

South Carolina Association of School Administrators

2024 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.

A quality public school system is the chief component of successful economic development. Therefore, in a spirit of deep responsibility to the children of South Carolina and a desire to contribute to our state's well-being and the health of our American Democracy, we call to action all Legislators to partner with the education community to provide the necessary resources to secure our future.

Educators across the State of South Carolina stand on behalf of all children to ensure each child learns to think, reason, exercise creativity and imagination, and to use his or her mind to make personally satisfying contributions to civic, social, and economic life. Through an equitable public-school system, South Carolina will provide the necessary resources for all students to graduate with world class knowledge, world class skills, and the characteristics necessary for life and career success.

2024 Legislative Platform Issue

For the 2024 legislative session, SCASA will focus its energy on one major **Platform Issue**:

Public Education Funding

SCASA urges the General Assembly to, at a minimum, maintain education funding at its current level. After such time, the General Assembly must 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 the level of their unique needs, where they live, or where they attend school.

SCASA believes that a comprehensive plan for educational funding and tax reform is essential to creating a revenue system that is stable, equitable and funds a 21st century foundation program that equips students with world class knowledge, world class skills and fosters the characteristics for life and career success as defined by §59-1-150, Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.

SCASA supports the following comprehensive actions by the General Assembly to:

- Institute comprehensive changes to the education funding formula only through statutory amendments to the existing law rather than through the budget proviso process. This allows for a thorough vetting process and identification of possible unintended consequences.
- Fund educational services which differentiate an amount based on specific student's needs.
- Institute an annual inflation factor since education expenses, which include facility and operational needs, are not stagnant.
- Maintain all EIA appropriations at 100% thus not requiring a 25% local match component for those funds.
- Provide maximum funding flexibility by repealing statutory provisions inhibiting true flexibility of funds.

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- Ensure that funding for new legislative initiatives receive adequate funding from the state to implement the requirements.
- Fully fund across the board teacher salary increases for all teachers which ensure our teachers are compensated above the Southeastern Teacher Salary Average.
- Increase the number of years of experience on the statewide minimum salary schedule beyond the current 23 to aid in teacher recruitment and retention.
- Complete a comprehensive review of South Carolina’s tax structure and identify the challenges “piecemeal” changes have created for the school districts of the State.
- Implement changes to the State’s tax policies to correct the challenges and unintended consequences created by the implementation of previously codified changes.
- Implement policies to generate increased revenue for public education that is appropriate, stable, and recurring and that will not be used to supplant any current funding appropriated.
- Review the program vision for the “Profile of the SC Graduate” and ensure that no student is denied access and opportunity to meet the standards, skills and characteristics prescribed due to underfunding by the General Assembly.
- Provide assistance, through a State public school facilities bond act, to school districts to meet the facility, technology and infrastructure needs necessary to provide safe and functional facilities and to administer the State’s computer-based assessments. The assistance should be based on the compilation of information collected through the Facilities Assessment outlined in Proviso 1.92 of the FY 2017-18 Appropriations Act: Facilities Tracking System and Assessment Assistance.
- Continue emphasis on expanding and funding for broadband access in South Carolina to ensure that access is available to all areas of the state so that all children have equal technology opportunities necessary to support their education needs.

2024 Position Statements

The additional **Position Statements** clarify our **Legislative Platform** and address some of the many other important issues that affect public education in South Carolina.

Accountability

SCASA supports a state accountability system with a focus on innovation, continuous improvement, and College and Career Readiness standards.

The accountability system must shift from the overreliance on external summative assessment measures to a focus on continuous quality improvement practices. The assessment system should provide an accurate view of student achievement and growth comparable to national assessments of like students, commensurate with the *Profile of the South Carolina Graduate*, and one that provides valid measures of school, district, and state quality. The State accountability system, which meets State and federal guidelines, should provide timely data to improve student learning and professional practice, and ensure that the burden of testing does not unreasonably reduce prime instructional time. To accurately assess local district performance for accountability and accreditation purposes, the State must use authentic measures of district performance (i.e. performance-based assessments) rather than compliance checklists. SCASA does not support a letter grade or overall rating assigned to districts and/or schools in the state's accountability model.

Public School Choice

SCASA supports a public-school choice plan that 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.
- SCASA supports public school choice that does not discriminate based on a child's race, creed, religion, socio-economic status, national origin, or disabling conditions.

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- SCASA supports the right of local school districts to determine choice options within their own districts or between districts, based on the needs of students in their districts along with available resources and community input.
- SCASA supports legislation that provides flexibility to local school districts to promote personalization and blended models of public-school choice based on innovative practices.
- SCASA continues to oppose legislation designed to subsidize K-12 private, religious, or home schools with public funds and any federal dollars designated for education. In light of the passage of the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) Act, SCASA recommends that the General Assembly annually review and revise, as needed, components of the Act. Specifically,
 - SCASA recommends that all students receiving ESTF funding should be required to be enrolled in either a public or private school.
 - SCASA opposes requiring public school districts to shoulder the total responsibility of providing wellness checks for students using nonpublic online education service providers since these students are no longer enrolled in the district.

Educator Quality and Effectiveness

SCASA supports the appropriate funding of programs and incentives to ensure quality educators and leaders are identified, recruited, developed and retained for the benefit of all students of South Carolina.

SCASA supports effective instruction and leadership as a means of promoting continuous student growth. SCASA further supports the implementation of an evaluation model for all educators that focuses on the professional development of the educators and impacts the growth and development of students for whom the educator has direct instructional contact. SCASA believes that, as life-long learners, required educator professional development is necessary annually to stay abreast of successful teaching strategies and changes to curriculum.

SCASA supports the use of an evaluation model in personnel decisions only when the model is demonstrated to be valid and reliable and can be implemented with fidelity in a timely manner such that it may impact contract decisions.

Early Childhood Education

SCASA believes childhood development programs for four-year-old children are essential to overall academic and social progress in the state. The General Assembly should immediately enact legislation to provide full funding to ensure that all four-year-old children in South Carolina have the opportunity to participate in an accredited early childhood program that will strengthen the transition to all kindergarten programs. SCASA supports continuation of the suspension of DSS regulations for 4K provided to public schools.

High Schools

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

SCASA recommends the following:

- Increase funding designed to strengthen the Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA).
- Provide adequate funding to Career and Technology Education programs to enable students to be prepared to succeed in a complex and ever-changing economy. Support funding for physical expansions and updates for facilities to allow a continued collaboration with business and industry to align what we teach with what the economy demands.
- Ensure that students who complete a state-approved alternative diploma program do not negatively affect high school report card ratings.
- Eliminate the "seat time" requirement of a Carnegie System and move toward a proficiency-based, mastery progression that enables students to proceed through high school and college along a personalized, self-paced, and flexible pathway. This may include in-person instruction, self-guided learning, and experiential learning through approved off-campus educational opportunities in calculating instructional hours and may offer the required instructional days at any time during the school year, consistent with the law.

Adult Education

SCASA firmly believes South Carolina's Adult Education Programs should remain a part of the local school districts and as such, part of the State Department of Education. In South Carolina, individuals without a high school credential are best served by the current structure that fulfills the individuals' educational need as well as providing assistance to students whose goal is to pursue post-secondary education. With over 250 Adult Education sites across our state, educational services for populations lacking a high school credential are adequate and conveniently accessible and provided at minimal cost to those most disadvantaged.

SCASA believes that Adult Education must be adequately funded and requests that funding be restored to the 2007-2008 level of \$17.4 million total (combination of EIA funding and General Fund). The FY 2022-23 total funding for adult education is \$17.5 million in the EIA budget. Continued support of Adult Education will enable approved adult education providers to provide successful dropout retrieval, as well as academic and employability/career readiness skills to all adults including the non-English speaking population and Family Literacy participants.

SCASA supports including high school equivalency diploma recipients as high school graduates. These efforts will enhance the economic development of South Carolina.

Public School Health and Safety

SCASA supports public school safety for all children and staff as a top priority. In order for students to achieve at higher levels academically, they must feel physically, socially, and emotionally safe in their schools. Therefore, SCASA supports

- Providing continued funding and support for the School Safety Center to serve as a clearing house for the dissemination of safety and security information that is research-based, and that provides training and technical assistance for K-12 schools by bringing together educators, school security administrators, and law enforcement.
- Providing research-based programs that create a culture of safety where all students can achieve at their highest level.
- Funding designated to support school safety infrastructure measures to include but not be limited to fencing, controlled access, etc. to protect all students and staff.
- State funding for video recording systems installed on the current and future buses.

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SCASA believes the safe transportation of students to and from school is of utmost importance. Because of this belief, SCASA supports the statutory requirement enumerated in §59-67-580 specifying a 15-year replacement cycle for school buses. Currently, 0.1% (7) of the state's bus fleet is older than 15 years (those units are not operating due to a driver shortage). If additional buses are not provided in January 2024, the percentage of the state's operating bus fleet older than 15 years will be 0%, making the total number of buses in operation older than the 15-year replacement cycle 0 as of January 1, 2024. However, if no additional buses are purchased by January 2025, this percentage will increase to 6.8%, bringing the total number of buses older than the 15-year replacement cycle to 385 beginning January 1, 2025.

SCASA encourages the General Assembly to continue to provide funding the replacement provisions enacted in 2007. Additionally, SCASA encourages the General Assembly to provide additional funding to increase the fleet due to the growth of its student population.

Educator Recruitment and Retention

SCASA supports initiatives designed to attract and retain teacher preparation candidates. Title 2 enrollment trend data indicates the number of young people choosing teaching as a career continues to decrease. The reasons given for this decision are low salaries, high loan debt, and roadblocks to program admission. Based on this information, we support such initiatives as

- Adjusting and funding increases to the salary schedule to aid in the recruitment of teachers and expand the salary schedule steps to aid in the retention of teachers;
- Maintaining the current defined benefits retirement system rather than instituting a new defined contribution retirement system for newly hired educators. The current South Carolina retirement system is a recruitment tool for attracting new educators;
- Increasing funds for South Carolina Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program as well as expanding the eligibility and forgiveness provisions of the Program;
- Providing incentives for teaching in rural and Title I schools;
- Supporting teacher residency programs that are co-created by higher education institutions and school districts;
- Expanding the Teaching Fellows program to other interested institutions to enhance recruitment efforts;
- Supporting coaching and mentoring programs created by higher education institutions for new teachers;
- Allowing for flexibility in teacher education admission requirements by allowing a college or university educator preparation provider to develop and submit a

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plan for approval by the State Board of Education for ensuring teacher candidate proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics using multiple measures, and

- Adding education as an acceptable major to receive a LIFE or Palmetto Fellows Scholarship stipend.

SCASA is concerned that fully staffing schools and districts will continue to increase in difficulty. Currently, the state produces far fewer educators than required to fully staff schools and districts, and that trend will continue without changes made in supports, requirements, and processes. SCASA supports increasing the \$10,000 earnings limitation to \$50,000 for retired individuals and removing the arbitrarily established 36 consecutive month maximum employment requirement. These actions could assist in addressing the state's educator shortage. By lifting the earnings limitation for retired individuals and eliminating the 36-month maximum employment requirement, the state could immediately increase the number of qualified candidates without creating an increased cost to the retirement system, and could significantly strengthen every district's ability to operate at full capacity. If the earnings limitation is not lifted, vast numbers of retired educators who could help during the shortage will choose not to return to work, and districts will lose the ability to use these experienced school leaders to fill vacant classroom positions.

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 in a safe and healthy environment. 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. SCASA supports the continuation of funding to implement these efforts.

SCASA supports local school districts' implementation of modified school calendars to support academic achievement and teacher recruitment and retention. SCASA also supports actions by the General Assembly to support additional transportation costs and salary supplements for teachers choosing to participate in remediation days associated with the modified calendar.

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SCASA supports setting the opening date for students as a local decision as well as any other decisions necessary to protect the health and safety of students.