

REMARKS TO THE TASK FORCE ON EDUCATION

June 1, 2015

Madame Chairman, Madame Superintendent, Members of the Task Force

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss our joint aspiration for our State, our students and those who serve and care for them. I am speaking on behalf of the Plaintiff districts. Working with an outstanding group of South Carolinians who have substantial experience in our schools, we developed the consensus document before you.

As a way of introduction to those of you with whom I have not had the opportunity to work, I have served as a classroom teacher and a school district administrator. In the 1980s I had the privilege of staffing the Senate Education Committee and the education budget deliberations (before the “money committees” had sufficient staff). Most recently I served as the initial Executive Director of the Education Oversight Committee. My work with and for you has taken me into every SC school district.

Your task, our State’s task is not an easy one. While we hold common goals for each child, the achievement of these goals is confounded by the differing circumstances in which our children and their families live.

From those differences, the Plaintiffs propose a remedy. The remedy is multi-dimensional; no single policy approach can create the level of achievement we desire. The actions proposed in the remedy require intense focus and new levels of collaboration across state policy

disciplines. While some actions require funding, many do not. They call for realignment of existing resources into more effective practices. The remedy acknowledges several realities of education improvement:

1. First, the goals for student learning are not static. We want our system to prepare students to succeed today, tomorrow and beyond. Therefore we must develop State, school, educator and student capacity to respond with the times. Highly effective organizations and individuals prevail in ever-changing environments. We cannot preclude the changes but we can develop capacity to be highly effective;
2. Second, for every student and the entire system to achieve, changes must be effected not only in law and funding but also in daily practices and attitudes. New attitudes and new determination must be exercised from the student desk to the legislative desk. The Court ruling places great responsibility on the members of the General Assembly but we are mindful that the Court calls upon local school districts to exercise creativity and initiative;
3. Third, the remedy can work only if there is flexibility to adapt to local circumstances. What may work in one district may not work in another, what works with one group of students may not work with another, what work at one point in time may not work in another. In our work we examined a number of current initiatives and explored why they are successful in one community and not another. When only one programmatic route to a goal is offered, we cannot succeed for every child;

4. Fourth, our efforts are going to take time, well beyond a budget cycle, a district superintendent's tenure or perhaps a generation of students. Many of our challenges are chronic—rural communities are sparsely-manned by definition; students who need more time learning need that throughout their school careers and so on. Within our remedy you should note that we anticipate a multi-year implementation. Some funds may need to be placed in a separate fund to permit expenditures across multiple fiscal years or until the local district is prepared to implement changes. Those of us who offer the remedy commit ourselves to that time. Some funds should be competitive and others should be distributed in a manner that recognizes differing costs based upon district locale, composition and enrollment.

At your meeting in Dillon Dr. Helena Tillar, Superintendent in Marlboro County, presented the framework for the remedy. My task is to take you deeper into that framework and guide you through the interrelatedness of the six elements for action. Within each of the six elements you'll hear the common themes of increased knowledge and understanding, collaboration, extended learning time, and access to quality teaching. While I am not going to take you through the details of the 18-page document before you, my colleagues and I are willing to work with you and your excellent staff at future meetings or study sessions. I offer a final caveat---all that we propose and all that is to be accomplished must be judged by their contributions to the goal of improved student learning.

To bring these elements to life, we ask that you provide direction and funding to districts and schools but also that you provide resources

(time, personnel and authority) to the SC Department of Education so that the agency may assume its responsibilities of leadership and support for student learning.

Let's talk first about supporting long term capacity for student success. What is the infrastructure of good schooling? The proposed remedy drew from the Court ruling as well as from the congruence of goals for SC students represented in the "Profile of the SC graduate."

- We propose that the profile should be used to frame criteria for the evaluation of current school facilities. The school facilities criteria should also include elements that afford community-wide activities, postsecondary education and access to current technology. These criteria should be used to evaluate the school facilities in the Plaintiff districts, establish a state sequence for funding and support new construction and renovation so that schools provide the settings and resources necessary for student success;
- We also propose that the school transportation system be re-conceptualized and funded to ensure that drive/ride time is kept to a minimum and that transportation affords students opportunities for learning in settings other than the zoned school (i.e. regional TEC colleges, community centers, or worksites;)
- We ask that you renew the five-year planning process in law with investments (requirements) for district board members and educators, community leaders, health and human service

providers and postsecondary education partners to become grounded in understanding the needs of children of poverty. Without new perspectives and incentives to address old problems with new energies, the plans are stale and shelved. We ask that these plans be evaluated for their contribution to substantive change prior to approval;

- We ask that you require multi-agency planning across state agencies and services and create incentives for communities to implement shared services models;
- Finally, the harsh reality is that many of the Plaintiff districts do not fare well in grants competitions whether the funding source is a state agency or a private entity. Turnover contributes to the lower rate of applications and success but we also acknowledge that many districts and schools have neither the time nor the expertise to write grants. We must teach them and ask that the SC Department of Education provide leadership and training.

To improve the quality, stability and effectiveness of the teaching force and leadership team requires actions by a number of entities. Good teachers are prepared initially and developed throughout their careers; they are supported by communities, families and professional leaders; they are rewarded for their accomplishments. Our state cannot compromise by allowing poor teaching to hinder any student's progress.

- Let's start with a reinvigorated role for higher education. We believe that our institutions of higher education, in particularly

those with teacher preparation foci, must engage in sustained, high impact work with school boards, district leaders, teachers, community leaders and families. You heard from Dr. Powloski from Francis Marion University. The program she leads is one of your great successes. Initiated with a Centers of Excellence grant, the Center has become a national leader in the preparation of teachers of children of poverty. There is no reason that other institutions across the state could not accomplish similar impact. We ask for funds directed to a higher education outreach, focusing on improving the quality of education in our districts. We also propose that a cadre of faculty experts from across several institutions be funded to build understanding and support for the success of children of poverty. These faculty, working with grants from the state, could develop expertise and build a community of educators focusing on the needs of children of poverty;

- Teacher preparation must change. We ask that the Commission on Higher Education and the State Board of Education be directed to increase the rigor of admissions requirements and exit standards for prospective teachers. The needs of children of poverty should be integrated throughout the preparation programs including practice experiences;
- We also propose the establishment of early childhood training centers in the Plaintiff Districts. At these centers pre-service teachers would work in the communities for a semester to gain knowledge and understanding of the young children as well as

develop their teaching skills. Their tuition and housing would be provided by the State.

It is not enough to prepare new teachers. We must build upon the knowledge and understanding of our current teachers. This would include

- The State has responsibility for recruiting teachers specifically to work in the plaintiff districts and with children of poverty as well as implementing compensation and reward structures that encourage their long-term commitment to the children most in need;
- The State and district leaders should examine directly the working conditions in which we ask teachers to teach as well as the data teachers provide through CERRA surveys and implement policies and practices that result in positive, supportive working environments;
- Through stipends the State should provide time and support for teachers to earn graduate credit leading toward the certification endorsement for working with children of poverty;
- By establishing and insisting on learning effectiveness criteria for all professional development programs the State not only protects its financial investment in professional development but also affirms the professional nature of teaching and its contributions in our collective future;

- The State Board of Education should modify the teacher evaluation system so that at least one goal (in the GBE) addresses children of poverty and action research;
- The State (General Assembly, State Supt and SBE) and district leaders should allow for the fair but quick and humane ways to disengage teachers who are not effective in teaching children of poverty to high standards.

Our leaders must also be prepared and evaluated based upon their ability to attract and retain teachers who are effective with children of poverty. We must introduce multi-year contracts (5 years or more) with longitudinal bonuses for superintendents with proven leadership resulting in student gains. These would require regulatory changes and funding. Turnover rates among superintendents in high poverty districts are too high to support long-term progress. There may be circumstances in which the State must provide contracts that guarantee a leader has time and opportunity to implement changes leading to higher levels of student achievement.

The next three elements address students differentiated by age groups that represent developmental changes in young people. Within each of these elements we call for family engagement well beyond what is common today, for multi-agency/human service collaboration, for the establishment and achievement of programmatic excellence, for extended learning time and for activist teachers. You'll note that several of the recommendations incorporate the concept that young people should advance through learning at their developmental pace.

Static age groupings rarely account for the varying rates of cognitive, social and emotional development.

To provide high quality early childhood education and care through grade three, we should

- Renew and enrich family engagement through expansion and training for parent and family educators---regardless of the agency for whom they work--, engage kith and kin caregivers in activities and development that increases their knowledge and understanding and enroll all our schools in the National Network of Partnership Schools to ensure their school's continued development of family engagement practices;
- Provide resources (perhaps through competitive grants) so that programs such as Florence One's Read2Me can expand to other districts and schools;
- Staff the SC Department of Education with early childhood educators to lead and support schools through the self-study process to achieve national accreditation (e.g., NAEYC, Montessori); to lead early childhood collaborative work groups, and to expand professional development;
- Extend learning time through after-school and summer programming as well as offer "booster camps" in the academic subjects, including the arts, so that the gifted and talented students learn at the level of their abilities and that a wider group

of students is able to develop the skills to access and succeed in the advanced curriculum.

To provide students in grades 4 through 8 high quality learning opportunities and experiences, we first acknowledge that the students in “middle childhood” are often ignored in policy and practice. Our policy history suggests that we have advocated for early childhood programs, focused on middle school reform and restructured high schools. But we simply have not talked about or acted upon the needs of fourth and fifth graders.

- We recommend that at the state and district levels there should be a coordinator for expanded learning opportunities and school-community partnerships. There also should be a coordinator in every middle school who has responsibility for involving 4th and 5th grade students from the feeder elementary schools. These professionals should be able to design and coordinate programming but also to facilitate partnerships and engagement with faith-based centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, 4-H, arts and cultural organizations and so on to ensure that every young person has access to high quality extended learning opportunities;
- It is critical that our upper elementary and middle school students begin their career explorations as outlined in the EEDA. Our review of the EEDA found that the statute provides an excellent framework and has worked well in some of our districts. Our reality is that the EEDA has not worked well or been implemented fully in districts isolated by economics or geography or whose school programming is confounded by low enrollments. There is nothing in law to preclude schools or districts collaborating to

offer a richer EEDA program. But there are no supports or funding to facilitate student transportation to off-campus sites; there is not funding to support extremely low-enrollment courses; there is not funding for access to technology to expand on-line or virtual learning experiences;

- We ask that the SCDE conduct an audit of course availability in the Plaintiff schools and, working with the CHE and TEC, determine how those offerings or the patterns among them enhance or inhibit a student's access to college and careers. Those findings should be translated into legislative and leadership actions to accelerate or advance student learning;
- We ask that the SCDE be provided resources to develop work groups to design state-approved models of teaching and learning, including weekly assignments, that address the learning needs of students of poverty and/or the practical challenges before rural or under-resourced learning environments;
- We ask that the SCDE be provided resources to study, develop and provide high quality teaching and learning resources for teachers. These resources should include cross-district partnerships to improve student performance, to provide opportunities for Plaintiff district teachers to learn and grow professionally through collaborative experiences and to improve the instructional leadership and human relations skills of principals. The SCDE should fund studies of instructional quality which emphasize content, rigor and vertical alignment as well as

school-to-school transitions and provide professional learning experiences and guidance to implement instructional improvements based upon results;

- Each middle school should be funded and should implement expanded learning and summer programs, including year-round school when appropriate for the community, to provide opportunities for students in need of accelerated or supplementary learning;
- We ask that the SC Arts Commission, working with the SCDE, be provided direction and resources to develop a Corridor of the Arts through the Plaintiff districts so that students have access to arts learning and arts experiences within and beyond the school day.

For students in high school, we feel particular urgency. Every year we delay results in young people entering college and careers with less-than-necessary skills. We urge you to place priority for statutory changes and increased funding that will

- Foster the family-student career planning and envisioning that enables successful school and life choices. Families must be taught about the nuances of high school course selection and how course selection opens or closes doors. Families should be included on college and worksite visits;
- Districts should be staffed to provide a Coordinator of Access to Advanced Learning whose function is to facilitate student access to learning from the full array of state and regional resources,

whether those be physical or on-line. The coordinator, along with the high school principal and the district superintendent should identify strategies and develop partnerships to expand greatly the availability of advanced career, technical and academic courses during the school day, after school and in summers near or in high schools;

- Each high school should have a full-time director of expanded learning and school-community partnerships to design and fund opportunities based on the best practices and research in the field;
- We recommend that the SC Department of Education be staffed to include a high school improvement coordinator with responsibilities to expand and deepen career exploration and learning, arts experiences and arts education, graduation planning and other improvements;
- We call for broader involvement of the technical college system and that changes be effected in state policies and/or regulations that may inhibit students from dual enrollment.

Finally, we must provide for accountability through monitoring the quality of implementation and adjusting for continuous improvement. Change happens through a combination of urgency, insistence and patient adherence to the goal of student learning. In that regard, we recommend

- The State should create within the SC Department of Education a Transformation Office, jointly accountable to a Transformation

Authority Board and the State Superintendent of Education. The Board, whose membership and longer-term duties are outlined in our document, shall report annually to the General Assembly, the Governor, the Supreme Court, the Plaintiffs and the public on the status of the implementation of the remedy, the need for changes in the remedy and the time period over which the remedy is to be implemented;

- As I mentioned in the beginning of my remarks, some funds should be set aside and distributed when the districts and schools are prepared to use them well, whether that crosses fiscal years or is a situation that requires extensive planning. For these funds, we recommend a special account in the Office of the State Treasurer;
- There are a number of ways in which data systems should be improved so that the data are easily accessible and in usable formats. For educators we ask that the PowerSchool reporting function be modified and expanded to be more teacher-friendly and support action research in their classrooms; for cross-system measurements we recommend common student identifiers from pre-school through graduate school, and for boards and leadership teams we urge that formats and accessibility support answers to their common questions as well as accommodate individual study. We also ask for the linkage of data sets that currently are isolated from one another (e.g., SCDE, CHE, TEC, Research and Statistics ;)

- We ask that the Education Oversight Committee, working with the Transformation Authority Board, the SCDE and representatives of higher education and business develop and use appropriate measures of growth on all aspects of a student's education. This should include attention to the grade-specific expectations for student learning in all content areas, including the arts, but also to include career readiness and student career and college success. High performance expectations should be consistent across assessments and school levels;
- We ask that the EOC in collaboration with relevant partners, over a series of years beginning in FY18, conduct multi-year studies of programs and services to determine how the programs and services might be strengthened and integrated to support high levels of student learning. These include the following: (a) CATE; (b) early childhood; (c) elementary; (d) middle; (e) high school; and
- We ask that School Improvement Councils or other mechanisms for formal engagement of families and communities in school decision-making be strengthened either through training or the implementation of different models and foci. Earlier recommendations and actions on family engagement and members in the National Network of Partnership Schools should foster these changes.

Thank you for your attention and patience. I am prepared to respond to your questions, as I am certain my colleagues on your panel also are prepared.