

South Carolina Whole Child Education Policy: A Preliminary Analysis

Highlights and Next Steps



UofSC COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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About This Policy Overview

Researchers, for some time, have shown that most of the student achievement gap can be explained by out of school factors. Now the science of learning has made clear that the variability in human development is the norm, not the exception; and the pace and profile of each child's development is unique. Adversity affects learning – and the way schools respond matters. However, schools alone cannot get the job done to close achievement and opportunity gaps. This is why we need whole child education.

ALL4SC, a University of South Carolina initiative to advance a cradle to career system of education, has completed phase 1 of its pilot of a whole child education policy analysis for the state, working in collaboration with SC-TEACHER. The purpose of SC-TEACHER is to understand, through comprehensive research, the impact of recruitment, preparation, and retention policies and practices on teacher effectiveness in South Carolina, as well as advance the teaching profession. The policy analysis has focused on five core elements derived from the new science of learning: (1) executing a whole child vision for teaching and learning; (2) transforming learning environments; (3) redesigning curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (4) building adult capacity and expertise; and (5) aligning resources efficiently and equitably.

This overview document draws from the full Whole Child Education Policy Analysis report, 167 pages in length, providing key policy and interview highlights. This exploratory analysis shares 16 foundations to build upon, 21 gaps to fill, and 21 opportunities to leverage, drawing from over 200 document reviews and 45 interviews with South Carolina state-policy and education policy and business leaders as well as local educators and students. Data were assembled from March to December 2021. Insights were gleaned from experts working at the SC Department of Education, SC Department of Social Services, SC Department of Mental Health, and the SC Education Oversight Committee as well as local superintendents, principals, teachers, social workers, other educators from early childhood non-profits, afterschool programs, technical colleges, and career and technical centers. However, the pandemic significantly limited time we were able to spend with these experts.

This policy overview is illustrative and certainly not exhaustive, providing a snapshot of where South Carolina is while also suggesting next steps that could propel the state toward a more comprehensive system of whole child education. It is our hope that this analysis can assist leaders in designing shifts in policies and practices so schools can more effectively and efficiently operate as hubs of their communities and cross-agency partnerships that can fuel and sustain collective impact, and eventually the transformation of education.

Contributors

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Collaborators

Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative

// I applaud the University of South Carolina and the leadership of ALL4SC in advancing whole child/whole community education. The researchers point to our state's successes and opportunities as well as our challenges – setting the stage for the innovative policy roadmap that South Carolina needs. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

– Anita Zucker, Chair and CEO, The InterTech Group, Inc.,
and Chair, Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative

Reading This Policy Overview

This whole child education policy overview serves as an illustrative summary of what the research team learned over the last several months (and more fully captured in the full report). The introduction begins with the surfacing of compelling South Carolina data regarding some of the challenges facing the state's youth and the schools serving them as well as a small sampling of the many bright spots representing whole child education.

After the introduction, each of the following sections are organized by the 5 elements. Each section begins with data and representative quotes from the experts we interviewed. Based upon what we learned the team developed one essential question that frames the foundations, gaps, and opportunities documented for each of the elements. We believe that each of these five essential questions can serve as a starting place for the state's policy leaders to begin developing a system of whole child education.

More details regarding both the findings and methodology can be found in the full report.

To receive a copy of the full report or to learn more about this project, please contact Dr. Barnett Berry at barnettberry@sc.edu or 803-777-2008.



Introduction

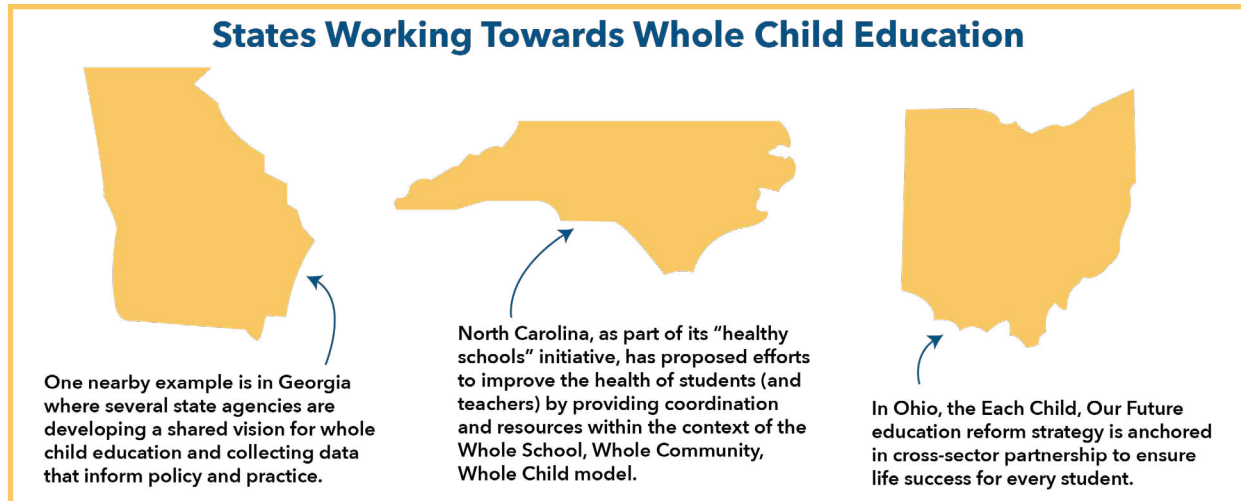
// When it comes to education reform, it is time for no more nibbling around the edges of school improvement. Everyone wants reform, but too few want the system reformed. It is time for transformation.

– A legislative leader, South Carolina General Assembly (2021)

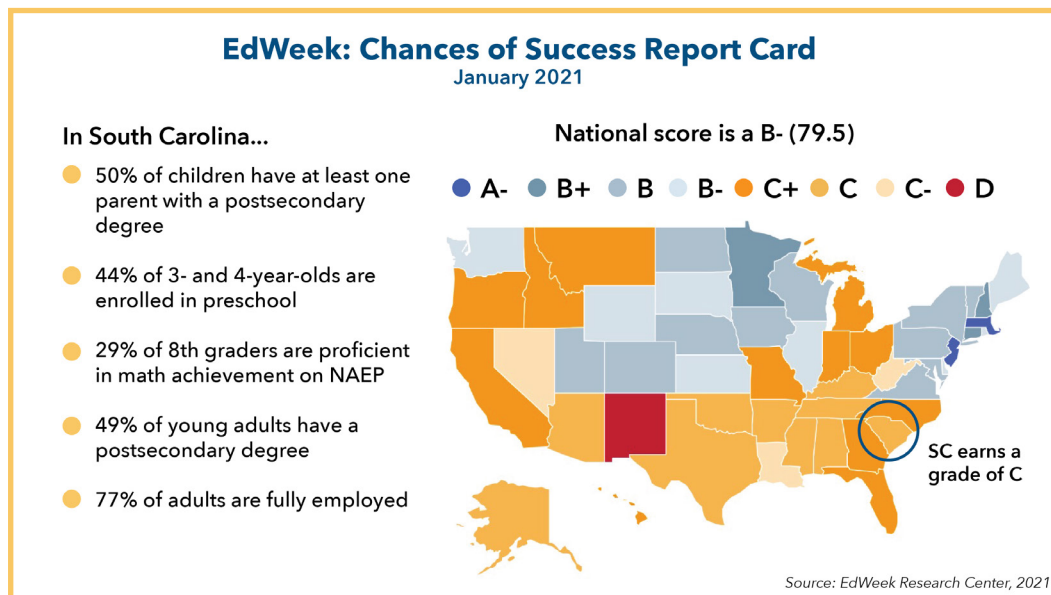
Defining whole child. Whole child education connects and supports a young person's academic learning by also attending to their social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and mental health development and needs.

The implementation of whole child education ideally anchors schools as hubs of their communities. It is a more effective and cost-efficient system of schooling that draws on cross-sector partnerships to ensure that all students reach their full potential and have the knowledge and skills to succeed in life and career.

No state has put together a whole child system of schooling. However, states such as Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, Maryland, and Pennsylvania have started to work on it.



The state has improved its grade (from a 74.6 in 2018, to a 75.9 in 2021) on [Education Week’s Chances of Success](#) national report card. The grading system, drawing on 13 measures from early childhood to PK-12 academic achievement to adult outcomes, shows South Carolina scoring a C.



Why now?

- Rapid changes in the global economy
- Schools alone cannot close achievement gaps
- New demands for every student to be ready for the future of work
- South Carolina, since March 2020, has [received](#) over \$3 billion in federal COVID-19 funds that can be used to accelerate learning while also [reinventing schools](#)

“ I think we could jump ahead 10 years or so if we’re really smart about it. It’s a lot of money. We need to use it wisely to make transformative, once-in-a-lifetime investments that allow us to compete nationally and globally in the future.”¹

– Gov. McMaster reflecting on use of \$8.9 billion in federal COVID-19 relief (June 2021)

Whole child education: challenges and opportunities

In many ways, South Carolina is no different than many states when it comes to the need for whole child education. Consider these out of school factors, identified by the [SC Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children](#), that undermine students' capacity to learn and educators' capacity to teach them.

- One in six (or 178,710) children in South Carolina are food insecure – numbers that are growing due to the pandemic-induced unemployment.
- Over 12,000 students experienced homelessness in 2017-19, and another unidentified 34,000 were estimated to be without a home.
- Over 40 percent of South Carolinians live in childcare deserts – a term used to describe a Census tract of more than 50 children under the age of five where there are no childcare providers.
- In 2019, about 10 percent of the 15,000 children referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice were for status offenses (truancy, curfew violation, etc.), reflecting underlying personal, family, or community problems, not criminal ones.²

Despite these challenges, South Carolina has many pieces of whole child education upon which the state can build. The state is already home to cutting-edge collaborations. Examples include:

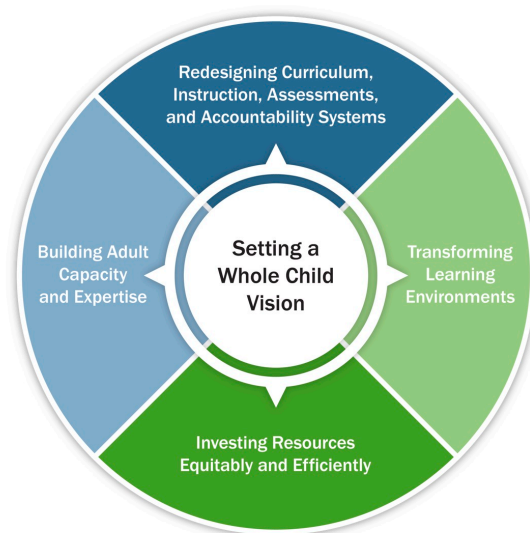
- The [Early Childhood Advisory Council](#) works with eight state agencies and focuses on Birth to Five.
- The [Beaufort County Human Services Alliance](#) connects 60 local agencies, non-profits and its local school district to support integrated services. The [Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative](#) and [Spartanburg Academic Movement](#) have developed whole child models as well.
- In 2015, the South Carolina Department of Education led the work to develop the [Profile of the SC Graduate](#) to begin [personalizing learning](#) for every student in South Carolina to transcend the “one-size-fits-all” approach to education.

The five elements of whole child education

In this overview and subsequent report, we focus on five core elements, drawn from the [science](#) of learning, that need to be in place for a whole child system of education:

1. Executing a whole child vision for teaching and learning
2. Transforming learning environments
3. Redesigning curriculum, instruction, and assessment
4. Building adult capacity and expertise
5. Aligning resources efficiently and equitably

South Carolina has many examples of these elements. If they were combined and scaled, it would make for a powerful system of whole child education.





Executing a Whole Child Vision

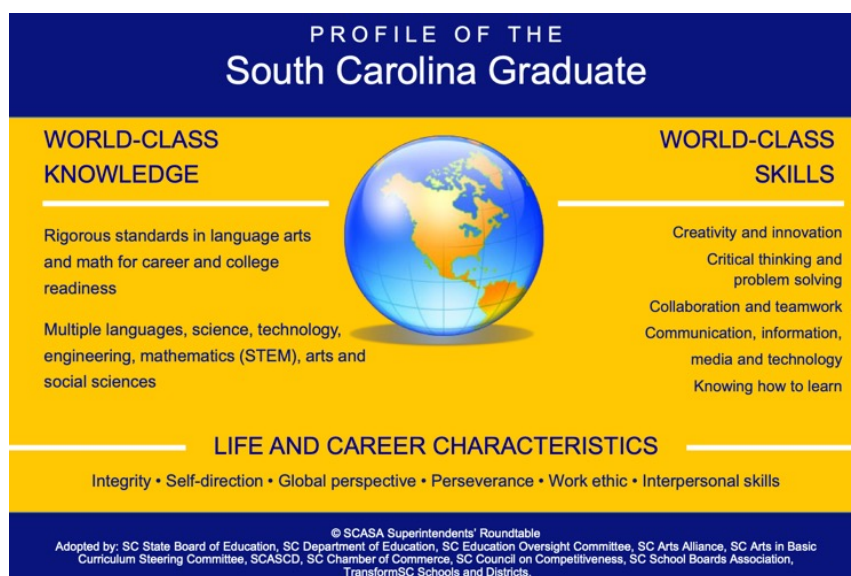
element one

// We need to figure out how to foster a culture of collaboration and intuitive innovation across-the-board – in our educator preparation programs, SCDE, boards, district administration, and in the classroom, and more. And we need to balance these innovations with a good dose of common sense.

– A South Carolina Policy Leader (2021)

In some ways, South Carolina is ahead of other states in executing a whole child vision – with its Profile of the SC Graduate as well as an array of efforts to bring together different agencies to begin making the vision come alive in the state’s public schools. The state’s leading early childhood agencies and educators have made major strides toward moving from vision to action. South Carolina does not yet have an integrated data system to report on progress and the shared accountability needed to ensure every child who graduates from high school is ready for college, career, and citizenship.

Executing a whole child vision is not about teachers and administrators doing more than they are today to serve a child's academic, cognitive, physical, and behavioral needs. Whole child education is about redesigning the way schools and community organizations and agencies work together to serve those needs and accelerate student (and family) outcomes. Acting on a whole child vision will make the work of educators more possible and the ambitious educational goals of South Carolina more achievable.



Different agencies with different funding streams can lead to fragmentation and division, not coordinated and streamlined services.

Bright spot: Early Childhood Advisory Council

The efforts of the [ECAC](#) are a strong example of how a state's birth to 5 sector can create a structure for diverse stakeholders to evaluate gaps in cross-sector services and issue guidance on how state agencies can coordinate and streamline services. First Steps and seven youth facing [agencies](#) are working together for [collective impact in early childhood with a wide array of state and federal funds](#).

However, South Carolina faces a number of obstacles in executing a shared vision of whole child education.

As one policy leader noted:

/// Agencies are expected to focus on quantity, or numbers of children or families served. It is about how many seats did you fill. How many brochures did you distribute. There is little accountability for performance, and for the agencies and non-profits to work together.

One policy leader told us:

/// When it comes to education in South Carolina, our policy leaders are the worst investors. We find a great program, pass a policy, pour money into it, and then step away from it. We never study it. We never improve it. It is as if we are scared to look at data and performance.

Integrated Data Needed Now More Than Ever

The issue of integrating data becomes even more critical following pandemic-induced disruptions in teaching, learning, and caring for students. In the summer of 2020, a joint data collection effort by SCDE, the SC Department of Social Services and SC Department of Mental Health revealed that, **since the beginning of the pandemic, more than 7,400 South Carolina students were missing from school.**

The Essential Question: How can the state's emerging Birth to 5, cross-sector agency partnerships serve as a model in firmly establishing a shared vision for whole child education, from early childhood to postsecondary?

Foundations

- A vision for whole child education can be anchored in part by the Profile of SC Graduate and its focus on competency-based, personalized education
- The [Education and Economic Development Act of 2005](#) and the policies supporting the South Carolina Education Data System
- Eight youth-facing state agencies serving Birth to 5 under the [Early Childhood Advisory Council](#) (ECAC)

Gaps

- Different agencies have their own visions, leading to fragmentation, division, and lack of coordination and collaboration
- Too few local examples of whole child system change are known and well documented to serve as pictures of practices for SC
- Integrated data are available, but they remain largely siloed in different agencies with limited incentives and mechanisms to use in a cradle to career system of education

Opportunities

- **Expand** on the work of ECAC to establish a similar body to align for K-12 serving agencies
- **Study and scale** community-based models such as [Spartanburg Academic Movement](#), [Tri-County Cradle to Career](#), [Beaufort County Human Service Alliance](#), and the recent development of ALL4SC's [Whole Child Education Consortium](#) (as well as others that are continuing to surface)
- **Assist** school communities in using federal American Rescue Plan ESSER funds, which totaled over \$3 billion, to fuel whole child education innovations
- **Leverage** efforts to integrate data to advance cross-agency collaboration for whole child education



Transforming Learning Environments

element two

// South Carolina has a lot of student discipline policy, but virtually no behavioral health policy.

– An education leader in South Carolina (2021)

The [science of learning](#) points to how a young person's learning environment and their cultural context shape their brain architecture –impacting how they learn and develop. This same science also makes clear that strong, trusting relationships are essential to learning and development. However, our current education system often minimizes opportunities to build and maintain meaningful relationships and fails to provide personalized supports that enable students to learn, cope, and become resilient. While interviews revealed that many SC schools have developed transformative learning environment, there are few policies in place to spread and scale these models of *community schooling*.

State policy efforts have set a vision for personalized learning for every child, yet more can be done to pay attention to how schools and their communities create the necessary flexible learning settings and spaces to meet diverse student needs.

Increasing focus on mental health

While state policy continues to be grounded in disciplining students, not their behavioral health, focus on students' social emotional well-being is increasing in new programs and initiatives. In 2020, the [Social Emotional Learning Alliance for South Carolina](#) was established to promote and advance effective social and emotional health in all schools, families, organizations, and communities in South Carolina.

Governor McMaster, along with leaders of education, mental health, and law enforcement agencies, established a school safety vision that includes having a school resource officer and a mental health counselor in every school and calls for expanded state health care coverage for mental health counseling.

Bright spots:

- Under the leadership of the Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative, a cross-sector effort to support school-based trauma-informed practices is underway in Charleston, Dorchester, and Berkeley counties.
- ALL4SC, in partnership with the Fairfield County School District and National University, is preparing educators (and later parents and afterschool and early childhood providers) to use [Harmony](#), an evidence-based curriculum, and its teacher professional development program [Inspire](#).
- United Way of the Midlands established [Resilient Midlands](#) in 2016 to bring together a coalition of public and private agencies throughout the Midlands to recognize the impact of trauma on children and families and respond collectively.
- Key South Carolina stakeholders have joined CASEL's [Collaborating States Initiative](#) with a goal to "work with states and school districts to help ensure that preschool to high school students are fully prepared – academically, socially, and emotionally – to succeed in school, at work, and in life."

Possibilities for School Improvement Councils (SICs)

The Education Finance Act in 1977 established [School Improvement Councils](#) at each public school. These advisory boards of parents, students, educators, and community members can fuel the deep school-family-civic engagement necessary to transform learning environments. This law is one of few that requires a variety of stakeholders to engage in a process to take ownership of school improvement. School Improvement Councils could evolve into community transformation councils.

One education policy leader shared:

/// The SIC process is a good one. But it all depends on the principals and their readiness and willingness to use the SIC in more transformative ways.

in South Carolina, there are...

12,000+ individuals

on **1,100+** SICs

The Essential Question: How can existing school communities be supported across the state to routinely foster positive relationships and ensure that students and families feel safe and valued?

Foundations

- The [SC School Improvement Council](#) model, established in 1977, involves the community as well as children and families in addressing advancing student outcomes
- The [Safe Schools Act of 2006](#) addresses harmful behaviors in schools by involving students, parents, educators, and community representatives in establishing local policy
- [Act 213](#) of 2018 established training and support for a statewide multi-tiered system of support for students, using data-based problem-solving, formative assessments, and evidence-based practices

Gaps

- Too few opportunities for educators to learn about evidence-based practices and from each other
- Overabundance of mandated programs that tamp down the creativity of educators
- Student discipline policies that outnumber those addressing behavioral health
- No policies in SC that focus on relationship-centered school designs (including staffing structures) and training, time, support, and funding for consistent communication between school and home and teachers and other helping professionals

Opportunities

- **Expand** on the [SC Behavioral Health Alliance](#) and SCDE and SCDMH partnership
- **Study and scale** models such as [Meeting Street Schools](#) and its innovative partnership with MUSC, and [River Bluff High School](#) with its focus on student-led, project based learning
- **Draw** on the cross-sector collaboration successes of [OnTrack Greenville](#) to expand uses of real-time, comprehensive data to support students
- **Look to** [SC Afterschool Alliance](#) (and related organizations) to align values, expectations, and data in both in and out of school supports for the whole child



Redesigning Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

element three

// It is estimated that nearly two-thirds of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate is not assessed.

– A SC Policy Leader (2021)

By establishing the [Profile of the South Carolina Graduate](#), the state has articulated an essential component of whole child education – personalized, competency-based, and expanded learning opportunities. Interviews for this policy report revealed that, while South Carolina is making progress in many ways, layers of long-standing state policies and regulations stifle the development of a system of deeper learning for every student. These barriers including an out of date accountability system, ridged academic grading policies, and limited supports for the kinds of internships and apprenticeships every student needs to be ready for future of work and life success.

An education leader (who leads curriculum and instruction for her school district), shared:

// We are asking teachers to teach differently and at deeper levels of learning. But we do not give them time to perfect their craft. We do not give them time to work with each other in sharing expertise.

Expanding pathways to personalized learning

To ensure personalized learning is a priority in the state, the SCDE formed the Office of Personalized Learning to grow a statewide network of local leaders committed to this vision.

Current data and assessments provide insufficient evidence to draw firm conclusions regarding state policy and the impact of personalized learning on student achievement. However, a 2019 KnowledgeWorks report pointed to several potential explanations as to why South Carolina has not made more progress in closing student achievement gaps, including:

- Lack of innovative staffing structures
- Insufficient resources need to ensure high quality instruction tied to the Profile
- Limited training on culturally responsive teaching practices and instruction that is “rigorous, student-centered and promotes students as agents of social change”⁴

Interviews also revealed that teachers and administrators have too few opportunities to learn from each other— a consistent finding from our inquiry.

As a principal said:

// We (teachers and administrators) learn to innovate by visiting each other’s schools. We need more of this.

One teacher leader shared:

// Our five habits of success are personal responsibility, growth mindset, collaboration, relationships, excellence and citizenship. Each semester students have to demonstrate these habits. They lead student-parent conferences. They talk about the mastery of their learning, not just their grades, but what have they learned this year, what has been something they’re proud of, something that they have overcome, looking forward to, also goals that they have. I only wish this was actually reported on the report card.

However, too few schools in South Carolina have redesigned time in workday for teacher teams to develop and use this kind of student data. School leaders consistently told us that teachers are too focused on teaching what is measured by the state’s high stakes tests, rather than what is defined in the Profile of the SC Graduate.

One former Superintendent noted:

// It’s not that we are afraid of testing and accountability. It’s *how* that data often gets weaponized and used against educators and schools without enough time to improve practice.

A UofSC [study](#), published in the summer of 2020, found that about 1 in 4 of the state’s teachers reported that during the pandemic they discovered and used innovations in engaging students in real world problem-solving and used non-standardized student assessments.

Will the leadership of teachers be used in supporting innovations in the future of education?

The Essential Question: How can the state create a network of whole child school learning communities, with incentives and supports for streamlining curriculum, elevating exemplary instructional models, and redesigning assessment?

Foundations

- [Profile of SC Graduate](#) sets the stage for deeper learning for every student
- [Office of Personalized Learning](#) at SCDE offers a unique learning community for educators across districts to learn from each other
- [Apprenticeship Carolina](#) and [Anderson Institute of Technology](#) serve as powerful models for project-based learning and cross-sector partnerships (PK-14) among school districts, technical colleges and businesses
- The SC State Board of Education has the authority to waive any regulation that may impede the implementation of an approved district strategic plan or school renewal plan

Gaps

- Few mechanisms to scale up the innovations in curriculum, instruction and assessment
- Little policy and funding available to support internships and apprenticeships in rural school communities where there are serious barriers to prevent student participation
- Deep disparities in Black and white students who participate in gifted and talented programs
- Lack of innovative staffing structures to deliver personalized learning
- Considerable data collected, but limited utility to improve classroom instruction
- Academic expectations of the Profile not measured by the current state tests and accountability

Opportunities

- **Establish** incentives to use school choice legislation so local districts and consortia operate multiple schools of innovation
- **Strengthen** the effectiveness of Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs), in place since 2005, to offer opportunities for students to lead and document their readiness for college and career
- **Ramp-up** the development of [VirtualSC](#) to create blended models of teaching and learning
- **Look to** [Read to Succeed](#) as an example of how South Carolina has established a statewide professional learning network that be applied to educator learning for whole child education
- **Improve** current accountability system to go beyond simply revealing gaps and also include whole child indicators as well as sufficient data to inform what needs to be done next



Building Adult Capacity

element four

// Classrooms in which deeper learning is the goal... [create] an ever-increasing demand for teachers (and administrators) who can meet the needs of today's students amid rapid changes in society and schooling.

– Learning Policy Institute (2019) ⁵

Whole child education requires PK-12 educators to work more closely with each other in using evidence-based teaching practices. It also requires them to collaborate with an array of early childhood caregivers, afterschool providers, and other helping professionals who can support their students' academic, physical, mental, and social well-being in and out of school. Whole child education cannot be fully realized without building adult capacity – which has significant implications for how educators are recruited, prepared, developed, assessed, and compensated.

Developing the profile of the SC Teacher

Growing teacher and administrator shortages and disruptions caused by the pandemic give the state the chance to build a more coherent system of teacher and school leader development for whole child education. South Carolina has several signature teacher recruitment programs in place, including [Teacher Cadets](#) and [Teaching Fellows](#) as well as [Call Me Mister at Clemson University](#). However, state has few policies in place to sufficiently address the serious lack of diversity in the teaching profession as well as preparation for whole child education.

The state's public schools are facing [worsening teacher shortages](#) – exacerbated by pandemic-induced disruptions in education. While the number of teacher vacancies is [reported](#) to be “dramatically rising.” However, [SC-TEACHER](#) research has shown that policymakers and practitioners do not have access to the most accurate data – leading to recycled solutions for misdiagnosed problems facing the state's teaching profession.

A policy leader noted:

“ Our schools of education, as a whole, are not there yet in preparing teachers for the kinds of personalized learning called for in the Profile. And this surely is the case when it comes to whole child education where more skills are needed to address social emotional learning.

Mentoring & Induction

The interviews suggested that mentors primarily focus on the state's teaching evaluation process in support of the new teachers. Too little time is available for mentors to fully assist new recruits.

A district leader asserted:

“ There isn't equal attention paid to both mentoring and inducing. Sometimes there is a focus on one at the expense of the other.

One policy leader noted:

“ Ensuring the well-being of teachers and their learning is a priority and a key to retention. We can do a lot more.

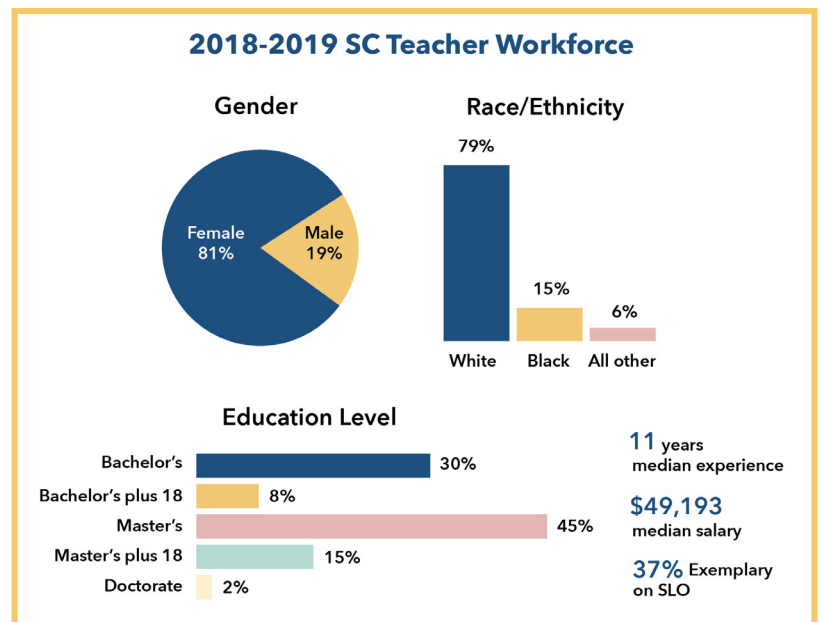
Little is known about mentoring and induction in South Carolina – e.g., how much is spent and to what effect.

Evaluation, Leadership & Compensation

A University leader shared:

“ I learned that teachers learn a lot more about improving their practice from peer observations, compared to the state's formal evaluation process which is implemented so differently from school to school.

Like most states, South Carolina pays teachers on the basis of years of experience and college degrees and continuing education units earned, and has nothing to do with identifying or recognizing teachers as leaders.



Source: [SC-Teacher](#)

The Essential Question: How can the state utilize its most accomplished teachers, including but not limited to NBCTS, to build adult capacity for whole child education among PK-12 and other educators?

Foundations

- Signature teacher recruitment programs, with national recognition, include those focused on increasing the diversity of the educator workforce
- National Board Certified Teachers receive a salary increase of \$7500 for demonstrating accomplished teaching practices
- [SC-TEACHER](#) has begun to build integrated data in support of evidence-based educator preparation and development

Gaps

- Need for more comprehensive and coherent data to assess educator development policies and practices, including under-resourced mentoring and diffuse professional development activities
- Few incentives for higher education institutions to fully partner with each other and school districts
- Little information on teacher working conditions known to influence their retention and school performance
- Need for a teacher leader strategy tied to school innovation, deeper learning, and the Profile
- Minimal data on the other adults, including early childhood and afterschool educators, whose capacity also needs to be developed

Opportunities

- **Expand** existing alternative preparation programs to recruit and develop a more diverse teaching workforce in a more customized, competency-based way
- **Study and scale** micro-credentialing pilots as basis to support teacher-led, competency-based professional learning and advance a 21st century educator compensation system
- **Grow** from the success of [UofSC teacher induction program](#) (with its 98% retention rate) which offers an opportunity to rethink the state's current approach to mentoring
- **Utilize** teacher leaders (such as the state's 6000 NBCTs) to lead coaching and professional development that improves classroom instruction and fuels whole child education
- **Refine** teacher evaluation processes to offer opportunities for teachers to spread expertise tied to the science of learning and whole child education



Aligning Resources Efficiently and Equitably

element five

// To reduce fragmentation and improve alignment across programs and funding streams, state and local leaders should provide tools and strategies for districts and localities to evaluate their needs and then combine and align school- based and community-based resources to support students.

– Aspen Institute (2021) ⁶

In serving children in our public schools, resources often are not aligned and frequently don't work in sync with each other – increasing cost and decreasing effectiveness. Aligning resources and encouraging cross-agency partnerships, both essential to whole child education, can accelerate **deeper, more equitable** student learning and increase efficiencies in public education.

An outdated education finance formula

A [2021 nationwide study](#) graded SC an “A” for funding effort and a “C” for both level and distribution. Currently, federal, state and local policies limit fiscal alignment across the state, creating funding opportunity gaps for students across South Carolina.

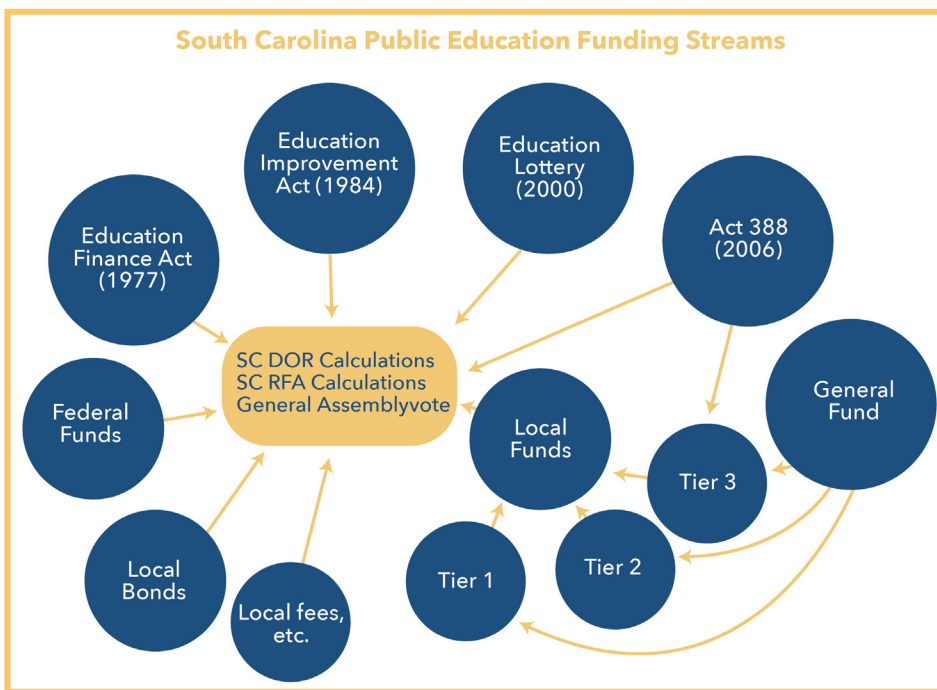
Major criticisms of SC’s finance system include siloed sources of funding, insufficient dollars for isolated rural school communities and coordinated support for whole child education. South Carolina’s school finance system is highly decentralized, undermining more coherent state school transformation efforts (see figure).

A school finance expert told us:

“Some school districts have less than 1000 students and then there is Greenville with 77,000. South Carolina has 30 rural districts with less than 2,000 students. We need a different finance system to take into account these very different contexts. The myth among policymakers here in South Carolina is that one size fits all regardless of scale.

Inequities and the digital divide

Many South Carolina communities are internet deserts. During the pandemic, the SCDE acted quickly to ensure that more than 73,000 lower-income K-12 students with no internet at home would soon receive Wi-Fi hot spots, enabling them to participate in virtual instruction. However, SCDE and school districts soon discovered that access might not be sufficient as many students found their cellphone signals were too weak in some locations to fully participate in online learning.⁷



- A 2021 report estimated that 400,000 South Carolinians do not have access to high speed broadband that would enable them to have a telehealth appointment or stream a video for a class⁸
- Many South Carolina rural communities are considered internet deserts. Six counties (Allendale, Chesterfield, Hampton, McCormick, Marlboro, and Saluda) have over 60% of their population lacking access to at least 100 megabits per second worth of internet

As one policy expert noted:

“We can create demand for internet use in rural areas by engaging students, not parents. By engaging students, and preparing them to help their families in the use of these tools, we can both ensure they receive a better education, but ensure more opportunity for their parents and siblings. We need to not just offer devices and connectivity we need to prepare students to become IT Directors of their homes. It will also create a potential career path for them.

The Essential Question: How can the state incentivize cross-sector partnerships in aligning financial and people resources based on demonstrated need and performance?

Foundations

- The [Education Finance Act of 1977](#) established the importance of weighted student funding to support the varied needs of different students
- Innovative funding proposals have been developed to support more equitable and transparent school finance
- Student digital access in school and home is recognized as a fundamental resource for 21st-century teaching and learning

Gaps

- Lack of aligned funding streams so that all children have access to all funds
- Need for better data and reporting on how resources are used across diverse programs in K12 and other related sectors such as social work and mental and physical health
- Updates needed to the weighted funding formula to reflect the demands posed by the Profile of a Graduate and whole child education

Opportunities

- **Leverage** ESSER funding as a way to encourage alignment of resources, i.e. mental health services
- **Foster** public-private partnerships to ensure equitable internet access for districts regardless of purchasing power
- **Employ** [Learning Management Systems](#) to better align resources around different program areas



Conclusion

// For me, supporting the whole child in our schools requires enormous collaboration between faculty, families, and administration. Every child is different, thus to achieve the best outcome for a child it requires taking in consideration their physical and mental health and overall well-being. Are schools organized for this kind of communication – which is key to whole child education?

– An 11th grader from a rural school community (2021)

No more nibbling around the edges of school reform. There is no shortage of diverse opinions concerning our public schools. However, hardly anyone seems to disagree over the fact that more children need to be ready for school and more high school graduates need to be ready for post-secondary education and life and career success.

Proposed Next Steps

There are many paths forward. Unfortunately, as this report is being finalized in early 2022, many educators as well as students and families they serve, continue to experience the tumult and trauma of the pandemic and havoc it has wreaked on schooling. So many educators have not had the bandwidth to engage in the necessary community-based dialogue and deliberations that are essential to building whole child education practices as well as informing the local and state policies needed to sustain them over time.

The process led our team to a series of interrelated steps needed to advance whole child education in South Carolina: **(1)** documenting what it looks like in a given community and state; **(2)** engaging students and parents, as well as educators and helping professionals, to define local opportunities and gaps in community schooling for deeper, more equitable learning; and **(3)** building on an emerging coalition of organizations and business leaders to establish a policy and practice roadmap for supporting whole child education from cradle to career.

With a “think big, start small, learn fast” approach to education transformation, several specific recommendations are proposed for both policymakers and practitioners.

- Develop a clearinghouse of evidence-based practices of whole child education in South Carolina and a venture capital fund for school communities to learn from each other in systematic ways.
- Create a set of common performance metrics for measuring progress and success in developing whole child systems of education in South Carolina.
- Establish pilot school districts that are willing to reimagine the education professions for whole child teaching and learning while also aligning resources equitably and efficiently in addressing current teacher shortages.

Whole child education is not another program. Over the last several decades educators, students, and parents have been burdened by too many of them. Top-down school reforms, including decades of test-based accountability and more rigid teacher evaluation, have not delivered the results that policy leaders had hoped to achieve. Whole child education is not about more nibbling at the edges of school reform. It is about building capacity in communities from the bottom up. It is about building a new education ecosystem co-created by young people and their families in partnership with educators both in and out of the PK-12 system. It is about innovation and transformation as well as excellence and equity in education, from cradle to career and birth to the workforce. Every child deserves no less.

Endnotes

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