Education in South Carolina
The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly
Below is a survey of the state of education in South Carolina:

The Good

Standards – In 2010, South Carolina’s English language arts (ELA) and math standards received a D and C, respectively, from the national Thomas B. Fordham Institute. On July 14, 2010 the South Carolina State Board of Education adopted the rigorous Common Core State Standards in ELA and math for grades K–12. These new standards received a B+ and an A- for ELA and math, respectively, from the Fordham Institute. Mastery of these standards will help ensure that South Carolina students are prepared for success in college and the workforce.

Data System – South Carolina’s state longitudinal data system contains eight of the ten core elements that the Data Quality Campaign deems essential. The state still must work to provide information on untested students, as well as match student-level P–12 and higher education data. South Carolina must also work to maximize use of data capacity in driving effective decision making to improve system and student performance.

Charter School Laws – According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools’ 2011 ranking of state charter school laws, South Carolina’s public charter school law is ranked 19th in the nation, with no arbitrary cap on the number of charters permitted to operate. South Carolina law allows for a variety of public charter school options, including new start-ups, public school conversions, and virtual schools. South Carolina can improve its law by ensuring equitable funding and access to facilities as well as strengthening quality control measures. For the 2010-11 school year, South Carolina has 17,000 students attending public charter schools.

The Bad

Teacher Policies – In its 2009 State Teacher Policy Yearbook, the National Council on Teacher Quality gave the state of South Carolina an overall C- for state policies focused on teachers. Specifically, the state received grades on its ability to perform in the following areas:

- Delivering well-prepared teachers: D+
- Expanding the pool of teachers: D
- Identifying effective teachers: C
- Retaining effective teachers: C
- Exiting ineffective teachers: C+

Return on Investment – Student achievement in South Carolina is modest relative to state spending on education according to the 2007 national Leaders and Laggards report. South Carolina received a C and ranked 26th among all states for its return on investment, which was measured by its students’ performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—an independent measuring stick also known as the Nation’s Report Card—relative to its per-pupil spending ($6,398, after controlling for student poverty, the percentage of students with special needs, and cost of living).
The Ugly

**Student Achievement** – Like many other states, South Carolina paints a misleading picture of how well its students are performing. While the state reports proficiency rates of 75% or higher for 4th and 8th graders in math, NAEP reveals a 34% or lower proficiency rate for both grades.8

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4th Grade Math</th>
<th>8th Grade Math</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Test</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAEP</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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**Achievement Gap** – Not only is the state performing insufficiently overall, but some groups of students are faring even worse. There is more than a 24-point gap in scores between South Carolina’s black and white students on both 4th and 8th grade reading and math tests.9 This is morally unacceptable and a significant threat to continued prosperity and economic competitiveness in South Carolina and the nation.

**Graduation Rate** – South Carolina reports a 71% graduation rate,10 but the national Diplomas Count report calculates a rate of 55%.11 Below is the percentage of students graduating in 2007 in South Carolina, compared to the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>United States (Diplomas Count-reported)</th>
<th>South Carolina (Diplomas Count-reported)</th>
<th>South Carolina (State-reported)</th>
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<tr>
<td>69%</td>
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<td>55%</td>
<td>71%</td>
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Dropouts’ Effect on the Economy – The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that the lost lifetime earnings in South Carolina for the 2010 class of dropouts alone would total over $7.8 billion. If South Carolina graduated all students ready for college, the state would save as much as $54.3 million a year in community college remediation costs and lost earnings. In addition, if the state increased its male high school graduation rate just 5%, South Carolina’s economy would see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue of about $151 million each year. Significantly reducing dropouts each year would multiply these positive outcomes.

Endnotes


For more information on the National Chamber Foundation visit www.uschamber.com/ncf. Learn more about the Chamber’s education agenda at www.uschamber.com/icw.