

**AGENDA**

**Academic Standards & Assessments Subcommittee Meeting**

Monday, January 13, 2025  
 10:00 a.m.  
 Room 433, Blatt Building

- I. Welcome ..... Dr. Patty Tate
- II. Approval of Minutes of November 18, 2024 ..... Dr. Patty Tate
- III. Information Items:  
 Multilanguage Learners Test Participation.....Dr. Matthew Lavery
- Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF)  
 Program Survey ..... Dr. Jenny May
- IV. Adjournment

- April Allen  
CHAIR
- Brian Newsome  
VICE CHAIR
- Terry Alexander
- Melanie Barton
- Russell Baxley
- Neal Collins
- Bob Couch
- Bill Hager
- Barbara B. Hairfield
- Sidney Locke
- Jeri McCumbee
- Melissa Pender
- Patty J. Tate
- C. Ross Turner, III
- Ellen Weaver

Academic Standards and Assessments Subcommittee  
 Dr. Patty Tate, Chair                                  Sidney Locke  
 Rep. Terry Alexander                                    Melissa Pender  
 Rep. Bill Hager    Sen. Ross Turner  
 Barbara Hairfield

## **SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

### **Academic Standards & Assessments Subcommittee**

Minutes of the Meeting

Nov. 18, 2024

**Members Present (in-person or remote):** Dr. Patty Tate, Rep. Terry Alexander, Barbara Hairfield, Sidney Locke and Melissa Pender

**EOC Staff Present:** Tenell Felder, Dr. Matthew Lavery, Dr. Jenny May and Dana Yow

Academic Standards & Assessments (ASA) subcommittee Chair Dr. Patty Tate welcomed members to the November 18<sup>th</sup> subcommittee meeting. After the motion approving the September 16<sup>th</sup> ASA meeting minutes passed, Dr. Tate called forward EOC Communications Manager Tenell Felder to present the first agenda item – the EOC’s report on SC High School students’ focus groups on attendance.

Ms. Felder stated she would be updating the subcommittee on the report on the chronic absenteeism focus group commissioned by the EOC. She stated that the EOC was looking into the issue due to a significant increase of chronic absenteeism rates, particularly after the COVID pandemic. Ms. Felder cited the U.S. Department of Education stating that chronic absenteeism rates went from about 15% in 2019 to 30% during the 2021-2022 school year – mirroring similar trends in SC public schools. She then reported how chronic absenteeism rates correlated with SC READY scores – only 23% of chronically absent students are on grade level for math, compared to 47% of their peers. Likewise, only 37% of chronically absent students are on grade level for ELA, compared to 57.8% of their peers.

Next, Ms. Felder let the committee know that three focus groups were conducted on October 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> and consisted of students who self-identified as being absent nine days or less, 10 days or more, or 18 days or more. 26 high school students participated in the focus group – 51% of which were white, 47% black and 2% Hispanic. The students represented 24 public high schools from across the state – 43.5% of which had an overall rating of Average, 21.7% Excellent, 21.7% Below Average and 13% Good.

Ms. Felder then began to review the report and defined chronic absenteeism as any student in grade K -12 who misses 50% or more of the instructional day for any reason, for 10% or more of the enrollment period and includes excused absences, unexcused absences and suspensions. The focus group asked three preliminary questions to participants to gauge if students felt like they had a sense of community at their school, their feelings on attendance, and their familiarity with chronic absenteeism.

In relation to school community, answers indicated that students who had more absences typically felt a lesser sense of community than students with less absences. It was also noted that students across the board indicated they believed that daily school attendance was not necessary. Students who were frequently absent expressed this opinion more strongly, with one even stating that her parent gave her and her sister opportunities to miss school. The final preliminary question on chronic absenteeism revealed that the majority of students were not familiar with the term.

Ms. Felder then outlined the following main reasons gathered from the focus group for students missing school; safety concerns/school environment, lack of consequences, mental health struggles, transportation issues, negative experiences with teachers, apathetic feelings towards school, and health issues.

Of these reasons, mental health struggles were the most discussed with students mentioning feeling overwhelmed. Students also discussed how high teacher turnover negatively impacts their perception that attendance is necessary and feeling that there are not significant enough consequences to tardiness/absences.

After discussing these points, Ms. Felder informed the subcommittee that EOC staff was working on a chronic absenteeism public awareness campaign. After the presentation, questions were accepted from subcommittee members.

Barbara Hairfield asked Ms. Felder to go back to the slide with the student quote about their parent allowing them to miss school days. She mentioned that the quote was very telling as it showed a parent's attitude towards school attendance. Next, Representative Terry Alexander mentioned receiving a call from parent who went to court because of their student's absence due to mental health issues.

Melissa Pender then spoke of her experience with chronic absenteeism as Principal of Coosa Elementary School. She stated it was one of her goals to combat rising chronic absenteeism rates at her school and that her school was providing celebratory incentives for students with good attendance. She also noted that for elementary school, chronic absenteeism issues primarily rests with parents. Ms. Pender noted that parents would take students out of school for multiple days to take vacations during the school year. She also noted communicating with parents about how missing school makes it difficult on teachers as the student has missed valuable in-person class instruction time. Parents at Coosa Elementary also are made aware of actions that will be taken if students are absent. Ms. Pender stated that in her experience, the possibility of truancy court did not provide much of a deterrent. She then spoke on the attendance contract Beaufort County School District puts into place for students who are having attendance issues. She expressed a need for stricter consequences for parents whose students are chronically absent.

EOC Executive Director Dana Yow reemphasized that chronic absenteeism was indeed a national issue, stating that approximately 32 states used chronic absenteeism as a part of their accountability system. She also emphasized how the report shows the cultural shift in attendance expectations that occurred after COVID.

Dr. Tate then pointed out the differences for chronic absenteeism among grade levels. She also stated that she has seen in her experience that high school students especially need a sense of belonging and that schools attempt to meet that need through mentorship programs. Dr. Tate then offered insight into seat time's purpose and implementation at the schools she works with.

Ms. Yow then spoke about a chronic absenteeism public awareness campaign in Rhode Island, informing the subcommittee that EOC staff was working with Gamecock Athletics to help create a marketing campaign. She also asked subcommittee members if they thought speaking to parents and possibly more students would be a good next step.

Next, Representative Alexander asked about chronic absenteeism rates before COVID to which Ms. Felder replied that before COVID rates were at 13% and then following jumped to 25% in South Carolina.

EOC Deputy Director Dr. Matthew Lavery then provided insight into analyzes EOC staff did on alternative instructional formats. Stating that in those comparisons, face-to-face instruction had

higher rates of student proficiency than any of the alternatives, be it fully online, be it hybrid or a remote distance learning format.

At this conclusion, Dr. Tate thanked Ms. Felder then called forward Ms. Yow to present the second information item on the 2024 school report card release.

Ms. Yow informed subcommittee members that the 2024 report card release was publicly done on October 15<sup>th</sup> at Pinecrest Elementary School.

She then noted the following revisions of note which impacted the 2024 Report Cards:

- 2024 Report Cards marked the first year of full implementation of the Added-Value Growth Model (AVGM) for the Student Progress indicator
- The First Year On Track to Graduate (1YOTG) metric and the Five-Year Student Success Rate (5YSSR) metric were scored this year in the new HS Student Success indicator.
- Twelfth grade students removed from School Climate Indicator calculation
- The Preparing for Success indicator was not calculated or reported on 2024 Report Cards for Elementary or Middle Schools. The Rating Points associated with the Preparing for Success indicator for Elementary and Middle Schools were reallocated to weight of the Academic Achievement and Student Progress indicators.

Next, Ms. Yow addressed the changes of the breakdown of points in the 2024 accountability system – noting that the College and Career Readiness Indicator went down to 19, as did the Graduation Rate indicator.

She then reviewed the number of report cards by overall school rating from 2019 to 2024 pointing out that in 2024, there were fewer schools with an Excellent or Good overall rating while the number of Average rated schools increased.

Next, Ms. Yow presented data on student performance in elementary and middle schools by overall rating for the 2023-24 school year which generally showed that students who attended a school with an overall rating of Excellent performed higher on their SC READY assessments than students who attended schools with lower overall ratings. She also noted the smaller percentage of students passing math than ELA.

SC's on-time graduation rate was addressed next during which Ms. Yow noted that SC's high school students are graduating on time. Nevertheless, Ms. Yow also pointed out the significant gap between the high graduation rate at 85.4% and low percentage of students who are college and career ready at 30.6%. It was also noted that of that 32.5% of 2024 graduates who were college ready – 12% of students got an ACT composite score of 20 or higher.

Next, Ms. Yow presented data on the percent of SC students who enrolled in college the fall immediately after high school noting that 59% was the average for 2024.

For Career Readiness, 69.6% of the 2024 graduation cohort were career ready of which 55.1% achieved a 3 or above on their career ready assessment.

Following this, Ms. Yow presented data on the statewide average poverty index of SC students which reached its highest at 62.2% during the 2024 school year. She then presented data showing schools with high poverty ratings of 90% or above which also had an overall rating of Excellent or Good and referred to the EOC's Beating The Odds Investigative Study which investigates the practices of high poverty index schools rated Good or Excellent.

Following this, Ms. Pender asked if someone could explain the Cambridge program. Ms. Yow clarified that it is similar to AP but that it is out of Cambridge, England and that it has advanced coursework with a different scoring system than AP or IB.

Dr. Lavery also clarified that the program is used by a small sample of students, making it difficult to build the same kind of data that can be used for AP and IB programs. Following this discussion, Dr. Tate adjourned the meeting.

## EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

DATE: January 13, 2025

### SUBCOMMITTEE:

Academic Standards & Assessments Subcommittee

### INFORMATION ITEM:

Report of the Parental Satisfaction Survey of the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) 2024-25 School Year

### PURPOSE/AUTHORITY

§ 59-8-110 (E): The Education Oversight Committee (EOC) shall: (1) comply with all student privacy laws; (2) report on and publish associated learning gains and graduation rates to the public by means of a state website with data aggregated by grade level, gender, family income level, number of years participating in the program, and race and a report for any participating school if at least fifty-one percent of the total enrolled students in the private school participated in the ESTF program in the prior school year or if there are at least thirty participating students who have scores for tests administered. If the Education Oversight Committee determines that the thirty participating-student cell size may be reduced without disclosing the personally identifiable information of a participating student, the Education Oversight Committee may reduce the participating-student cell size, but the cell size may not be reduced to fewer than ten participating students; (3) evaluate and report the academic performance of scholarship students compared to similar public school populations; and (4) collaborate with the department to develop and administer an annual parental satisfaction survey for all parents of scholarship students on issues relevant to the ESTF program, to include effectiveness and length of the program participation. Results of this survey must be provided to the General Assembly by December thirty-first of each year.

### CRITICAL FACTS

Given the timeline of implementation, the EOC can only report the parent satisfaction survey results in the initial report. In the 2025 report, academic data is expected to be included. At the time of publication of this report, a bill to alleviate the issues resulting from the Supreme Court decision and other issues of implementation addressed in this report was pre-filed on December 11, 2024.

### TIMELINE/REVIEW PROCESS

This report was sent to members of the SC General Assembly on December 27, 2024.

### ECONOMIC IMPACT FOR EOC

Cost: no impact

### ACTION REQUEST

For approval

For information

### ACTION TAKEN

Approved

Amended

Not Approved

Action deferred (explain)

# Parental Satisfaction Survey of the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) 2024-25 School Year



**SC EDUCATION  
OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

*Reporting facts. Measuring change. Promoting progress.*

**Dr. Jenny May, EOC Director of Qualitative  
Research and Stakeholder Engagement**

**Dana Yow, EOC Executive Director**

## December 2024









# CONTENTS

- Introduction and Background ..... 2**
- Timeline ..... 3**
- Parental Satisfaction Survey Research from other States ..... 4**
- Survey Development Process and Methodology..... 5**
- Findings and Respondents .....6**
- Overall Satisfaction and Drivers ..... 8**
- Implications of Findings & Recommendations ..... 13**
- Conclusion and Next Steps ..... 13**

**Appendices**

- Appendix A: The SAG and Review Process for ESTF Parent Satisfaction Survey Development
- Appendix B: Final Parent Satisfaction Survey



## Introduction and Background

In June 2023, Act 8 of 2023 — or the [South Carolina Education Scholarship Trust Fund \(ESTF\)](#) — became effective. The law provides guidelines for implementation and evaluation of the ESTF program beginning in the 2024-25 school year. Eligible students are those who are residents of South Carolina, attended a public school during the 2023-24 school year or had not yet been kindergarten-eligible due to age, and whose household income does not exceed 200% [federal poverty rate](#). Eligible students approved to participate in the program could access a \$6,000 scholarship distributed on a quarterly basis in the amount of \$1,500 to be used on qualifying expenses approved by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE).

In October 2023, a lawsuit was initiated questioning the constitutionality of using tax dollars to fund the ESTF program. On September 11, 2024 the SC Supreme Court [found a direct benefit](#) to private industry using tax dollars and ESTF scholarship dollars for Education Service Provider tuition and fees. Therefore, tuition and fees for an approved non-public online Education Service Provider or course was found to be unconstitutional. On September 11, 2024 the SCDE halted use of ESTF funds for this use. Other uses of funds remained constitutional, according to the Court's opinion, and all of the categories of fund use are described below.

At the start of the 2024-25 school year, there were 13 related categories of approved expenses outlined and described in the South Carolina Education Scholarship Trust Fund Participant Guide. Expenses noted with an asterisk (\*) were not approved following the September 11, 2024 SC Supreme Court ruling.

- **\*Education Service Provider Tuition and Fees:** These items invoiced by public schools included costs or enrollment and registration, uniform fees purchased through the school, technology fees, supply and book fees, academic testing and assessment fees, and transportation fees.
- **Textbooks and student workbooks:** For students in grades K through 12 in the subject areas of Math, English (including Grammar, Reading and Writing), Science (including Coding and Engineering), Social Studies (including History), and Foreign Language.
- **Reading Books:** Books included on a class reading list and purchased through the school, including fiction, non-fiction, paperback and hardcover books.
- **Curriculum:** Curriculum in the subject areas of Math, English (including Grammar, Reading and Writing), Science (including Coding and Engineering), Social Studies (including History), and Foreign Language are approved expenses. Other subject areas are not approved.
- **Instructional Materials:** School supplies purchased for individual students (not bulk) including binders, calculators, pens, pencils, glue, notebooks, thesaurus, dictionary, and USB cards are approved expenses.
- **Tutoring:** Tutoring by approved providers in the areas of Math, English (including Grammar, Reading and Math), Science, Social Studies (including History), Foreign Language and the supply fees charged by a tutor are approved expenses.
- **Computer Hardware:** Hardware such as a laptop, desktop, monitor and/or tablet used primarily for scholarship students' educational needs are approved, and limited to one purchase of each item every two years. Product warranties are approved as part of the cost.
- **Technological devices:** Materials such as printers and ink, headphones, keyboards, mouse/mouse pad, protective cases for technology, and apple pens are approved items to be used primarily for a scholarship student.
- **\*Tuition and fees for an Approved Non-public Online Education Service Provider or Course:** Classes and courses in the subject areas of Math, English (including Grammar, Reading, and Writing), Science (including Coding and Engineering), Social Studies (including History), Foreign Language, Test Preparation (AP, SAT, ACT etc.), or Study Skills. National Norm-Referenced Examinations: Advanced placement examinations, industry certification exams, or exams related to college or university admission or test preparation classes are approved.
- **Educational Therapies:** Fees for an initial evaluation and/or therapy needed to support a student's success such as ABA, speech, Vision, Occupational, Dyslexia or Dysgraphia therapies are approved.
- **Services Provided by a Student's Non-Resident School District:** Out-of-district fees, afterschool tutoring, and fees or costs associated with participation in extracurricular activities are included.
- **Fees for Transportation:** Fees for transportation charged by the school, not to exceed \$750/year are approved fees for ESTF students.



# ESTF Timeline

## May 4, 2023

Governor McMaster signed Act 8 of 2023 into law to become effective June 3, 2023.

## October 2023

The SC State Conference of the NAACP, SC Education Association (SCEA) and six public school parents asked the court to strike down the law making it unconstitutional to use public money on private school education.

## Jan. 15 - March 15, 2024

Applications opened for the 2024-25 school year using the [ClassWallet](#) platform. Eligible applicants are students who live in SC, who attended a public school during the 2023-24 school year (or who were not old enough to attend kindergarten) and are at/under 200% [federal poverty rate](#).

## April 2024

Director of Education Choice and Family Engagement hired to manage ESTF, and EOC staff holds biweekly meetings May through December 2024 with ESTF staff. According to SCDE staff, approximately 2,879 applicants were approved for first quarter payments.

## July 31, 2024

First quarter payment of \$1,500/student released to the ClassWallet platform for use.

## September 1, 2024

SCDE compared the list of scholarship students with public school enrollment to avoid duplicate payments, per the language in the ESTF statute.

## September 11, 2024

The South Carolina Supreme Court issued opinion which finds a portion of the ESTF law unconstitutional, striking portions of the program allowing funds to be spent on tuition for private schools.

## January 15, 2024

SCDE again compared the list of scholarship students with public school enrollment to avoid duplicate payments.

## March 15, 2024

SCDE again compared the list of scholarship students with public school enrollment to avoid duplicate payments.

## October 15, 2024

SCDE staff performs confirmation of student eligibility requiring that students are no longer enrolled in their district of residence. According to SCDE, approximately 1,000 student accounts were suspended when it was discovered students were still enrolled in school district of residence. Three students were displaced due to Hurricane Helene, but their eligibility was not impacted and their access to funds remained stable.

## October 29, 2024

Satisfaction surveys administered to all parents (representing 2,879 student accounts) who were approved to participate in the program. Surveys were sent out from the SCDE, on behalf of the EOC. All parents received a survey, even if they were impacted by the September 11 SC Supreme Court decision or were found ineligible to participate due to enrollment in school of residence.

## October 30, 2024

Second payments went out to those confirmed eligible; number of confirmed eligible is not available.

## November 15, 2024

Survey closed and 243 responses collected.

## Enabling Legislation

Pursuant to Section 59-8-110(E):

The Education Oversight Committee (EOC) shall:

(1) comply with all student privacy laws;

(2) report on and publish associated learning gains and graduation rates to the public by means of a state website with data aggregated by grade level, gender, family income level, number of years participating in the program, and race and a report for any participating school if at least fifty-one percent of the total enrolled students in the private school participated in the ESTF program in the prior school year or if there are at least thirty participating students who have scores for tests administered. If the Education Oversight Committee determines that the thirty participating-student cell size may be reduced without disclosing the personally identifiable information of a participating student, the Education Oversight Committee may reduce the participating-student cell size, but the cell size may not be reduced to fewer than ten participating students;

(3) evaluate and report the academic performance of scholarship students compared to similar public school populations; and

(4) collaborate with the department to develop and administer an annual parental satisfaction survey for all parents of scholarship students on issues relevant to the ESTF program, to include effectiveness and length of the program participation. Results of this survey must be provided to the General Assembly by December thirty-first of each year.

Given the timeline of implementation, the EOC can only report the parent satisfaction survey results in the initial report. In the 2025 report, academic data is expected to be included.

At the time of publication of this report, a bill to alleviate the issues resulting from the Supreme Court decision and other issues of implementation addressed in this report was pre-filed on December 11, 2024.



## Parental Satisfaction Survey Research from Other States:

### Other States with Similar Programs:

Several other states have similar school choice programs for public school students, so research was completed to determine how these states assess parent satisfaction. After review of publications from national groups, individual states identified as having school choice programming were contacted to inquire about parent satisfaction surveys. A list of resources consulted to develop this list can be found in the *Works Consulted* section.

The following states were contacted:

Alabama	Indiana	Mississippi	Rhode Island
Arkansas	Kansas	Montana	South Dakota
Arizona	Louisiana	North Carolina	Utah
Florida	Maryland	New Hampshire	Virginia
Georgia	Maine	Nevada	Washington DC
Iowa	Minnesota	Ohio	Wisconsin
Illinois	Missouri	Pennsylvania	West Virginia

Of the 28 states with a school choice program of any kind, all were contacted, nine do not conduct a survey, seventeen did not respond, and two offer a parent satisfaction survey and shared the items on it with EOC staff.

## *Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program Parent Satisfaction Survey:*

These questions are used on the parent survey of the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program:

- How satisfied were you with the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program during the 2023-2024 school year?
- How likely are you to recommend the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship program to others?
- How satisfied were you with the participating private school your child attended during the 2023-2024 school year?
- Overall, how satisfied were you with the educational program your child received at the participating private school he or she attended during the 2023-2024 school year?
- Overall, how effective do you believe the participating private school's curriculum was preparing your child for the next grade and future success during the 2023-2024 school year?
- How satisfied were you with the participating private school's ability to keep you updated about the progress of your child during the 2023-2024 school year?

## *Missouri MOScholars Scholarship Program Survey Items:*

These items are used on the parent survey of the MOScholars Program:

- For how many years has your student been a recipient of a MOScholars scholarship?
- How satisfied are you with your student's academic achievement at the school(s) the child attends through the MOScholars scholarship program versus academic achievement at the school previously attended?
- What is your level of satisfaction with school safety at the school(s) your student attends through the MOScholars scholarship program versus safety at the school(s) previously attended?
- How satisfied are you with the ClassWallet virtual platform?
- What is your overall satisfaction with the MOScholars scholarship program?
- What improvements and changes would you like to see made to the MOScholars scholarship program?
- Is your child graduating High School this year?
- If you answered yes, where are they heading after graduation?



## **Survey Development Process and Methodology:**

In 2023, EOC Chair April Allen created a special ad-hoc subcommittee, a Survey Advisory Group (SAG), to advise and assist with decision-making related to surveys, administration, and related projects. The SAG was instrumental in the development of the parental satisfaction survey administered by the EOC in partnership with SCDE. EOC staff collected feedback from SAG members after items from Georgia and Missouri were edited to reflect South Carolina's ESTF program. Additional information about the SAG and details of this process can be found in Appendix A, with the survey items distributed in Appendix B. Not all respondents answered every survey item, as the survey was designed to skip to the next logical item and not all items required a response.

Recommendations from the SAG resulted in a final version of the survey with eight items designed to take less than 15 minutes to complete. The survey was developed using the Qualtrics platform and was shared to all ESTF families approved to participate (2,899) using the SCDE listserv to all parents approved to participate. Responses are kept anonymous in reporting of results, with any potentially identifying information, such as a child's name or school shared by respondents, redacted. Parents were instructed to complete the survey once per participating child, so that each child's experience could be captured. For example, if a parent had two children receiving ESTF funds, they were asked to take the survey twice.

The survey used a Net Promoter Score (NPS) to gauge overall satisfaction and those findings are described in the next section. The NPS is used with an item with a scale of 10 options and is widely used to measure customer experience. In this case, the NPS was used to measure satisfaction or likelihood to recommend the program to others. A score of 10 is the most satisfied, or highest promoter, with 0 representing the least satisfied, or strongest detractor. Depending on the response, participants in the ESTF program fall into one of three categories to find the NPS score:

- Promoters respond with a score of 9 or 10. These participants are enthusiastic and happy with their experience with the program.
- Passives respond with a score of 7 or 8. These participants are satisfied with service but are not happy enough to be considered promoters.
- Detractors respond with scores from 0 to 6. These are unhappy participants who are unlikely to recommend the program and may discourage others from participating in it.

The NPS score is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters.

- Above 0 is good as there are more promoters than detractors.
- Above 20 is favorable.
- Above 50 is excellent.
- Above 80 is world class.

The NPS was used in this survey development and analysis as a recommendation of the SAG and it’s potential to build a culture of action. It is very useful identifying areas of poor performance and drivers for dissatisfaction so they can be adjusted in the future. Similarly, the same is true for areas of excellent performance and these will be illustrated in the next section.



## Findings and Respondents:

The survey responses from 243 parents/caregivers of ESTF participants yielded several findings. When participants were unsatisfied, it was often the result of how the program was implemented or changes related to policy as a result of outside influences.

Of the 243 respondents, several responded that they elected not to participate, or their children became ineligible after being originally accepted into the program due to residency requirements. This information about respondents is relevant in a satisfaction survey because their experience is unique. Most of the respondents had only one child participating; however, the number of children accepted into the program ranged from one to six. One respondent noted that three children applied while only one was accepted, and another parent described that he/she applied for one student and didn’t realize the other siblings could also apply.

Respondents were asked where their children attended school during the 2023-24 school year to determine if any patterns in satisfaction were detected across previous education environments. Table 1 illustrates the previous educational setting for respondents. No statistically significant correlations were found when analyzing satisfaction scores by previous educational environment.

Table 1: Previous Educational Environment:

School Environment	Homeschool	School in a Different State	Public Charter School	Public School (Includes Magnet Program)	Virtual School (Online Program through District or Other Organization)	Other*
Number of Respondents Moving from that School Environment	6 (3%)	1 (0.4%)	18 (8%)	110 (46%)	5 (2%)	46 (19%)

Respondents who selected “other” were asked to describe the educational environment in a text box. Responses include: Preschool, Private School, College, “a school outside of our district”, homeschool. According to Act 8 of 2023, students are eligible to participate in ESTF if they participated in a public school in SC the previous school year, which suggests that students participating in private school, homeschool, a school outside the district in SC, or college should not have been found eligible to receive funds. This ineligibility, if discovered by SCDE staff during reviews, may have resulted in second quarter funds not being released to these families, potentially influencing their satisfaction with the program.

Respondents were also asked if they experienced a disruption in educational services funded by ESTF this year. This item was not completed by all potential respondents, but of the 178 who did, 37% reported yes, and the same amount reported no. Forty-five, or 25% of respondents reported that they did not yet experience a disruption, but they might. Of those who reported they may experience a disruption, most reported that was a result of the Supreme Court decision and changes to what ESTF funds could be used for. Another frequent topic that respondents listed for experiencing or anticipating a disruption was due to the eligibility requirement to not be enrolled in a school district of residency, when funds were distributed and families were approved in the first quarter.

## Survey comments related to eligibility:



“My children would have to leave the school district they had been in for years!”

“Funds were taken from us because my child was enrolled in her zoned school even though the funds were being used for tutoring.”

“Well, my fund got stopped because my daughter goes to the assigned school where she supposed to. I didn’t know she not supposed to, if I would’ve known I wouldn’t even apply for this. I wanted to use it for her tutoring, but my fund got stopped before I could arrange the payments with the tutors. So it’s absolutely pointless at this point for us.”

## Survey comments related to the SC Supreme Court decision:



“My children have thrived at the school we chose, expecting the ESTF to help fund, but I’m not sure they can continue in the future if funds will no longer be available for private school. I will not send them back to public school and I can’t afford full private education.”

“I’m a single parent to an autistic child and this scholarship afforded my daughter the opportunity to attend a private school where she benefits from the smaller class size and individual support. Since the revoking of using funds for private school I have had to make significant changes in our life to continue my daughter’s education. “

“I have had to contact my parents and ask them for assistance in paying for my child’s education. They have helped me with tuition for last month and will continue. My father is putting off his retirement to continue to help fund *my child’s* education.”

*\*italics are used to show edits have been made to quotes to protect identity.*



## Overall Satisfaction and Drivers:

Survey respondents were asked “Based on your experience, how likely are you to recommend the ESTF program to others” and responses ranged from 0 “not at all likely”, to 10 “Extremely likely”. The highest percentage of scores were at the extremes with almost 60% of respondents selecting either 0 or 10. This suggests there were strong and varied experiences among respondents.

Table 2: Distribution of Scores on How Likely Respondents are to Recommend the ESTF Program:

Score 0-10 (10 highest)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number of Respondents who Reported that Score	41	12	6	5	10	16	5	4	20	12	81
Percent of Respondents who Reported that Score of Total who Answered the Item	19%	6%	3%	2%	5%	8%	2%	2%	9%	6%	38%

The NPS for this item is  $-.92$ , meaning there are slightly fewer to recommend the program than to advise against it during the first year of implementation.

### Respondents NPS Category on Likelihood to Recommend ESTF

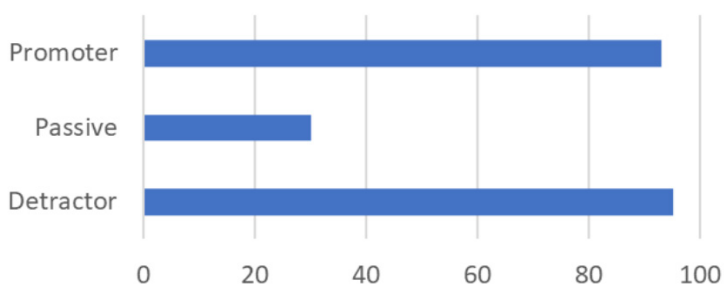


Table 3: Percentage and Count of NPS Category on Likely to Recommend ESTF

Based on your most recent experience, how likely are you to recommend the ESTF program?	Percentage	Count
Promoter	43%	93
Passive	14%	30
Detractor	44%	95

**Promoters** respond with a score of 9 or 10. These participants are enthusiastic and happy with their experience with the program.

**Passives** respond with a score of 7 or 8. These participants are satisfied with service but are not happy enough to be considered promoters.

**Detractors** respond with scores from 0 to 6. These are unhappy participants who are unlikely to recommend the program and may discourage others from participating in it.

Another similar item on the survey asked parents “How satisfied are you with the ESTF program during the current school year (2024-25)?” and the NPS for this item was -20. This result means there are more dissatisfied than satisfied respondents and there are opportunities to improve the parent experience in future implementations.

Chart 2: NPS on Satisfaction

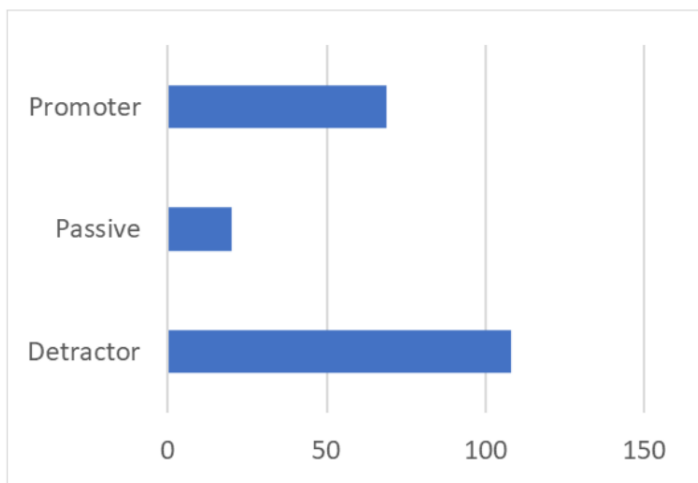


Table 4: Percentage and Count of NPS Category on Satisfaction

How satisfied are you with the ESTF program during the 2024-25 school year	Percentage	Count
Promoter	35%	69
Passive	10%	20
Detractor	55%	108

Respondents who were dissatisfied by the program provided information about why, and the primary reason was that initially accepted students were not able to use funds either because they were never eligible due to age or enrollment in resident public school, or were rejected due to challenges with vendors not being approved. Some respondents indicated frustration escalated due to poor communication such as unanswered calls or emails.

*“I'm not satisfied for the following reasons:*

- 1. No communication about potential loss of funds.*
- 2. Unclear communication from Class wallet employees after Supreme Court Ruling (said funds could still be used for this school year but later said they could only be used for books and supplies, which also got denied when payment request was submitted).*
- 3. It took two weeks to receive a denial and after inquiring about escalation, I found out supplies could not be covered because it was going to a private school.*
- 4. When I asked if there was a number to call the program director or office that oversees the ESTF program, I was told there was no email or number to directly ask them about these funds and their uses.”*

*“My daughter was awarded a scholarship, she hasn’t been able to use the funds. We were told she will not receive the funds because she goes to USC. We did not know the funds were for k-12 and it did not specify on the application. I’ve emailed and called but no one responds.”*

*“The limitations and restrictions are not friendly. Additionally, the programs offered are geared more toward elementary-aged students. Options for SAT/ACT help and vendors who offer those types of programs should be included.*

*“Reimbursement is not allowed even from vendors approved in list.”*



Some parents were frustrated at barriers to accessing the educational environment they wanted for their children despite being approved for the program. Prior to the SC Supreme Court decision, there was not a mandate for private schools to accept ESTF funds.

“I was unable to use the scholarship because no school(s) in our area accept the educational scholarship. It would help (a) family in areas where there are school(s) willing to accept the educational scholarship.”  
(parentheses indicate additions made by researchers for clarity)



Some families were frustrated that the risk of covering tuition rested on families who had to meet a poverty threshold to participate when the lawsuit was already initiated. Some families were angry at the decision to move forward with the ESTF program while the constitutionality of payments to providers was in question.

“Leading up to this decision and dispersion, more research should have been conducted to ensure families would(n't) have to be stuck at a school they couldn't afford.”

“I wish that if (it) might be taken away I could have been notified in advance. I think what the education department did was disgusting.” (parentheses indicate additions made by researchers for clarity)

Many of the satisfied parents reported that the program supported their child and the access to financial assistance was a benefit.

- (I rated this program a 9) because of the limited resources (tutors on the list) that is it, this is a great program!
- I am able to help my child in a way as I see (f)it, with the best education through this trust fund.
- I haven't run into any problems using the funds. I am happy with the services it provided.

Satisfied respondents also referenced tuition supports — despite the challenges associated with them during the first year of implementation, and homeschooling children, and despite a provision against using funds to do so in Act 8 of 2023. While the law prohibits the use of funds for homeschooling, funds can be used for materials such as curricula, assessments, school supplies and technology. These allowances can create potential ambiguity and confusion for parents.

“It has made it possible for me to home educate my children.”



*Marketplace Satisfaction:*

Despite being less satisfied with the ESTF program implementation, families were satisfied to receive the ESTF funds in the first quarter with an NPS of 43, which is very favorable. The thirteen categories of approved use of funds have a separate NPS and parents were asked if they perceived an improvement in their child’s academic achievement as a result of the use of funds.

Table 5: Use of Funds NPS and Improved Student Achievement:

<b>Use of Funds:</b>	<b>Net Promoter Score by Use of Funds</b>	<b>Percent of Parents who Reported Improvement in Student Achievement as a Result of ESTF by Use</b>
Textbooks and Workbooks	75	83%
Reading Books	78	89%
Curriculum	83	83%
Instructional Materials	77	68%
Tutoring	56	89%
Computer Hardware	100	86%
Technological Devices	50	25%
Services Provided by a Student’s Non-Resident District	-100	0%
Education Service Provider Tuition and Fees*	41	65%
Tuition and Fees for Approved Non-public Online Education Service Providers*	77	77%

*\*After September 11, 2024 using ESTF funds for these services was no longer allowable.*

*\*\*Small number of participants using funds for Norm-referenced tests and Educational Therapies; therefore data for these categories is not reported in this table.*

Some parents reported that they would appreciate additional approved vendors and training for vendors and service providers so that approval and use of funds could be completed rapidly for shorter wait times to begin accessing educational supports:

*“We need more marketplace options”*

*“Have more online stores that we can use for educational materials.”*

*“I think the process for getting a service provider approved needs to be smoother and conducted in a more timely manner. For example, it took about 2.5 months and many phone calls to clarify issues that came up with one service provider. Two of our service providers were initially denied over confusion over how to fill out the application and what the questions were asking, which caused many delays. Our preferred school was finally approved just before the school year, but it left us scrambling and under much stress touring other schools last minute in case it didn't work out with that one. It might also be helpful for the new service provider to receive a little more coaching on the ESTF program and how to fill out the form.”*

The SC Supreme Court decision and a variety of eligibility requirements related to school enrollment resulted in a disruption in the ESTF funded educational experience for 66 respondents, with 46 additional respondents anticipating a future disruption for the same reasons.

Many respondents reported feeling surprised by a variety of aspects of the program. The topics and degree of positive to negative impact fell along a continuum – ranging from surprise that the SC Supreme Court decision would take effect immediately and that to access funds, families must move out of public school in their resident district, to enthusiasm regarding the variety of items parents can use funds for and relief about a child’s safety in a new school.

*“Yes - greatly surprised me that our child, who qualified and desperately needs the help, was denied help because we didn't want to switch public schools. Left us paying \$200 out of pocket every month to get help that should have been covered by this program. BIG, BIG fail.”*

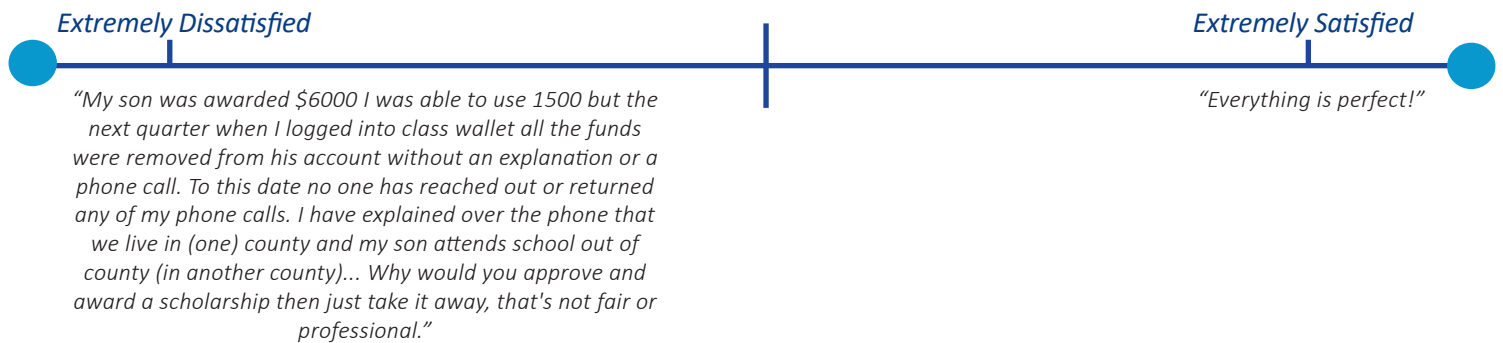
*“I was surprised at how the choice to use the funding towards private schools was taken away so fast, as soon as those kids just had started school.”*

*“Just how much stuff you can get for your children that parents aren’t able to afford”*

*“The opportunity to enroll my daughter in a Christian private school , I feel she is in a safe place.”*

*“We were so happy my daughter got the scholarship, my husband died March 11, 2024 and we really needed those funds.”*

## Satisfaction with Portals and Parent Support:



### ClassWallet and Outbridge

ClassWallet is the portal that was used to disperse funds to families and access approved vender information. While some respondents offered information about ClassWallet as a means for vender approval or other programmatic pieces, ClassWallet conducts its own evaluation of users, so this survey did not duplicate those efforts. ClassWallet holds the contract to do this work for the SC Department of Education.

Outbridge is a company that was hired to help parents participating in the ESTF access and use funds. Outbridge is separate from ClassWallet which was the portal for parents to access and use funds. The primary use of Outbridge is to answer questions and reach out to families who had not opened a ClassWallet account or who did but hadn’t spent funds to ensure they were properly supported.

Respondents reported varying degrees of satisfaction with communication and who to contact with questions or problems during the first year of implementation. Parents

who referenced communication were as likely to be satisfied as they were to be frustrated by it. To alleviate stress for families during the first year of implementation and after the SC Supreme Court decision, Outbridge support was used by the SCDE to support parents navigating program changes. Seventeen percent of respondents used Outbridge support during their participation in the program to access funds, make decisions during participation, and get questions answered. Almost 70% of respondents did not utilize Outbridge support and 15% didn’t know if they did or did not. Of the 30 respondents who did use Outbridge, 55% promoted the support structure, while 31% were detractors providing an NPS of 24, which is favorable. Despite overall favorable results, some parents reported being frustrated with Outbridge. When asked to rate how important Outbridge was in navigating the program the results were overall positive, but for those who had a negative experience, it was very intense.

## Implications of Findings & Recommendations:

While the first year of implementation of a program of this magnitude on a short timeline is likely to have errors, most of the detractor drivers were related to poor implementation. Based on the results of the survey, areas of poor performance in the implementation of the ESTF program included: eligibility determination, communication, and vendor approval processes. While there is reason to believe the second year of implementation will mitigate these issues of implementation, it cannot be assumed. Therefore, the following recommendations are built from the Parent Satisfaction Survey data.

### *Prioritize Communication of Program Eligibility and Participation Requirements:*



Despite efforts to communicate the requirements for participation in the ESTF program, many parents reported not being told they must attend a program outside of their school zone of residence. Several families who would be ineligible due to previously participating in private school or homeschool settings, and students in college were initially approved to participate and later unable to access funds for second quarter. Being removed from the program was illustrated to be more problematic than not being approved to begin with. Prioritizing the delivery of clear communication around eligibility may alleviate dissatisfaction as it relates to which students can participate.

### *Confirm Eligibility Before Funds are Released on July 31st First Quarter Payment:*



In accordance with Section 59-8-120 (E) it is recommended that SCDE confirm eligibility of enrollment in non-residential school, at the time of approval before quarter one payments (on or before July 31st) instead of accepting applicants and waiting to verify. This will ensure families accessing funds are eligible and won't experience a termination when eligibility cannot be confirmed.

*"Nothing in the qualifications stated the children could not live in their zoned school area. This is unfair and not right."*

*"After an application was submitted, reviewed and accepted months later we get a response that my child technically wasn't eligible and that his account was deactivated. Nowhere did we see he had to not reside within his district. That literally doesn't make any sense whatsoever."*

## Conclusion and Next Steps:

All open response items have been shared with the SCDE so they have access and can make programmatic decisions using all of the data collected from these surveys. Exemplars have been shared in this report to illustrate the breadth of parent satisfaction; however, the SCDE, Outbridge and ClassWallet have all data pertaining to them.

Overall, parents reported satisfaction receiving funds and the use of funds despite being surprised by eligibility requirements and frustrated by a lack of clear and responsive communication. Some of the dissatisfaction was the result of first year implementation lessons and the SC Supreme Court Decision. The next year of implementation will likely bring improvements made from lessons learned and experience implementing the program. Impacts of the SC Supreme Court decision have begun to be addressed by SC legislators in advance of the legislative session's official opening. EOC staff will continue to monitor efforts and resulting questions.

# Appendix A

# Appendix A The SAG and Review Process for ESTF Parent Satisfaction Survey Development:

## *SAG Background, Description and Current Membership:*

Beginning with the 2022 School Report Cards, South Carolina has incorporated the SC School Climate Surveys in its statewide educational accountability system to meet both state and federal requirements. There are three versions of the SC School Climate Survey designed for different groups of stakeholders. The Student School Climate Survey (SSCS or “Student Survey”), the Teacher School Climate Survey (TSCS or “Teacher Survey”), and the Parent / Guardian School Climate Survey (PSCS or “Parent Survey”) may be referred to collectively as the “Climate Surveys.” The Climate Surveys were developed per the Educational Accountability Act of 1998 and the Parental Involvement in Their Children's Education Act of 2000 and have been administered annually to students in SC public schools, their teachers, and their parents or guardians. Prior to their use in accountability, the Climate Surveys were only given to students in the highest grade level at a school but are now administered to all students from Grade 3 through Grade 12 enrolled at any school in the state. All the Climate Surveys are currently administered electronically. Given their broader use in the state, their administration to all students in all schools, and the higher stakes associated with their use in accountability, the SC Education Oversight Committee (EOC), in collaboration with the SC Department of Education (SCDE), has begun to explore ways to make the Climate Surveys more accessible and relevant to more stakeholders, to make the information that the Climate Surveys provide to school and district leaders clearer and more relevant to ongoing continuous improvement efforts, and to improve the quality of the scores that they produce for the state’s accountability system.

In addition, the EOC has been tasked with additional responsibilities which require the development, administration, and analysis of additional surveys for which the input of relevant stakeholders would be valued. To that end, the EOC has established the Survey Advisory Group (SAG), a special subcommittee of the EOC and also a standing advisory group of relevant stakeholders who provides input on work to improve Climate Surveys and their use, provides input on the development and use of other surveys related to the EOC’s work, advocates for the unique interests and needs of the stakeholders they represent on issues related to surveys, and advises on the development of relevant policies, procedures, and support documents related to surveys (e.g., survey administration manuals).

SAG membership is comprised of 12 leaders in education with a vested interest in the surveys used in SC, who were nominated to participate. These leaders serve 1 to 2 year terms, with the exception of a past chair and additional historian who will serve 3 years to preserve the culture of the group, while other members will change to maintain a fresh perspective. The group is diverse and includes classroom teachers, district leadership, psychometricians, and a consultant from SCDE staffed by EOC staff. The group of 12 includes:

Jeff Maxey- Chair

Jessica Adamson

Julia Sowell Byrd

Nikkina McKnight

Frank Rodriguez

Darleen Sutton

Angela Crosland-Vice-Chair

Kandace Bethea

AJ Chambers

Helena Miller

Scott Smith

Amy Young



### *ESTF Parent Satisfaction Survey Development:*

The following draft items include options from both states edited only to reflect South Carolina's ESTF program, and some original items designed to collect data for the initial implementation year of the ESTF program. If the item is from another state, that is noted with the state abbreviation in front of the item. A final draft was developed using SAG feedback for October 2024 administration.

Survey compilation:

1) GA: How satisfied were you with the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program during the 2023-2024 school year?

MO: What is your overall satisfaction with the MOScholars scholarship program?

- Extremely satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

2) GA: How likely are you to recommend the Educational Scholarship program to others?

- Extremely likely
- Fairly likely
- Neutral
- Fairly unlikely
- Extremely unlikely

3) MO: What improvements and changes would you like to see made to the MOScholars scholarship program? (Type your response below)

4) Did your child attend a private school as a result of ESTF funds? (If yes items 4a-f, if no item 5.)

GA: How satisfied were you with the participating private school your child attended during the 2023-2024 school year?

- Extremely satisfied
- Mostly satisfied
- Neutral
- Mostly dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

GA: Overall, how satisfied were you with the educational program your child received at the participating private school he or she attended during the 2023-2024 school year?

- Extremely satisfied
- Mostly satisfied
- Neutral
- Mostly dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

GA: Overall, how effective do you believe the participating private school's curriculum was preparing your child for the next grade and future success during the 2023-2024 school year?

- Extremely satisfied
- Mostly satisfied

- Neutral
- Mostly dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

d. GA: How satisfied were you with the participating private school's ability to keep you updated about the progress of your child during the 2023-2024 school year?

- Extremely satisfied
- Mostly satisfied
- Neutral
- Mostly dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

e. MO: How satisfied are you with your student's academic achievement at the school(s) the child attends through the MOScholars scholarship program versus academic achievement at the school previously attended?

- Extremely satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

f. MO: What is your level of satisfaction with school safety at the school(s) your student attends through the MOScholars scholarship program versus safety at the school(s) previously attended?

- Extremely satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

5) Did you spend your ESTF funds on tutoring? (if yes items 5a-b, if no item 6)

a) How satisfied are you with the tutor?

- Extremely satisfied
- Mostly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Mostly dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

b) Do you see an improvement in your student's achievement that you believe is a result of tutoring?

- Yes
- No

6) Did you spend your ESTF funds on school supplies or technology? (if yes items 6.a-b, if no item 7-9)

a) How satisfied are you with the supplies/technology you purchased using ESTF funds?

- Extremely satisfied
- Mostly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Mostly dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

b) Do you see an improvement in your student's achievement that you believe is a result of these supplies?

- Yes
- No

Closing:

7) MO: How satisfied are you with the ClassWallet virtual platform?

- Extremely satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

8) MO: Is your child graduating High School this year? (If yes, 8b, if no item 9)

- Yes
- No

B\_If you answered yes, what are their plans after graduation? (type your response below)

9) What else should we know about your experience with the ESTF program, but didn't ask? (type your response below)

# **Appendix B**

## Appendix B Final Parent Satisfaction Survey for ESTF:

Thank you for participating in the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) Parent Satisfaction Survey! State law requires that this survey is offered to all families who participated in the program. The survey is conducted by the Education Oversight Committee and the results will be shared with the General Assembly.

The survey is designed to:

1. understand how the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program is working, and
2. identify ways to improve the program.

The short survey will take about 15-20 minutes to complete. Please complete a separate survey for each student using Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) funds. We value your honest feedback, and no information that could identify you or your child will be shared in any reporting of survey results.

The survey will remain open until Friday, November 15, 2024. If you can't complete the survey at one time, it will automatically save and later you can pick up where you left off. Please contact Jenny May (jmay@eoc.sc.gov or 803-734-9925) with questions.

### Section I:

1. How likely are you to recommend the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program to others?\* (10 options)
2. How satisfied were you with the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program during the 2024-25 school year?\* (10 options)
3. Was there anything that surprised you about the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program as you participated? (text box)
4. How many children do you have participating in Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program this school year?
  - a. Not to please complete the survey separately, for each child participating.
5. Where was your student enrolled in school last year/during the 2023-24 school year? (define what these are in items)
  - a. Public school
  - b. Public charter school
  - c. Homeschool
  - d. Virtual school
  - e. In school out of state
  - f. Other (text box)
6. How did you use the funds from Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) this school year? (description included)
  - i. Education Service Provider Tuition and Fees
  - ii. Textbook and Student Workbooks (K-12 in the subjects of: Math, English, Science, Social Studies, or Foreign Language)
  - iii. Reading Books
  - iv. Curriculum in the Following Subject Areas: Math, English, Science, Social Studies, or Foreign Language
  - v. Instructional Materials/School Supplies
  - vi. Tutoring
  - vii. Computer Hardware (desktop, laptop etc.)
  - viii. Technological Devices (printers, apple pen, keyboard etc.)
  - ix. Tuition and Fees for an Approved Nonpublic Online Education Service Provider or Course
  - x. National Norm-Referenced Examinations (AP, industry certification etc.)
  - xi. Educational Therapies (ABA therapy, vision therapy, evaluation for therapy equipment etc.)
  - xii. Services Provided by a Student's Non-Resident District (out-of-district fees, transportation, fees or costs associated with participation in extracurricular activities etc.)

Section II (Items are included specific to categories of fund use---pop up after selection of how funds spent)

7. Overall, how satisfied are you with (use of funds) so far?\*
8. Do you see an improvement in your student's achievement that you believe is the result of (use of funds)? (yes, no, I'm not sure)

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Room 502 Brown Building  
Columbia, SC 29201  
[www.eoc.sc.gov](http://www.eoc.sc.gov)



*The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC) is an independent, nonpartisan group of 18 educators, business people, and elected officials appointed by the legislature and governor. The EOC enacts the South Carolina Education Accountability Act of 1998, which sets standards for improving the state's K-12 educational system. The EOC reviews the state's education improvement process, assesses how schools are doing, and evaluates the standards schools must meet to build the education system needed to compete in this century.*

**FYI**

# South Carolina

## State Opportunity Index



The State Opportunity Index measures state progress in five priority areas: Clear Outcomes, Quality Coaching, Affordability, Work-Based Learning, and Employer Alignment. While all states have room for improvement, those designated as Leading are at the forefront and have made the most progress toward creating equitable pathways to opportunity. Advanced states also have made substantial progress, while Developing states are earlier in their improvement efforts. Foundational states are at the beginning of their journey.

The five priority areas below all represent ways for states to strengthen the link between education and opportunity. One measure of the current strength of that link is how consistently college graduates achieve a positive return on investment (ROI), i.e., the percentage of graduates better off financially because they went to college. The positive ROI value for each state represents the estimated percentage of college graduates whose earnings premium over high school graduates is enough to repay their total cost of a degree within 10 years. Positive ROI data are available for 50 states and Washington, D.C.

### Positive ROI

**65%**  
OVERALL

**65%** BACHELOR'S  
**63%** ASSOCIATE

## Clear Outcomes

ADVANCED

STATE OVERALL

Everyone should have access to accurate information on employment outcomes that can help them make informed decisions about education after high school. To measure state progress, we have identified 10 critical elements that contribute to the capacity of state education-to-employment data systems to strengthen the connection between education and opportunity. Clear Outcomes data are available for 50 states and Washington, D.C.

FOUNDATIONAL

1. Nondegree and noncredit data

LEADING

2. Enhanced wage records (e.g., occupation)

ADVANCED

3. Longitudinal data from postsecondary education

ADVANCED

4. Longitudinal data from high school

LEADING

5. Data sharing across state lines

DEVELOPING

6. Open data files

DEVELOPING

7. Interactive resources

LEADING

8. Researcher access

FOUNDATIONAL

9. Learning and employment records

DEVELOPING

10. Dedicated insights capacity

### CATEGORY KEY

Overall score is the average of the 10 elements.

- Leading: Completely present
- Advanced: Partially present
- Developing: In development
- Foundational: Not in development

## Quality Coaching

FOUNDATIONAL

NATIONAL OVERALL

Everyone should have access to coaching that helps them reflect on their talents and interests, choose a career goal, map pathways through education, and navigate challenges. To measure progress, we surveyed recent graduates to learn who experienced education-to-career coaching with accompanying information about employment outcomes information and support in achieving their goals. Quality Coaching data are available nationally for public two- and four-year institutions and for public four-year institutions in California, Florida, New York, and Texas.

FOUNDATIONAL

1. National bachelor's

FOUNDATIONAL

2. National associate

### CATEGORY KEY

Percentage of graduates who receive timely information, guidance, and support on education-to-career pathways.

- Leading: 76-100%
- Advanced: 51-75%
- Developing: 26-50%
- Foundational: 0-25%



# Affordability

DEVELOPING

STATE OVERALL

Quality post-high school programs should be within everyone's financial reach, allowing for equitable opportunities for success. To measure progress, we calculated how many hours a week a student would need to work to cover the in-state net price [total cost of attendance minus any grants and scholarships]. Affordability data are available for 50 states and Washington, D.C.

FOUNDATIONAL

State bachelor's

LEADING

State associate

## CATEGORY KEY

Hours of work per week during school year needed to pay net price of education (net price of education equates to the cost of attendance minus grants and scholarships) in addition to full-time summer work.

- **Leading:** Less than 10 hrs.
- **Advanced:** 10-20 hrs.
- **Developing:** 20-30 hrs.
- **Foundational:** More than 30 hrs.

# Work-Based Learning

DEVELOPING

NATIONAL OVERALL

All students should have access to quality work-based learning experiences, such as paid internships and apprenticeships, that help connect their education and career aspirations. To measure progress toward broadening access to paid internships, we surveyed recent college graduates. Work-Based Learning data are available nationally for public two- and four-year institutions and for public four-year institutions in California, Florida, New York, and Texas.

DEVELOPING

National bachelor's

FOUNDATIONAL

National associate

## CATEGORY KEY

Percentage of graduates who have participated in a paid internship.

- **Leading:** 61-100%
- **Advanced:** 41-60%
- **Developing:** 21-40%
- **Foundational:** 0-20%

# Employer Alignment

FOUNDATIONAL

STATE OVERALL

Students should have access to programs that lead to quality jobs and mobility, and employers should assess and advance individuals based on skills and experiences, not just degrees. To measure progress, we calculated a supply/demand ratio for a variety of high-demand, high-wage jobs in each state, as well as estimated the percentage of terminal bachelor's degree holders aged 26-30 employed in a college-level job. Employer Alignment data are available for 50 states and Washington, D.C.

DEVELOPING

College-level employment

FOUNDATIONAL

Overall supply/demand ratio

FOUNDATIONAL

1. Data analytics

DEVELOPING

2. Engineers

LEADING

3. Finance and accounting professionals

FOUNDATIONAL

4. Finance and accounting support

FOUNDATIONAL

5. Health care technicians and technologists

ADVANCED

6. Information and cybersecurity

FOUNDATIONAL

7. Nursing

LEADING

8. Software development and engineering

ADVANCED

9. Technicians and technologists

## CATEGORY KEY

Overall score based on average of the College-Level Employment Rate and Overall Supply/Demand Ratio.

- **Leading:** 76-100%
- **Advanced:** 61-75%
- **Developing:** 50-60%
- **Foundational:** 0-49%

## ABOUT STRADA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

We collaborate with learners, educators, employers, and policymakers across the U.S. to bring to life a postsecondary education and training ecosystem that provides equitable pathways to opportunity.



Learn more at [StradaEducation.org/OpportunityIndex](https://StradaEducation.org/OpportunityIndex)

# Assessment 101: State and Federal Policy

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Ben Erwin

The assessment landscape is varied and complex. Because assessments serve many purposes, they can take multiple forms depending on what they are measuring and how they are used. The intended purpose behind each assessment influences its design, and the design influences how assessment data can be used by students and their families, school, district and state leaders.

Assessments are administered at various stages of a student's education journey to evaluate their mastery of specific academic subjects, mastery of skills or readiness for their next step. Student assessment results are also a key part of school accountability systems as they help ensure students have access to a quality education and that resources are allocated to the schools and students with the most need. State and district policymakers have important decisions to make about when and how to gather and use assessment data across K-12 education systems, but federal policy is a key component of every state's assessment system.

## Assessments in Federal Policy

### Requirements

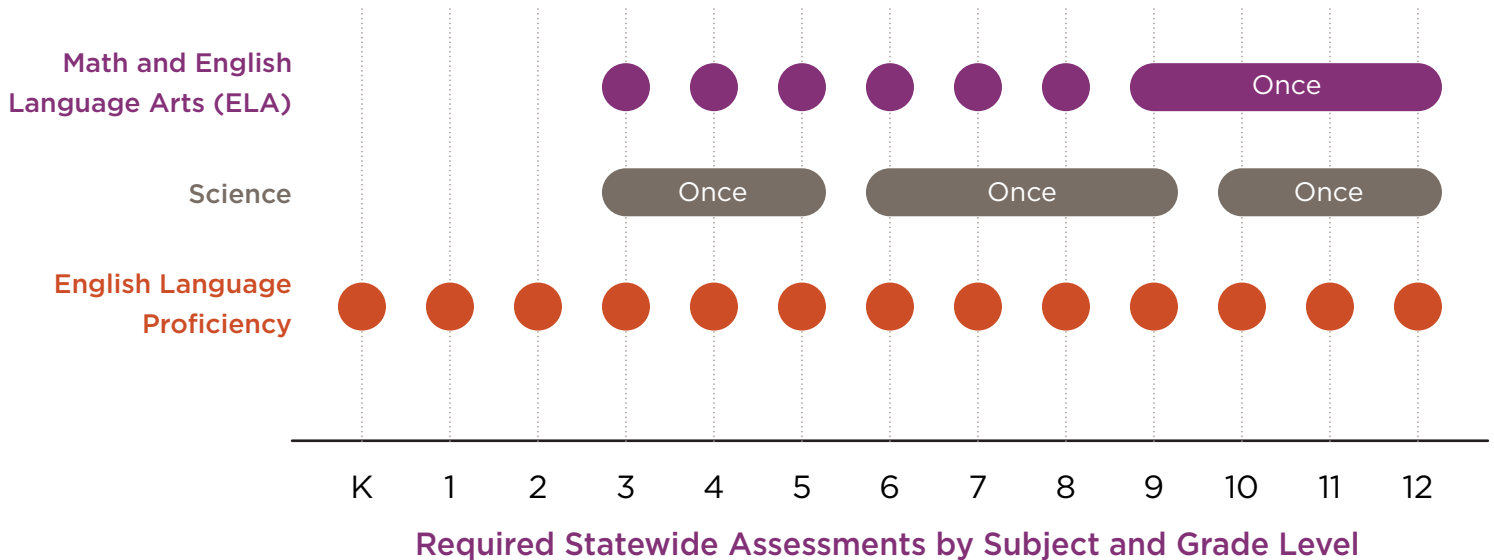
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The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) lays the foundation for state summative assessment systems and requires state education agencies to implement statewide assessments.



These include:

- A math and English language arts (ELA) assessment each year between third and eighth grade and one time between ninth and 12th grade.
- A science assessment one time in each of the following grade spans: third through fifth grade, sixth through ninth grade and 10th through 12th grade.
- An English language proficiency assessment for all identified English learners each year.



Student performance on these assessments — often used to determine both achievement and growth over time — hold significant weight in [school accountability systems](#). Accountability systems can help stakeholders determine whether schools and districts are serving students adequately and equitably, [identify](#) schools for support and improvement, and inform the allocation of additional resources and supports.

ESSA also outlines a minimum participation standard for statewide assessments to ensure schools have sufficient information to measure school quality and disaggregate student achievement and growth data. The law specifies that 95% of all students and 95% of each student group must participate in state assessments or a school may be penalized in the state accountability system. ESSA enables states to administer an alternative assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, which must be capped at no more than 1% of the total number of students assessed in the state. Students with disabilities participating in the statewide summative assessment must be [provided with accommodations](#) — such as the use of assistive technology — and the assessment itself must incorporate Universal Design for Learning principles.

## Flexibility

---

ESSA provides flexibility and support for innovative approaches to student assessment in several ways, including through the option to administer the following as the statewide summative assessment:

- **Multiple interim assessments or performance tasks** to inform a single summative score.
- **Nationally recognized assessments** — such as the ACT or SAT — for high school accountability.

The law also establishes two avenues for states to pursue innovative assessments that aim to better meet their unique needs. These avenues grant states federal support and afford them some additional latitude as they develop innovative assessments.

### Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority

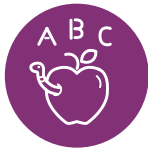
The [Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority](#) (IADA) permits approved state education agencies to establish, operate and evaluate an innovative assessment system. This authority is now open to all states and includes use in the statewide accountability system. Once states develop and pilot their innovative assessment, states who receive approval may scale it statewide. Thus far, states have used the flexibility to develop interim, competency-based and instructionally embedded assessments. As of publication, no states have completed the demonstration period and received approval to scale statewide.

### Competitive Grants for State Assessments

The [Competitive Grants for State Assessments](#) (CGSA) provides states with funding designed to increase the quality of assessment systems. Twenty-one states have received funding through the program since ESSA's enactment with award amounts typically ranging from \$2 million to \$5 million. States have leveraged funds to develop, pilot and scale through-year assessments, performance-based assessments, and instructionally embedded assessments that are aligned to high-quality curriculum materials.

## Assessments in State Policy

In addition to federal compliance requirements, states may use assessment data in separate state accountability systems or opt to administer certain assessments to better inform policymaking and priorities. States may develop their own assessments or leverage existing assessment instruments to measure areas including:



**Kindergarten readiness.** [Kindergarten entrance assessments](#) evaluate student mastery of pre-K developmental milestones and academic and social and emotional development to determine student readiness for kindergarten, identify learning gaps and target interventions to support student success in kindergarten and beyond.



**Literacy.** States may use [K-2 literacy assessments](#) to monitor student progress and/or third grade summative ELA assessments to identify students for promotion, [retention](#) or [literacy intervention](#) in addition to school accountability to ensure students develop foundational literacy skills.



**End-of-course proficiency.** End-of-course exams assess student mastery of standards in state-determined high school courses including algebra, English language arts, biology and U.S. history, among others, to prioritize proficiency of key academic content. End-of-course exams may be used as the statewide summative assessment for school accountability purposes, factored into a student's final course grade or be used as a prerequisite for graduation.



**Civics.** States may require [civics exams](#) — which may include portions of the U.S. Naturalization Test — as a graduation or accountability requirement to measure student understanding of key civics concepts and U.S. history to ensure students are prepared for civic engagement.



**College and career readiness.** A growing number of states require students to demonstrate [college and career readiness](#) to earn a high school diploma or as an additional measure in their school accountability system. States typically offer a range of assessments as options for students to demonstrate their readiness. For instance, career and job assessments can be used to fulfill requirements associated with completing a course

sequence aligned to a career cluster or pathway or achieving cut scores on college entrance exams. Either instead of or in addition to these assessments, states may require students to demonstrate readiness by completing early postsecondary opportunities, engaging in career-connected experiences or completing performance-based options such as capstone projects or student portfolios.



**Arts.** States may measure or require schools and districts to measure student mastery of arts standards and competencies through locally developed or state-approved assessment instruments.



**Graduation.** Eight states require a graduation test or high school exit exam as a condition for receiving a diploma. Graduation tests are standardized assessments measuring the student mastery of state academic standards across core subject areas. The prevalence of exit exams has significantly declined in recent years as opponents argue they create an unnecessary barrier to graduation and postsecondary enrollment with a disproportionate impact on students classified as English learners and those that qualify for special education services, while proponents maintain they set common expectations for student readiness.

### Local Assessment Decisions

While state leaders play a role in building out an assessment system, school and district officials have significant authority to develop their own assessment landscapes. Schools and districts may adopt interim assessments to evaluate student progress on specific priorities or content areas, curriculum-relevant or instructionally embedded assessments to evaluate student learning and improve instruction, or specialized assessments for specific student groups. The number and type of assessments district and school leaders choose to implement — and the related supports they provide — can play a larger role in how assessments and their utility are viewed by educators, students, students' families and community members.

## Final Thoughts

State policymakers play a vital role in the development of student assessment systems and have several important decisions to make that impact how often students are assessed, what knowledge and skills are assessed, and how the information is used. Understanding federal requirements and flexibilities supports state leaders in developing an assessment system aligned with state priorities.



# About the Author

## Ben Erwin

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As a senior policy analyst, Ben works on tracking legislation, answering information requests and contributing to other Policy Team projects. Prior to joining Education Commission of the States, he taught high school social studies in Kentucky and worked in education policy at the National Conference of State Legislatures. He earned a master's degree in education policy from the University of Colorado Boulder and a bachelor's degree in history and education from Transylvania University. Contact Ben at [berwin@ecs.org](mailto:berwin@ecs.org).