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OUR MISSION

is to educate members and all South Carolinians about state and local public policy based on the traditional South Carolina values of individual liberty and responsibility, free enterprise and limited government.

Public School Test Scores Remain Stagnant

For decades, standardized testing has been used as an accountability tool to measure the performance of individual students, the schools and the districts. The results are also analyzed in a broader state and national context. The Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) are two such indicators, and South Carolina's results have concerned policy makers and the public for years. Unfortunately, in spite of increased funding for education, the results of the 2007 tests demonstrate that South Carolina's public school students still lack competence in core subject areas. The tests further show that South Carolina's students are not competitive with their regional and national peers. Consider that South Carolina has the lowest graduation rate in the nation -- roughly one-half of SC ninth graders do not graduate four years later. Of the students remaining in school by the time the SAT is given, less than half take it. Clearly, SC's SAT-takers should be the best and brightest students and should be adequately prepared for the test. And yet our state's SAT scores continue to fall at the bottom.

In examining the recently released results of the 2007 SAT, the nation's premier college entrance exam, we find:

South Carolina SAT scores are the region's lowest, and the second lowest in the nation.

The South Carolina average score of 984 is 76 points below the Southeastern regional average of 1060 and 33 points below the national average of 1017. Only Maine, which requires all students to take the SAT as an accountability test, scored lower than South Carolina. In South Carolina, the participation rate averages only 44 percent of students per school.

More schools saw their average score drop than improve.

One-hundred and eight schools saw a decline in average scores from 2006 to 2007. Eighty-four schools improved and five schools remained the same.

The fewer students taking the test at a school the higher the average score.

In schools where less than half the students were tested the average score was 929, while at schools with more than 50 percent of students tested the average score was 990.

Schools which lowered their test turnout saw the greatest gains.

In the ten schools with the highest average gains from 2006 to 2007, eight tested fewer students this year than last year. Conversely, in the ten schools with the biggest decline in average score, eight had a higher percentage of students taking the test in 2007 than in 2006.

The performance gap is wider.

The mean score at the ten highest performing schools in 2007 was 266 points above the average score at the ten lowest performing schools. In 2006, this gap was 223 points.



College eligibility remains low.

Only one school in South Carolina, the Governor’s School for Math and Science, had an average SAT score as high as the stated average incoming score of freshman at the University of South Carolina (1166) and Clemson University (1220).

One reason for the low test scores and high drop out rate becomes clear in analyzing PACT test scores. Students become less proficient in reading as they progress through the public school system. In the third grade, more than half of the children are proficient readers. By the time they reach the eighth grade, only one fourth of them read at a proficient level. PACT is a South Carolina designed test that assesses basic skills in accordance with federal and state benchmarks. The test is used to gauge the progress of schools in accordance with the No Child Left Behind ACT.

Individual students taking the PACT are ranked as “below basic,” “basic,” “proficient,” or “advanced” in four main content areas. The 2007 scores indicate that most South Carolina students are not learning the fundamental skills they require.

The percentage of students in each grade who are NOT “proficient.”

	English	Math	Science	Social Studies
Third	45.6%	<i>69.2%</i>	71.1%	59.0%
Fourth	57.8%	<i>58.6%</i>	65.8%	66.3%
Fifth	68.1%	66.4%	69.7%	72.7%
Sixth	69.0%	62.1%	68.9%	64.4%
Seventh	<i>71.6%</i>	67.3%	<i>66.9%</i>	<i>76.0%</i>
Eighth	<i>75.4%</i>	<i>80.2%</i>	<i>74.1%</i>	<i>84.5%</i>

Italics indicate where the percentage of non-proficient INCREASED from 2006 to 2007.

The results of the tests are clear: large numbers of students in South Carolina public schools are neither competent nor competitive. Despite years of public school “reforms” and millions of dollars in new funding, performance is stagnant (and in many cases worsening). Assessments such as the PACT and SAT clearly demonstrate that all South Carolina students are falling behind. Policy makers need to honestly assess the data and recognize that reforms have been far too slow to significantly raise student achievement. Broader reforms that focus on classroom instruction and increasing opportunities for all children must be considered and implemented quickly in order to achieve real progress.

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