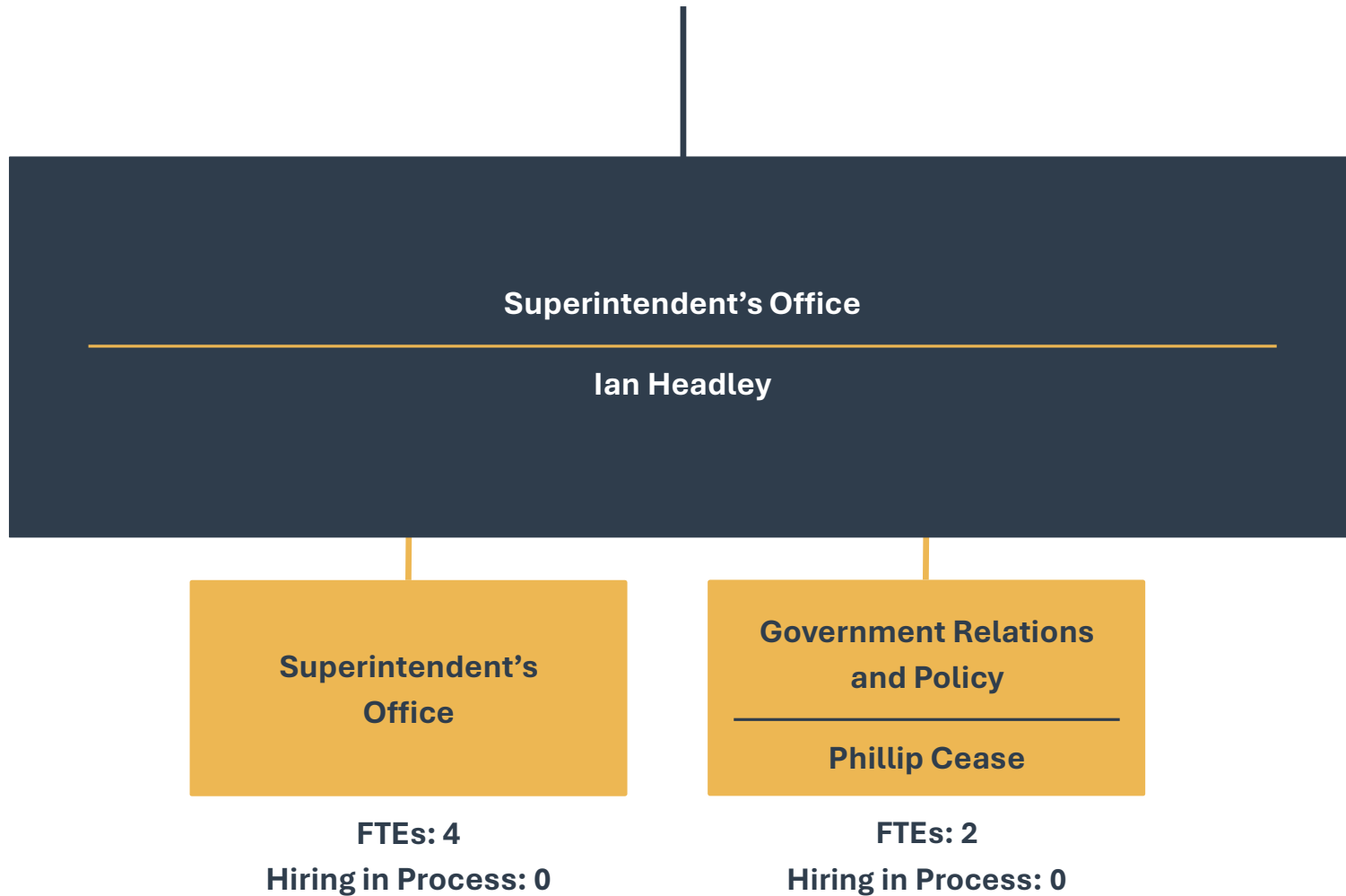


# Agency Divisions

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## Superintendent's Office





**Turnover Rate:\* 0%**

\*Turnover rate calculated for FY23-24.

## Superintendent's Office

### Ian Headley

**Responsibility:** *The Superintendent's Office provides executive leadership, oversight, and support across divisions of the South Carolina Department of Education. It supports alignment of agency functions—policy, academic programs, operations, finance, legislation, and strategic initiatives—with the State Superintendent's vision and the agency's strategic goals. The office directs cross-agency coordination, manages responses to legislative and public inquiries, and ensures accountability for performance and impact across every division.*

#### Services:

- Set agency-wide vision and strategic direction in alignment with state law and the Superintendent's priorities.
- Coordinate legislative policy, external requests, and cross-office collaboration.
- Oversee statewide academic, operational, and administrative initiatives.
- Support leadership development, agency alignment, and strategic communication.

#### Customers:

Students | Families | Educators | Taxpayers  
All Agency Offices | General Assembly | Governor's Office | State Board of Education | Education Oversight Committee | School Districts | Business & Industry | Community-based Organizations

#### Accomplishments:

- Launched and aligned the agency vision: ensuring every child is college, career, or military ready; 2030 Goal: at least 75% of students at or above grade level; and supporting strategies, objectives, and processes.
- Oversaw the development and implementation of a cohesive strategic plan across all divisions.
- Streamlined executive communication and coordination across 25+ offices to enhance clarity and responsiveness.
- Supported agency-wide leadership development aligned to core goals and accountability structures.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Supporting implementation of all four strategic plan objectives through targeted leadership development, shared accountability structures, and cross-office alignment.
- Streamlining communication and response processes across multiple offices to ensure consistent, timely engagement with districts, legislators, and all stakeholders.
- Advancing internal reporting and coordination tools to monitor progress toward strategic goals and inform decision-making at the executive level.

# Superintendent's Statewide Engagement

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## **Engaging with Communities**

The Superintendent regularly engages directly with local leaders, teachers, parents, and students through school visits; presentations to community, business, and faith groups; and meetings with educational support organizations.

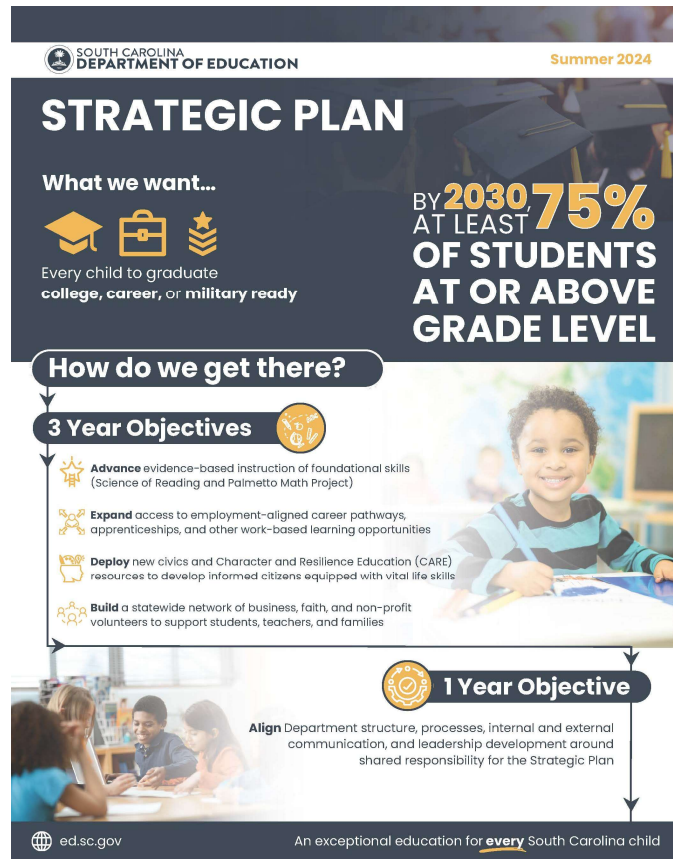
## **Highlighting Issues and Successes**

Visits focus on identifying key issues, celebrating achievements, fostering collaboration between the SCDE and school districts, and encouraging local communities to support the academic growth of students.

## **Informing Agency Priorities**

Feedback and insights from these visits directly shape agency priorities, showing a commitment to transparency and partnership.

# Superintendent's Agency Assessment & Strategic Plan



## Agency Assessment

Supported the Superintendent's early efforts to meet with every office and employee in the Department to assess their areas of responsibility and work.

## Strategic Planning

Using these initial assessments and data on current student academic achievement assisted in the creation of a department strategic plan and planning process.

## Ongoing Improvements

Working with key leaders in the Department, created an ongoing planning process that both supports office level leadership and establishes a feedback loop to connect each office's work with the ultimate goal: student academic achievement.

# CRM System Empowers Agency Engagement

*SCDE is in the planning stages of deploying a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to unify stakeholder engagement, streamline operations, and build a scalable foundation to modernize how the agency tracks, responds to, and learns from its interactions with districts and constituents.*

## Purpose & Vision

- **Purpose:**  
Launching a CRM across key offices to centralize external communications, requests, and follow-up.
- **Functionality:**  
Tracks inquiries, concerns, and resolutions across multiple channels (email, phone, web, social media).
- **Initial Offices Included:**  
Government Affairs, Superintendent, State Board, and Communications.
- **Use Cases:**  
Legislative coordination, constituent services, board correspondence, media inquiries, and public engagement tracking.

## Key Benefits

1. **Unified Engagement Tracking:** The CRM system will consolidate all external communications and stakeholder requests, simplifying follow-up and record-keeping for greater transparency.
2. **Enhanced Responsiveness and Transparency:** Automated tracking and follow-ups in the CRM will increase responsiveness and ensure stakeholders experience transparent, consistent interactions.
3. **Proactive Trend Analysis and Outreach:** The system will enable analysis of engagement trends and support proactive outreach, helping anticipate needs and improve stakeholder relationships.
4. **Model for Digital Transformation:** The CRM system will serve as a best-practice example for other divisions, supporting platform expansion.

## Government Relations and Policy

### Phillip Cease

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Government Affairs manages the agency's relationships with the South Carolina General Assembly, Governor's Office, and other government entities. It monitors legislation, develops policy options, and coordinates the agency's response to proposed laws and regulations. Serving as the primary liaison between the Department and policymakers, the office provides timely information to support informed decision-making on education policy.*

#### Services:

- **Legislative Outreach and Coordination:** Communicates with members of the South Carolina General Assembly and their staff to provide updates on education policy, budget proposals, and pending legislation.
- **State Reporting Compliance:** Ensures all reports required by law or legislative mandate are submitted by SCDE to the appropriate recipients, including the General Assembly and oversight bodies.

#### Customers:

Members of the General Assembly | Legislative staff |  
Internal SCDE leadership | External agencies  
requiring legislatively mandated data

#### Accomplishments:

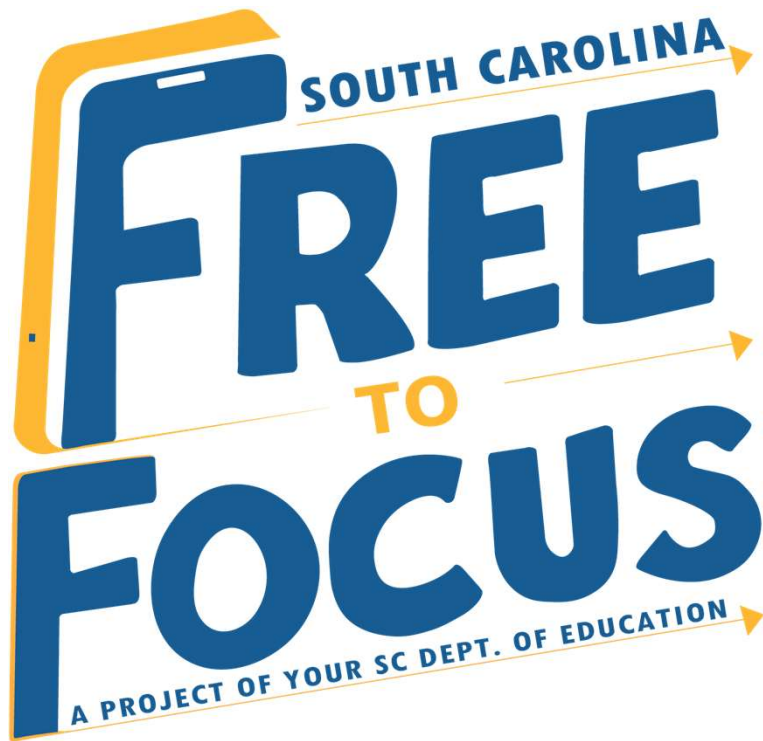
- Delivered 20+ formal briefings and bill analyses in the 2024–25 session, directly informing budget decisions and policy debates.
- Established regular “legislative update” newsletters, increasing open-rate engagement with lawmakers by 40%.
- On-time submission of all legislatively mandated reports for the past three fiscal years.
- Realigned the Office of Government Affairs under the Superintendent's Office to ensure tighter coordination of legislative priorities

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Preparing the 2025–26 Legislative Session Briefing Book, including impact analyses for proposed K–12 education bills
- Reviewing statutory reporting requirements to streamline internal timelines and improve submission efficiency
- Enhancing two-way communication between SCDE and House/Senate education committees
- Supporting drafting and impact analysis of potential legislation affecting K-12 education.

# Proviso 1.103 - Cell Phone Free Schools

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## **Proviso to Policy**

Engaged parents, teachers, and school district leaders to assist the State Board of Education in gathering feedback and recommendations for policy language aligned with the General Assembly's direction to eliminate use of personal electronic devices during the school day.

## **Policy to Implementation**

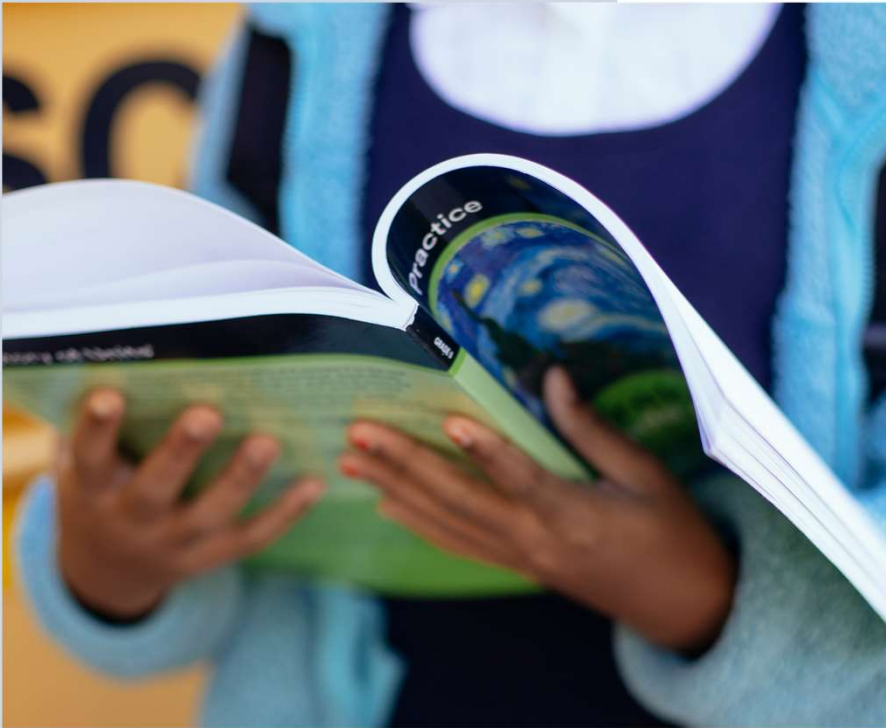
Supported the SCDE Communications Office in reaching out to school districts, community organizations, and parents regarding the importance and positive impact of the policy.

## **Assessing Impact**

Assisted SCDE Office of Research & Data Analysis in reviewing impacts of the policy.

# Instructional Materials – R. 43-170

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## **Bringing Clear Guidelines**

Effectively reviewed laws and requirements on instructional material reviews, responding to broad parental and community concerns with practical solutions. Unanimous passage by State Board of Education after extensive public input and revision.

## **Implementing Compliance Frameworks**

Established protocols that meet constitutional standards while maintaining educational integrity in schools.

## **Supporting School Districts**

Provided districts with clear review protocols and resources, recognized for promoting transparency for parents and uniform procedures for districts.

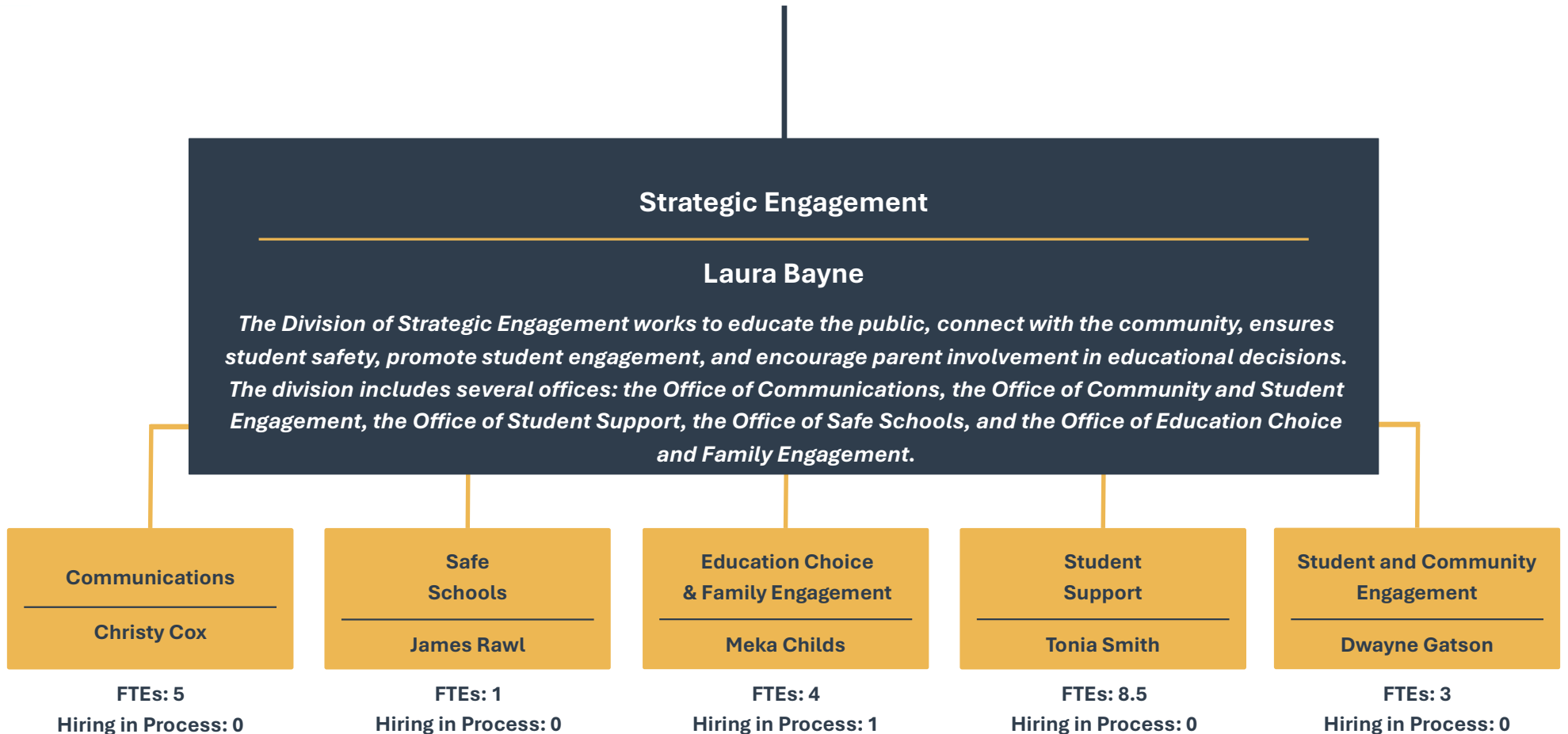


# Agency Divisions

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## Strategic Engagement





Turnover Rate:\* 0%

\*Turnover rate calculated for FY23-24.

## Communications

### Christy Cox

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Communications serves as the central hub for the agency's media relations, public information, and school-district outreach. It manages press inquiries, SCDE's web and social media presence, and produces newsletters and memoranda to keep stakeholders informed. In addition to its communications work, the office coordinates major statewide events and recognition programs—including the South Carolina Teacher of the Year celebration, the Military Honor Cord ceremony, and other initiatives that highlight excellence in education and honor the service of students, families, and educators.*

#### Services:

- Engages students, families, educators, and the public on education issues, policy changes, and agency initiatives through proactive communication and responsive outreach.
- Manages all media relations, including the development and distribution of press releases, media advisories, and official statements.
- Coordinates and promotes key agency events such as Teacher of the Year Gala, Military Honor Cord ceremony, and major statewide education announcements.

#### Customers:

SC Students, Parents, Educators, and Citizens |  
SCDE Leadership and Offices

#### Accomplishments:

- Issued 33 press releases in FY 2023–24, keeping stakeholders informed of agency priorities, achievements, and changes.
- Initiated statewide "Free to Focus" public relations campaign, with district integration in messaging.
- Maintained strong media engagement, responding to local and national education inquiries and supporting accurate public reporting.
- Led communications for high-visibility initiatives and recognition programs, including Teacher of the Year and Military Honor Cord.
- Supported consistent messaging across divisions, helping ensure clarity and alignment in agency communications to the public.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Enhancing digital platforms and tools to improve the reach and accessibility of SCDE communications.
- Developing media toolkits and internal guidance to support consistent messaging across offices.
- Coordinating agency-wide communications for new legislative initiatives and strategic plan milestones.

## How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

In the short term, we will measure progress toward our one-year goal of honoring South Carolina's pivotal role in securing American freedom through a variety of meaningful metrics. These include educator feedback on the SC250/civics curriculum in classrooms, the creation and participation in SC250-inspired events that generate positive media coverage and educator engagement, and a noticeable increase in public awareness of our state's rich history and the South Carolinians whose service and sacrifice helped shape our nation.

**46,000**

Facebook followers

**459**

Media  
statements/responses  
issued in fiscal year 2024-  
25

Assess feedback and  
engagement.

Agency wide move to “smart  
brevity” messaging that  
honors all our stakeholders.

BY **2030** **75%** OF STUDENTS AT OR  
AT LEAST **ABOVE GRADE LEVEL**

Office of Communications Strategic Plan

## Three-Year Milestones

### Build Our “Front Porch”

Ensure SCDE switchboard, ombudsmen and website are easily accessible, welcoming, expeditious and effective in serving citizens.

### Maximize Internal Communications

Provide strong, reliable and impactful channels of internal communication so that every department feels invested in SCDE mission.

### Inspire, Provoke and Engage!

Craft creative, highly-elevated and unique social media postings/ campaigns that inspire citizens’ faith and engagement in our schools.

### Just “Saae” It!

**Streamline** and simplify all SCDE messaging; make it **accessible** and easy to understand. Ensure accuracy, **accountability** and **expeditious** delivery.

## One-Year Goal

Creatively and successfully implement rigorous strategies to mark, celebrate, and promote South Carolina history and our history makers as part of the larger US Sestercentennial celebration culminating on July 4, 2026.

## Safe Schools

### James Rawl

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Safe Schools leads school safety efforts by developing resources, training, and compliance supports to reduce violence and emergency risks. It administers intruder and threat assessment guides, emergency operations planning, and manages federal/state safety grants and school safety checklists that districts use to improve safety measures.*

#### Services:

- Partners with SLED to deliver local, regional, and statewide training on school safety and emergency response, including active shooter drills, reunification protocols, and school security exercises.
- Conducts site surveys to assess potential safety risks in school facilities and provides recommendations to improve physical security and preparedness.

#### Customers:

School Districts | School Administrators, Safety Officers, and Transportation Staff | Emergency Response Partners (e.g., SLED)

#### Accomplishments:

- Delivered 117 safety and emergency response trainings in FY 2023–24, up from 64 in FY 2021–22, reaching nearly every district.
- Completed 100 school site safety surveys in FY 2023–24, up from just 10 two years prior—dramatically expanding district access to expert risk assessments.
- Expanded support for specialized trainings, including sessions for SPED environments and bus drivers.
- Strengthened collaboration with law enforcement to ensure statewide consistency in school safety training.
- Distributed \$40 million (FY 2023-24 and 2024-25) in school safety upgrade funding for high-priority district safety improvements.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Developing updated training modules and survey tools aligned to evolving safety threats and federal guidelines.
- Building a centralized data system to track safety trends and school responses.
- Increasing support for rural and high-need districts through targeted on-site training and follow-up services.

# How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

- Allocation of School Safety Funds
- School Mapping Data Program
- Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) Training
- Model Safe Schools Checklist and District Safety Plans Submissions
- Model Fire and Safety Policy

**160**

Completed 160 school sight  
surveys

**\$40,000,000**

Allocation of 40M in school  
safety funds over previous 2  
years

Trained hundreds of law  
enforcement and district  
personnel in behavioral threat  
assessment

Partnered with I Love U Guys to  
bring training and a nationally  
recognized school safety  
program to the state

# BY 2030 AT LEAST 75% OF STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL

Office of Safe Schools Strategic Plan

## Three-Year Milestones

### Discretionary Funding:

Set priorities and meaningful reporting framework for safety funds. Collect impact data from 20% of districts funded.

**Training:** Ensure 75% of school districts have certified BTAM instructors.

### Infrastructure Risk Mitigation:

Conduct site assessments in at least 75% of South Carolina public schools.

### School Mapping:

100% of the schools in the state should be mapped, kept updated, and any associated training completed.

## One-Year Goal

Activate 2025 school safety task force (with SLED and Gubernatorial buy-in) to publish best practices around critical event response, reunification, and family assistance.

## Education Choice and Family Engagement

### Meka Childs

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Education Choice and Family Engagement oversees a range of public-school choice options and provides families with the information and support needed to navigate educational pathways. The office also administers the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF), managing its implementation and compliance to ensure eligible families can access approved educational services. In addition, the office oversees charter school authorizers, accreditation processes, and family engagement initiatives related to educational options across the state.*

#### Services:

- Monitors sub-grant recipients of the Charter School Planning and Implementation (P&I) Grant through phone calls, desk audits, and on-site visits to ensure compliance and support successful school development.
- Serves as convening point with the school authorizers to seek ways to improve and strengthen legislation and policy.
- Oversees the implementation and management of the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF), providing eligible families with funding to support approved educational expenses.

#### Customers:

Charter School subrecipients of P&I Grants |  
Students and Families Participating in ESTF | Charter  
School Authorizers | Education Service Providers |  
Military-connected Families and Students

#### Accomplishments:

- Maintained oversight of P&I subgrants through tailored support and monitoring, ensuring compliance with federal guidelines.
- Successfully launched the ESTF program, with over 5,000 students awarded scholarships in its first year of implementation.
- Built statewide infrastructure to support family participation in school choice, including application systems, eligibility verification, and payment processing.
- Provided clear communication and technical assistance to families navigating new education options under ESTF.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Expanding technical assistance and compliance tools for charter subgrantees.
- Monitoring and refining ESTF operations to ensure fiscal accountability and fair access for eligible families.
- Collaborating with program administrators and vendors to improve the user experience for families and education providers.

# How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

The Education Choice and Family Engagement office oversees all school choice programming for the state including:

- The Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program
- Charter Schools
- Magnet schools

Additionally, the office coordinates family engagement efforts and military outreach efforts, including the development and launch of the agency's Parent Portal (coming soon). The portal will give parents access to information about what schooling options exist for their children and how to access needed resources in the course of their child's education journey in the state.

The office knows it is achieving its mission effectively based on trends it sees in inbound constituent inquiries; the number of charter schools opening, closing and expanding; program saturation and additional demand expressed, and the number of web hits on the resources developed.

**10,000**

ESTF Program Participants for  
the 2025-26 academic school  
year

**22**

P&I grantees supported

**30**

Public school districts  
participating as ESTF service  
providers

**13**

Charter School authorizers

# BY 2030 AT LEAST 75% OF STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL

Office of Education Choice Strategic Plan

## Three-Year Milestones

Increase the number of local authorizers to 11 and the number of IHE authorizers to 3.

Increase the number of ESPs to 50 school districts, 50 therapists, 100 tutors, and 10 transportation providers.

Increase the number of Purple Star districts by 15%.

Increase the number of CTE-focused charter schools by 10%.

## One-Year Goal

Parent awareness campaign deployed promoting education choice with resources in place to increase awareness and saturation.

# South Carolina's Growing Education Ecosystem



**What educational setting best fits the unique needs of my child?**



**Traditional Schools**



**Magnet Schools**



**Charter Schools**



**Education Scholarship Trust Fund**



**Independent Schools**



**Home School Options**

# Strengthened Charter Partnerships



## Enhanced Collaboration

Stronger relationships with charter authorizers, operators, and legislators foster improved partnership and educational outcomes.

## Clear Operational Framework

The creation of a clearer framework strengthens oversight, accountability, and resource alignment for charter schools.

## Support for Parent Choice

Initiatives ensure parents have fair access to a variety of high-quality educational opportunities for their children.

# Implementing ESA/ESTF Legislation

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## **Legislation Leadership**

The Education Choice and Family Engagement Office led the passage and initial implementation of ESA and ESTF legislation.

## **Collaborative Program Design**

Collaboration with legislators, boards, and partners ensured efficient program design and a smooth launch process.

## **New Guidelines and Systems**

The division created communications, eligibility guidelines, and streamlined application systems for education choice and funding.

## Student Support

### Tonia Mallett Smith

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Student Support oversees programs that strengthen student well-being and school connectedness. It manages initiatives like Stronger Connections, anti-bullying efforts, chronic absenteeism interventions, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, alternative school models, and analyzing trends in discipline data to provide behavioral, mental health, and academic support across districts.*

#### Services:

- Administers the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, including training, support, and monitoring of recipients delivering after-school programming.
- Administers the federally funded Stronger Connections program meant to reduce bullying and discipline instances in schools.
- Provides training, technical assistance, and monitoring related to student behavior, discipline, and alternative education.
- Administers state and federal sexual risk avoidance funds to organizations that deliver that education directly to students.

#### Customers:

Community-Based Organizations | Students |  
Families | School Districts administering initiatives

#### Accomplishments:

- Distributed over \$21.2 million in 21st CCLC after-school funding in FY 2023–24 to support academic enrichment and family engagement.
- Maintained consistent alternative school training delivery (5 annually) over the past three years to improve district approaches to student behavior and discipline.
- Provided direct oversight and technical assistance for grant compliance and program quality in extended learning and alternative education efforts.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Expanding support resources and monitoring protocols for 21st CCLC subgrantees.
- Updating guidance and training related to behavioral interventions and alternative education strategies.
- Strengthening program alignment with district needs and state priorities in student engagement and dropout prevention.

## How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

The Office of Student Support measures the effectiveness of its mission through enhanced data collection efforts. With the support of professional development opportunities, districts will be equipped to accurately enter the required data into PowerSchool. This will help ensure that state-level data reviews reflect accurate and meaningful representations of school-based efforts.

Additionally, with ongoing professional development, subgrantees will be better prepared to submit all required documentation to the Office of Student Support both accurately and on time. These practices will enable us to effectively monitor expenditures and evaluate the success of program implementation.

**40% increase**

in subgrantees meeting state and federal reporting guideline

**25% increase**

in districts inputting truancy and chronic absentee data timely and accurately

**20% increase**

in collecting student performance data vs program implementation data

Program funding made available from non-federal sources

BY **2030** **75%** OF STUDENTS AT OR  
AT LEAST **ABOVE GRADE LEVEL**

Office of Student Support Strategic Plan

### Three-Year Milestones

Capacity: Expand data collection past program implementation to that of increased student outcomes

System and Processes: Expand the data dashboard and increase aligned training by 10%

Student Outcomes: Increase amount of offered PD in tiered intervention by 20%

Sustainable Funding: Evaluate a transition plan for services to state funds in the event grant funding is decreased or discontinued

### One-Year Goal

Increased PD for LEAs by 25%.

## Student and Community Engagement

### Dwayne Gatson

**Responsibility:** *The Office of Student and Community Engagement fosters strong partnerships among families, schools, and community organizations to support student success. It leads implementation of the CARE (Character and Resilience Education) framework, which promotes civic responsibility, life skills, and personal development. The office works to strengthen communication between schools and families, encourage meaningful engagement, and connect communities with resources that help students thrive both in and out of the classroom.*

#### Services:

- Supports districts with training and resources on effective character/resiliency education.
- Facilitates regional partnership development between schools, districts, and community-based organizations, including faith-based institutions.
- Coordinates "Project Raise Your Hand," which gives community and faith organizations an easy mechanism through which to volunteer in schools
- Publishes the annual South Carolina African American History Calendar.
- Spearheads the "Let Grow" initiative in schools.

#### Customers:

School Districts | Community and faith-based Organizations | Teachers

#### Accomplishments:

- Convened three Community Partner Strikeforce meetings in FY 2023–24 to strengthen cross-sector collaboration.
- Re-established statewide engagement infrastructure following a period of limited activity in prior years.
- Provided district-level guidance to improve family-school partnerships and connect families with local supports.
- Published the South Carolina African American History Calendar featuring family members and friends of the Emanuel Nine.
- Developed the "Hope Tour" and conducted several regional stops to share curriculum and resources.

#### Challenges and Opportunities:

- Expanding regional training opportunities and toolkits for community engagement.
- Building systems to track engagement activities and measure impact.

## How does this office know it is effectively achieving its mission?

The newly formed (December 2024) Office of Student and Community Engagement (OSCE) will know it is achieving its mission when:

- When school “needs” are known for every school within all state districts, expanding volunteer opportunities.
- There is a fully functioning infrastructure in place to support the strategic deployment of its growing compendium of resources to schools and students.
- OSCE has organized the build of volunteer networks in all five regions of the state and provided a formal system to onboard organizations and individuals into districts to connect resources with identified school needs.

### 56% increase

In SY24-25, fully implemented **iLead** in 126 schools (56% increase); trained 104,589 *students* (9% increase); trained 4,241 *educators* (100% increase).

### 40%

100% District-level Volunteer Oversight now in place; “school needs” responses at 40% and growing.

### 2,140

Became first ***Let Grow Lighthouse State*** in the nation, leading a growing movement to give kids more independence, responsibility, and free play.

Conducted three teacher outreach events and activities primarily funded by community partners and volunteers, directly engaging 2,140 teachers.

BY **2030** **75%** OF STUDENTS AT OR  
AT LEAST **ABOVE GRADE LEVEL**

Office of Student and Community Engagement (OSCE) Strategic Plan

## Three-Year Milestones

OSCE has a fully functioning infrastructure to deploy CARE resources and Strike Force Assets to all five regions of South Carolina

OSCE informs stakeholders of student needs and links students with resources to provide durable skills to excel

OSCE builds a sustainable network among all community sector (including business, faith, and non-profit) volunteers that support students, teachers, and families

OSCE sustains a robust database that creates organizational efficiencies to track programs and volunteer initiatives in support of students, communities, and teachers

## One-Year Goal

The Office of Student and Community Engagement (OSCE) will provide sustained student and community engagement through strategic networking, programs, internal collaboration, and other support that will bring transformation to schools and strengthen community sectors in South Carolina.

## Project Raise Your Hand

SERVE STUDENTS. SUPPORT TEACHERS.  
EMPOWER PARENTS. ENGAGE COMMUNITIES.

We connect districts with community partners to create sustainable solutions to some of our schools' biggest needs. Our goal is to prepare and equip every student for a successful future.



## One Purpose

Every South Carolina student is precious and full of potential. We hold high expectations for them because we believe in their resilience and capability. But high expectations require high support. And that requires effort from each of us: our schools, our responsibility. Project Raise Your Hand seeks to build sustainable partnerships to maximize the efforts of educators, parents, and community leaders working together to support our students' success. Working together, we can build a vibrant, hope-filled future for our students and state.

- ✓ OUR SCHOOLS, OUR RESPONSIBILITY
- ✓ HIGH EXPECTATIONS, HIGH SUPPORT
- ✓ A HOPE-FILLED FUTURE FOR EVERY STUDENT

# ProjectRaiseYourHand.com