

**Talking Points**  
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**Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force**  
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- Good afternoon, and thank you for this opportunity to provide the perspective of The South Carolina Education Association.
- We hear again and again that the quality of our children's education should never depend on where they live. That's because we really cannot say it enough. **Equal educational opportunity does not have a zip code.**
- Concentrated poverty and segregation are complex problems brought into our public schools by circumstance. It is critical that we examine and deal with the many **impacts on educational achievement that occur outside of the classroom.**
- As we discuss this issue today, rural school districts bear a disproportionate share of the challenges raised by circumstances over which they have no control.
- **Forty out of every 100 students in South Carolina (40 percent) attend school in a rural district.**
- The impacts of unequal education are felt long after high school.
- SC adults in rural communities face the second highest unemployment rate in the nation (10 percent).
- The Rural School and Community Trust study concluded that an **increase in per pupil spending of 20 percent** (*sustained throughout a child's entire K-12 schooling career*) would:

- increase the high school completion rate by 22.9 percentage points;
  - increase adult earnings by 24.6 percent; and
  - reduce the incidence of adult poverty by 19.7 percentage points.
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- As many of you know, the SC Department of Education has adopted a document known as the “Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.” It advocates rigorous standards and broad-based curricula that include core subjects as well as the arts, foreign languages, and social sciences. Together, these should contribute to the “world class knowledge” that our graduates need to be ready for career, college, or the military.
  - The Profile identifies world class skills and characteristics that young people should have by the time they have completed their K-12 education, and it is a tall order, especially for schools that lack adequate resources.
  - Key among those skills is simply knowing **how to learn**. In this increasingly test-and-punish culture, students now focus valuable classroom time on preparing for and taking tests, not on actual learning. It is no longer a “given” that our students truly know HOW to learn – that is how to think critically, draw conclusions, solve problems, utilize technologies, or collaborate.
  - And what about “soft skills” like manners, work ethic, integrity, and perseverance? Teaching these important qualities has been crowded out by the federally driven emphasis on high-stakes testing.

- If we are to produce graduates who fit this profile, we must ensure adequate, equitable, and sustainable long-term funding for education is a **very necessary investment** in our children and our future.
- Not only will this investment change individual lives, but it will boost state and rural economies, because **educated and skilled workers will be more likely to remain in their communities, provide a strong workforce to grow business and industrial development.**
- An educated citizenry will buy homes, pay taxes, and contribute to an improved quality of life in their communities.
- According to research conducted for us by the National Education Association (NEA), investing **an additional \$200 million annually in our public schools would generate more than \$400 million in revenue** and create approximately 10,000 jobs. At 100 percent, that is an indisputably handsome return on investment. *(using Regional Economic Modeling Incorporated REMI model)*
- In order to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in hard-to-staff areas, rural school districts must be able to compete in terms of salary, resources, and facilities.
- We hope that lawmakers will undertake an **exhaustive analysis of school funding to include comprehensive tax reform.**
- One place to identify new sources for needed education investment is the **\$3.1 billion in special interest sales tax exemptions** in the state's tax code.

To review proposed solutions already expressed, The South Carolina Education Association recommends the following six suggestions:

**1) Investment in South Carolina as a whole by taking a systemic approach to addressing education inequities. One of the most commonsense ways to do this requires little or no new funding.**

State agencies that already have regular contact with at-risk families can partner with one another and faith, business, and community organizations to send consistently constructive and positive messages to at-risk families and make them aware of programs that can help.

These agencies, such as the Departments of Health and Environmental Control, Health and Human Services, Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services, Disabilities and Special Needs, Mental Health, Social Services, as well as Clemson Extension Service and First Steps, can cooperatively develop strategies to address access to quality nutrition, early childhood education (Pre-K), health care (from prenatal months and birth) and Medicaid coverage, Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC), as well as affordable, high-speed Internet connectivity.

This not only extends our reach to target populations, but it better utilizes existing resources.

Another promising strategy is for school districts to adopt policies to "buy local" as often as possible. Fifty-two (52) schools in South Carolina are participating in farm-to-school projects that bring healthy food from local farms to schools for the preparation of nutritious options for their students.

**2) An exhaustive analysis of school funding to include comprehensive tax reform.**

One place to identify new sources of education funding is unnecessary special interest tax exemptions. Lawmakers can eliminate many of the \$3.1 billion in special interest tax exemptions that may no longer be prudent or valid and apply previously lost revenue toward public education.

**3) Ensuring adequate, equitable, and sustainable long-term funding for education.**

Continue to weight funding formulas to provide a higher level of funding for under-served children. Look at public education funding not as a cost but as an investment in our future.

**4) Establishing a beginning teacher salary of \$40,000, with the means and a plan to fund and reach the goal within a five-year period.** *(Note — this salary increase must not be paid for by eliminating the National Board Supplement.)*

**5) Expanding programs for pre-K children, such as full-day kindergarten for 3- and 4-year-olds.** Research has found that poor children typically begin school with a 30-million-word deficit at the beginning of school.

- 6) Bringing to the table practicing classroom educators and education support personnel who reflect the education workforce of their communities to provide their insights in decision-making processes at the school, district, and state level.**
- If we truly believe that education is a **major route out of poverty**, then **all public schools** serving the most impoverished communities, by design, should be well-resourced, well-staffed, and well-funded.
  - Thank you.