

A Matter of Facts

About The State of South Carolina Annual

School and District Report Cards

South Carolina's Performance Goal:

By 2010, South Carolina's student achievement will be ranked in the top half of states nationally. To achieve this goal, we must become one of the five fastest improving systems in the country.

Education Accountability Act (EAA): Five Components

- **Curriculum Content Standards** – The required knowledge and skills for students in English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.
- **Assessments** – Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests in grades 3-8; an exit exam and end-of-course tests for high schools.
- **Professional Development/Technical Assistance** – Teacher training and assistance to low-performing schools.
- **Public Reporting** – The school and district report cards; data to use in decision-making and program evaluation.
- **Rewards and Intervention** – Recognition for schools performing at high levels or with high rates of improvement and intervention for schools that do not improve.

The School and District Report Cards

- Issued to all public schools and school districts by November 1 of each year.
- Distributed to parents by November 15.
- Results advertised in newspaper within 45 days of release.
- Printed in black and white.

Purposes of the Report Card

- Inform parents and the public about the school's or school district's performance.
- Assist in addressing the strengths and weaknesses within a particular school.
- Recognize schools with high performance and improvement.
- Evaluate and focus resources on schools with low performance.

Report Card Rating Terms

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Below Average
- Unsatisfactory

Application of Ratings

- **Absolute Rating** – The academic achievement of students in the school year upon which the report card is based measured against the target level (2010 goal) of performance.
- **Improvement Rating** – The progress of longitudinally-matched student achievement scores from one year to the next.
- **Ratings Increase in Rigor Over Time** – The score, or index ranges, that determines a school's performance level rating remained the same from 2001-2003. Beginning in 2004, the score ranges increase annually through 2010.
- **Adequate Yearly Progress** – As required by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) specifies that the statewide target is met for all students and for each student subgroup: racial/ethnic, economic, disability, limited English proficiency, and migrant status. (Contact State Department of Education for more information on AYP.)

Report Card Contents

- **General Information** – The name, location, enrollment, and leadership structure of a school or district, the state's 2010 education goal, and Web site resources are provided.
- **School/District Ratings** – The Absolute and Improvement Ratings, the performance trends over the past four years and a comparison to Schools/Districts with Students Like Ours are provided. Notice of the school's or district's status of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) also is provided.
- **Standardized Test Results** – Details of student achievement data by content area and by grade level are provided in both pie charts and tabular form. Student results are disaggregated by student gender, ethnicity, disability status, socio-economic status, migrant status, and English proficiency status.
- **School/District Profile** – Information about the school or district is provided in three categories: students, staff and school programs and compared to Schools/Districts with Students Like Ours and the State Median.

Report Card Contents (Continued)

- **School/District Narrative and Survey Results** – A narrative about the school's or district's accomplishments and its plans to address any barriers to increasing student achievement is provided by the school principal and School Improvement Council or superintendent. Results of surveys of teachers, students and parents evaluating the school/district learning environment, social and physical environment and home-school relations also are provided.

Criteria Used to Calculate School Ratings

- **K-2 Only Schools** – Student attendance, pupil-teacher ratios, parent involvement, external accreditation that is early childhood specific and professional development time devoted exclusively to early childhood.
- **Elementary and Middle Schools with Grades 3-8** – Percentage of students achieving at different levels on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT).
- **High Schools with Grades 9-12** – Percentage of first attempt and seniors passing the high school exit exam, percentage of seniors eligible for LIFE Scholarships to four-year institutions and graduation rate.
- **Career & Technology Centers** – Percentage of students who earn a 2.0 or above on the final course grade, the graduation rate, and the percentage of graduates who are placed in either post-secondary instruction, military services or employment.
- **School Districts** – Weighted summary of the criteria for elementary, middle and high schools within the school district.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Q. What is the difference between school/district ratings and Adequate Yearly Progress?

- A. School/district ratings were established in 1998 by the EAA to communicate a school's overall level of student performance and progress to the 2010 education goal. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) was added as a third measure in 2002 by NCLB to communicate if a school/district met or did not meet the annual targets for student performance and testing participation rates. Schools/districts with an Excellent or Good Absolute Rating that do not meet AYP for all students have their rating lowered one level from Excellent to Good or from Good to Average.

Q. What happens if my child's school gets a low rating?

- A. Schools with a Below Average or Unsatisfactory Absolute Rating are eligible to receive technical

assistance and resources provided through the State Department of Education. Technical assistance may include teacher specialists, professional development, principal specialists, and grants for homework centers and extended year programs. Parents of children in Title 1 schools that do not meet AYP for two and three consecutive years are provided options including transfers to other schools or supplementary services for their children.

Q. How should parents respond if their child's school receives a low rating?

- A. Parents should observe how their child's school responds to areas of concern and how their child is achieving. Parents are integral to the school improvement process. Parents can encourage the school to address concerns, encourage student learning and make student attendance a priority.

Q. Are ratings considered the same things as labels? Won't they do more harm than good?

- A. Unlike labels, ratings aren't perceived as being permanent. Ratings are simplified statements to help the public better understand the overall level of academic performance of a school or district and can be powerful motivators for change. Positive ratings bring recognition and pride. Lower ratings bring support and technical assistance. SC focuses on continuous improvement.

Q. Why are test scores used to rate schools?

- A. Test scores are a uniformly collected result of schooling. Test scores are used in decisions schools make about students' promotion, selection into special programs, admission to post-secondary education and eligibility for scholarships. Emphasis on test scores reflect the primary mission of schools to provide academic competencies.

Q. Is there a process for schools/districts to appeal their ratings and/or other report card information?

- A. Yes, each school and district is given an opportunity to appeal to the State Department of Education (SDE). If differences exist between the SDE data and the school or district data, the differences are reconciled, and if necessary, the ratings are recalculated. In general, other report card data elements are collected from several sources, each of which has its own provisions for assuring that the data are accurate. A large amount of data is collected in early summer. Data provided by the deadline date are printed and returned to the school/district for review and correction, as time permits.