

SOUTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

2009 LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM and POSITION STATEMENTS

Because education is the driving factor for the engine of economic development and quality of life, **the South Carolina Association of School Administrators** calls upon itself and all who care about South Carolina's future to focus on continued educational improvement, to set aside particular interests and address collective responsibility, and once again, to engage our energies on our tomorrows.

2009 PLATFORM ISSUES

For the 2009 legislative session, SCASA focuses its energy on two **Platform Issues** that deeply **affect the quality** of education available to the people of South Carolina:

- **Public Education Funding Reform**
- **Public School Choice**

Position Statements

The additional **Position Statements** clarify the **Platform Issues** and address some of the many other important issues which also affect public education in South Carolina.

These SCASA Platform Issues and Position Statements are also available on the SCASA website, at http://www.scasa.org/legislative_platform_2009.pdf.

SOUTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

2009

LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM ISSUES

For the 2009 legislative session, SCASA focuses its energy on two major **Platform Issues**:

Public Education Funding Reform

SCASA urges the General Assembly to set as its first priority providing equitable and adequate funding of preK-12 in order to ensure a quality public education for all students regardless of where they live, go to school or what their needs are.

Issues with the current funding system for public K12 education are:

1. The current funding system is cumbersome and ineffective with many categorical funding sources. It is accompanied by laws and regulations that make it difficult to craft a comprehensive, innovative educational program.
2. The current system continues to erode the Education Finance Act (EFA) of 1977.
3. The current system provides inadequate financial resources to support a modern 21st century education, in general, and provides inadequate resources to overcome the specific effects of poverty — a major barrier to our state's progress.
4. The allocation method of the current system uses Weighted Pupil Units (WPU) only with selected revenue sources instead of using those WPUs with the majority of revenue sources; however, policy issues of great state interest may continue to exist that would require some categorical funding.
5. Act 388's inequities have impacted the current system.
6. The current system is funded through an unbalanced revenue system that relies too heavily on narrow high taxes rather than broad lower taxes.

A comprehensive plan for modernizing our education funding system and revenue system, including a 21st century foundation program, is needed.

SCASA believes that a comprehensive, updated plan for educational funding and tax reform is necessary to create a funding and revenue system that is stable, equitable

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and adequate to fund a modern 21st century education and to prepare students to meet the achievement expectations set by the state.

It is proposed that the following comprehensive planning steps be taken:

1. Use a multi-year phase-in plan for increased funding for the new foundation program and accompanying initiatives. A preliminary proposal for priority in the plan is to begin with the at-risk four-year-old program, the poverty index, and corrections to Act 388, unless Act 388 is mitigated by the proposed new funding plan and revenue system. Typically, states seeking to implement funding proposals use a 6-to-8-year development plan.
2. Streamlining and realigning various funding sources. Education Improvement Act, general fund, and special revenue funds should be realigned in order to decrease the number of individual accounts, streams of dollars with accompanying regulations and requirements, thereby decreasing categorical funding. This realignment would allow districts to use state dollars more efficiently and effectively and would make the funding system more understandable and transparent. Current education funding could be realigned to support these recommended initiatives. Implementation of this realignment can begin in 2010-11. This requires no additional funding.
3. Implement a Weighted Pupil Unit (WPU) system for most state funds beginning in 2010-11. This requires no additional funding and can begin as long as districts are held harmless. Hold harmless status would remain until funding level reaches the point where districts are no longer penalized by the WPU system.
4. Flexibility, deregulation and accountability would accompany items 1 and 2. Districts would have reasonable flexibility in how the dollars are spent, and regulations would be eliminated or modified. This flexibility would be accompanied by accountability. In the event that schools or districts fail to meet the necessary statutory accountability laws, the South Carolina Department of Education should have the authority to intervene. Intervention authority by the State Superintendent of Education for districts with serious financial difficulty or gross mismanagement could be granted.
5. Implement a new 21st century educational funding plan and revenue system that establishes a more balanced tax system creating a reliable, simplified, flexible and equitable revenue system while acquiring resources necessary to fund major state policy responsibilities including funding of public education.
6. Adopt facility funding legislation. The current funding for public school facilities in South Carolina allows severe facility needs to persist across our state. Inequities exist throughout the state because some districts do not have the local tax base to address their needs and thus require assistance.

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Schools are unable to provide for the positive teaching and learning environment necessary for all students to reach our high academic expectations. Many low wealth school districts are unable to renovate and build schools that are adequate for a modern 21st century education.

SCASA supports the following recommendations for Public School Facilities:

1. **Provide for Quality Facilities.** Establish the South Carolina School Facilities Infrastructure Act to address severe health and safety needs, provide assistance to low wealth district and rapid growing districts, provide support to all districts for facilities improvement necessary to meet educational standards, provide appropriate technology infrastructure and address equity concerns including the timetable for implementation.
2. **Provide for Efficient and Effective use of Facilities Funding.** Implement a standardized assessment of school building needs across the state to be funded by the legislature, promote use of prototype school planning, joint use of facilities among school districts and other public agencies, promote energy efficient building technologies and provide an annual allocation to school districts for maintenance of school buildings and for information technology.
3. **Adopt Standards, Accountability and State Intervention.** Protect the investment of tax dollars for school facilities by establishing standards and accountability systems for school facilities including establishing a statewide facility assessment system, requiring districts to adopt a five-year facility plan, and providing for State Department of Education intervention in serious misuse of funds.
4. **Begin Implementation of the Infrastructure Act in 2009 legislative session.** Appoint the School Facilities Review Commission to issue general obligation bonds and revenue bonds as outlined in the Act, and to fund and implement the facilities assessment system.

SCASA urges that the General Assembly immediately address in the 2009 legislative session a correction to the calculation of the index of taxpaying ability. Additionally, other unintended consequences of Act 388 need to be addressed.

Index of Taxpaying Ability (ITA) needs to be modified.

The EFA formula requires that districts contribute a portion of local revenue to the base student cost set by the legislature. The district's portion is determined by the index of taxpaying ability (ITA) or the value of all taxable property in the school district, including owner-occupied property, as compared to the total value of all taxable property in the state. ITA represents a district's fiscal ability to pay in comparison to other school districts in the state. School districts with significant fiscal capability receive less state money per pupil than districts with less significant fiscal

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capability. On average, the EFA formula provides that the state furnish 70 percent of the support while local districts provide the remaining 30 percent.

Under Act 388, districts are required to make a 30 percent match based on the index of taxpaying ability which includes owner-occupied property that is no longer taxable for school operations. One approach to this problem could be adjusting the ITA by imputing the equivalent assessed value to equate the reimbursement on owner-occupied property to school districts as it is currently done for industrial property under the fee-in-lieu of agreement.

We recommend that a specialized team of experts be convened to resolve the issues of the ITA. The team should be convened by the Chief State Economist and include a representative from each of the following groups: Department of Revenue, Department of Education, School Business Officials, South Carolina Association of School Administrators, South Carolina School Board Association, Education Oversight Committee, Palmetto Institute, Policy Council and South Carolina Chamber of Commerce. The group should report to the General Assembly no later than February 15, 2009 with recommendations and proposed legislation if necessary.

SCASA urges that the General Assembly immediately address an interim measure, until adoption of comprehensive reform, to assure that all school districts have the fiscal authority to fund the local share of funding required by the EFA.

SCASA supports fiscal autonomy for all local school boards.

Public School Choice

SCASA supports the school choice plan promoted by State Superintendent Jim Rex. The plan is fair, equitable, and meets the needs of students and parents without placing undue hardships on districts and schools.

- SCASA supports public school choice that is designed specifically to increase the opportunities for all children to learn in ways that best meet their abilities and needs, and that does not result in the segregation of children by race, creed, religion, socio-economic status, national origin or disabling conditions.
- SCASA supports the right of local school boards to determine choice options within their own districts or between districts, based on available resources and community input.
- SCASA opposes legislation designed to subsidize K-12 private, religious, or home schools with public funds. This opposition includes pilot programs such as vouchers and tax credits.

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SCASA supports a state accountability system which provides a fair and accurate measure of school and district quality by requiring the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) to immediately increase the report card weightings given for South Carolina's extraordinarily high proficient scores.

Educator Recruitment and Retention

SCASA supports the funding of programs and incentives to ensure quality educators and leadership for each child of South Carolina every year, preK-12.

Early Childhood Education

SCASA believes that the lack of adequate funding for four-year-old programs in South Carolina has resulted in a major negative impact on overall academic progress in the state. The General Assembly should immediately enact legislation to provide adequate funding to ensure that *all* four-year-olds in South Carolina have the opportunity to attend/participate in a child development program.

Although South Carolina has made gains in early childhood education, funding levels from the state provide enough to serve only the most at-risk students in half-day programs, leaving a waiting list for parents who want this service for their children, and requiring districts to provide local funding if they wish to do more.

High Schools

SCASA supports the belief that a student's education is a cumulative experience and that a student's potential to graduate or dropout of school is not determined solely on the basis of the student's high school experience. The likelihood of a student graduating from high school is a systemic issue and should be addressed in grades K-12.

SCASA recommends the following:

- Provide full funding for implementation of the Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA).

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- Eliminate the “seat time” requirement of a Carnegie system and move toward a proficiency-based progression that enables students to proceed through high school and college.
- Provide full funding for the expansion of Career and Technology Education Facilities and Equipment, meeting the needs of new and innovative high-tech programs that are based on high wage, high skill careers.
- Support counting GED, adult education students, and all graduates age 21 and under as graduates.
- Eliminate the requirement that special education students completing alternative diploma programs be counted as dropouts.

Adult Education

SCASA believes that Adult Education must be adequately funded to ensure effective dropout retrieval and supports the request for \$3.2 million which would restore funding for the Adult Education’s Young Adult Program (17-21 year olds). Additionally, we support funding to provide academic and employability/career readiness skills to other undereducated adults that includes the non-English speaking population and Family Literacy participants.

SCASA also supports the request by the State Department of Education for funding to provide free GED exams for qualifying applicants and to restore Adult Education funding to the 2001-2002 level. We recommend that a study be conducted to determine the “real cost of educating adults.” SCASA supports including GED Diploma recipients as high school graduates. These efforts will enhance the economic development of South Carolina.

District Governance/Organization

SCASA supports local control in the governance of school districts.

SCASA supports any efforts that local school districts and communities undertake to improve the efficient and effective delivery of educational services and opportunities to students. We support the right of local school districts and communities to collaborate and examine consolidation, deconsolidation, or any organizational framework that improves the district’s ability to meet the educational needs of students and expectations of the local community.

Flexible Alternative Educational Programs

SCASA supports adequate public school funding for flexible alternative educational programs for students who have challenging educational needs.

All districts are not financially able to fund flexible alternative educational programs. The General Assembly should provide the needed funding to offer flexible alternative educational programs to meet the needs of challenging students.

Participation of Home-Schooled Students in Interscholastic Activities

SCASA opposes home-schooled students participating in public school interscholastic activities.

SCASA believes that participation in interscholastic activities is a privilege earned when students meet rigorous standards of academic achievement, conduct, attendance, and citizenship. Schools are not able to verify that students schooled at home meet the same standards for participation as do public school students. Public schools are concerned primarily with the academic achievement of students. Interscholastic activities are not isolated from academic achievement and constitute an integral part of the high school program. One part of a school program cannot be separated to allow participation by outside students without creating inequities for those students who participate fully in the system.

Campaign Finance Reform

SCASA supports any efforts to strengthen state campaign finance laws, especially language to control the influence of out-of-state money flowing into our state.