

TO: Members, Education Oversight Committee

FROM: Melanie Barton

DATE: January 30, 2013

IN RE: Systemic and Comprehensive Reading Strategy for South Carolina

Pursuant to Section 59-6-110 of the South Carolina Code of Laws, the EOC is to:

- (1) monitor and evaluate the implementation of the state standards and assessment;
- (2) oversee the development, establishment, implementation, and maintenance of the accountability system;
- (3) monitor and evaluate the functioning of the public education system and its components, programs, policies, and practices and report annually its findings and recommendations in a report to the commission no later than February first of each year; and
- (4) perform other studies and reviews as required by law.

Prior to and with adoption of the 2020 Vision, the EOC has monitored reading proficiency of South Carolina students using both the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading. Student performance in reading on these two assessments shows the same trend: static achievement without any significant improvement. Moreover, the achievement gaps between students are not closing.

- Roughly one in five students in grade three are not reading on grade level as defined by PASS.
- By eighth grade, one in three students is not reading on grade level as defined by PASS.
- In 2012 the gap in reading proficiency between white students and African-American students in grade three was 20 percent. The gap widened to 24 percent in grade eight.
- In 2012 the gap in reading proficiency between students who were eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program and all other students was 20 percent in grade 3 and 24 percent in grade 8.

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- In 2009 62 percent of fourth-grade students in South Carolina were reading at the Basic or above level on NAEP. In 2011 the percent was 61 percent. South Carolina ranked 39th nationally.
- In 2009 69 percent of eight-grade students in South Carolina were reading at the Basic or above level on NAEP. In 2011 the percentage was 72 percent. South Carolina ranked 38th nationally.

Two other southern states have documented greater gains in fourth-grade reading proficiency. Between 1992 and 2011, the average NAEP score improved in Florida by 17 points and in Alabama by 13 as compared to South Carolina where the average NAEP score improved by 5 points. In 8th grade, however, Alabama improved by only 3 points, Florida by 7 points and South Carolina by 5 points, and these are relatively comparable gains.

To determine what initiatives were taken in Florida and Alabama and to consider the recommendations of the reading panel, the South Carolina Reading Achievement Systemic Initiative, EOC staff and members initiated the following:

1. In fiscal year 2011-12 a reading panel, the South Carolina Reading Achievement Systemic Initiative, met over the course of approximately five months and released a report. The EOC received and discussed the recommendations of the report at its 2012 summer retreat.
2. EOC staff and Dr. Baron Holmes attended the April 2012 Empower S.C. Education Reform Summit organized by former Senator Jim DeMint. At the summit, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush discussed the educational initiatives taken in Florida. The EOC staff and Dr. Holmes focused on Governor Bush's comments on reading and initiated conversations with the Just Read, Florida! Office. To determine the policies, programs and initiatives Florida has pursued over time that have resulted in the significant gains in reading proficiency in kindergarten through grade 5. While Florida did implement a mandatory third-grade retention policy for all third graders who were significantly below grade level, Florida also implemented systemic and comprehensive intervention strategies prior to third grade to assist struggling readers early on in their educational experience and required significant professional development for teachers.

Alabama implemented the Alabama Reading Initiative. In addition to establishing an extensive intervention system, Alabama also funded reading coaches in all schools with K, 1, 2 or 3 grades, regardless of the wealth or academic achievement of the school. Currently, Alabama spends \$58.2 million on these coaches.

Based upon the information provided, EOC staff issued an *At A Glance* in December, which is attached, focusing on the Florida model but including other state initiatives as well. Dr. Holmes also provided to the EOC information from the Education Commission of the States on third-grade reading policies as well as about reading literacy policies and legislation adopted by other states, which is also attached.

3. In the fall of 2012 the EOC contracted with Dr. Kathy Headley, Interim Director of the School of Education at Clemson University, and Dr. Diane Stephens, Professor and Swearingen Chair of Education at the University of South Carolina, to expand upon one of the recommendations of the state reading panel: in-service and pre-service training of

teachers. Drs. Headley and Stephens produced the attached concept paper, "Reconceptualizing Teacher Certification and Recertification in South Carolina."

The EOC invited the deans of the colleges of education or their designees to a meeting on January 10, 2013 to discuss the concept paper. Dr. Baron Holmes facilitated the meeting and Barbara Hairfield, Vice Chair of the EOC chaired the meeting. Representatives from the following colleges and universities and the Commission on Higher Education attended the meeting.

The Citadel
Charleston Southern University
Claflin University
Clemson University
Columbia College
Converse College
Lander University
Morris College
Newberry College
Southern Wesleyan University
USC-Aiken
USC-Beaufort
USC- Columbia
Wofford College

The overall consensus was that colleges and universities with graduate level teacher education programs in reading/language and literacy are willing to work together to improve the knowledge base of in-service teachers and administrators. Institutions that do not offer such degrees would partner with those that do and their faculty could help provide the needed professional development. There was also discussion about the need for reading specialists in schools with grades 6 through 12 for struggling readers.

Comprehensive Vision for Systemic Change in Reading:

If South Carolina is to dramatically improve the teaching and learning of reading, systemic and comprehensive changes must occur and must include the following:

- An office focused on guiding and supporting districts in increasing reading proficiency;
- Strategic planning at the state, district and school levels on the interventions that will be provided for each struggling reader;
- Systemic monitoring of each struggling student's reading progression across time and systemic reading interventions for each struggling reader;
- Mandated readiness screening of children in prekindergarten and kindergarten to identify potential language, cognitive, social, emotional and health problems of children early on and to provide appropriate intervention;
- Beginning as early as kindergarten and continuing thereafter, intensive in-class and supplemental reading intervention for struggling readers, including summer reading camps;
- Increase the time students spend in school and out of school reading;
- Retention of a student in third grade who demonstrates reading proficiency that is substantially below third grade reading despite these early interventions;

- Create a midyear promotion policy for students retained who can demonstrate reading grade-level text. Such a policy recognizes the impact that intensive acceleration can have on reading;
- Promote reading achievement in all content areas in grades 4 and above through extensive reading and writing instruction and intervention to improve comprehension in English language arts; mathematics, science, social studies, career and technology education, etc.;
- Reading specialists in every school with grades 6 through 12 for students who need additional support;
- Revise in-service requirements so that all teachers and school leaders have the knowledge to assist struggling readers. Specifically over time and within the capacity of institutions of higher education:
 - All early childhood and elementary teachers would be required to earn their literacy teacher add-on endorsement;
 - All middle and high school teachers would be required to complete three of the five courses required for their literacy teacher add-on endorsement;
 - K-8 administrators (principals, assistant principals) and all high school teachers would be required to complete two of the five courses required for their literacy teacher add-on endorsement;
- Extensive support for parents to assist their children succeed in becoming proficient readers;
- Intensive partnerships with county libraries, faith-based institutions, doctors, etc. for services and volunteers.

What funds currently are appropriated for such a system?

In the current fiscal year, the General Assembly appropriated the following funds for initiatives:

- \$136 million in EIA funds for students at risk of school failure;
- \$6 million in EIA funds specifically for reading;
- Lottery funds for K-5 reading, math, science and social studies in the amount of \$39.5 million; and
- Lottery funds for grades 6-8 reading, math, science and social studies in the amount of \$2.0 million.

Of the \$136 million in EIA funds for students at risk of school failure, districts are currently reallocating approximately 25 percent to other functions. Clearly, a portion of these funds could be dedicated to reading instruction and intervention. Prevention is much more cost-effective than remediation. The lottery funds are to be spent in accordance with Section 59-1-525 which states the following:

The State Department of Education shall implement a schoolwide grant program to enhance the teaching of the grade specific standards adopted by the State Board of Education and to increase the academic performance of students in grades K-5 in the core academic areas of reading, mathematics, social studies, and science. The grant shall include an evaluation component to measure the success of increasing student performance and the teaching of the standards. Of the reading, mathematics, social studies, and science appropriation for this purpose from lottery proceeds each year,

\$500,000 must be used for teacher in-service training and professional development related to Project Read.

The awarding of grants shall be based upon their ability to promote the goals of providing every student with the competencies to:

- (1) read, view, and listen to complex information in the English language;
- (2) write and speak effectively in the English language;
- (3) solve problems by applying mathematics;
- (4) conduct research and communicate findings;
- (5) understand and apply scientific concepts;
- (6) obtain a working knowledge of world, United States, and South Carolina history, government, economics, and geography; and
- (7) use information to make decisions.

Additionally, grants shall be awarded based upon the likelihood that receiving such grants shall strengthen the above referenced skills and increase the academic performance of students in the core academic areas. In the awarding of grants every effort should be made to ensure that all geographic areas of the State are represented. First priority shall be given to acceptable grants from schools rated as below average or unsatisfactory and grants designed to increase academic performance of historically underachieving students.

Grant applications received by the State Department of Education shall be reviewed by a panel of individuals with knowledge and expertise of the subject area and of programs that have proven to be successful within the State or throughout the nation.

How many students are currently not reading on grade level by the end of third grade?

Students who score “Met” on PASS by state law have “met the grade level standard” with “Not Met” defined as “not meeting the grade level standard.” For accountability purposes, the Not Met category is divided accordingly to distinguish students, who are *significantly below grade level*, which are those students in the Not Met 1 category.

Not Met 2 – The student demonstrates performance that sometimes meets expectations at this grade level.

Not Met 1 – There is significant need for additional instructional opportunities to achieve the met level.

Based on the 2012 administration of PASS, approximately 10,533 students scored Not Met on 3rd grade reading. Of this amount 27% scored at the lowest level, not Met 1. Currently, 1.1% of all third graders or 584 students are retained.

**Number of Third Graders Scoring Below Grade Level in Reading
2012**

Not Met 2	7,647
Not Met 1	2,886
TOTAL	10,533