



Report on the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children (ECENC) Program

FY 2022-23 June 2024

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**SC EDUCATION
OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

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INTRODUCTION

This report is the sixth annual report on the impact of the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children (ECENC) program as required by Act 247 of 2018. The ECENC program provides grants and parental tax credits to students with exceptional needs attending private schools that meet specific eligibility requirements for approval by the Education Oversight Committee (EOC). Exceptional SC is a 501 (c) (3) that raises and accepts funds and reviews student grant applications for an ECENC grant. This evaluation was prepared using information and data from the state fiscal year 2021-22 and utilizes information prepared by the South Carolina Department of Revenue (SCDOR) and Exceptional SC. The law also specifically requires the EOC to annually:

Issue a report to the General Assembly documenting the impact of the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Program on student achievement. In addition, the report must include information on individual schools if at least 51% of the total enrolled students in the private school participated in the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Program in the prior school year. The report must be according to each participating private school and for participating students, in which there are at least 30 participating students who have scores for tests administered. If the Education Oversight Committee determines that the 30 participating student cell size may be reduced without disclosing 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 less than 10 participating students. (Section 12-6-3790 (E) (6) of the SC Code of Laws).

This report seeks to provide the following about the ECENC program:

- Information on the approval process, participation, and compliance for ECENC schools;
- Information about the process for collecting assessment results used to document the impact of the ECENC program on student success;
- Updates to previous recommendations from the EOC report; and,
- A description of the differences between ECENC and the Educational Scholarship Trust Fund Program, which was established by the SC General Assembly pursuant to Act 8 of 2023.



ECENC Process, Participation and Compliance

Process

The law defines qualifying students and eligible schools. Grants may be awarded to students in an amount not exceeding \$11,000 or the annual cost of tuition, whichever is less, to a qualifying student at an eligible school. A qualifying student receiving a grant may not be charged tuition by an eligible school in an amount greater than the student would be charged if the student was not a qualifying student.

Term	Definition per Act 247
►► Qualifying Student	A student who is an exceptional needs child is a South Carolina resident, and is eligible to be enrolled in a South Carolina secondary or elementary public school at the kindergarten or later grade for the applicable school year.
►► Exceptional Needs Child	Means a child who has been evaluated in accordance with this state's evaluation criteria as set forth in S.C. Code Ann. Regs 43-243.1, and determined eligible as a child with a disability who needs special education and related services, in accordance with the requirements of Section 300.8 of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Or a child who has been diagnosed within the last three years by a licensed speech-language pathologist, psychiatrist, or medical, mental health, psychoeducational or other comparable licensed health care provider as having a neurodevelopmental disorder, a substantial sensory or physical impairment such as deaf, blind or orthopedic disability, or some other disability or acute or chronic condition that significantly impedes the student's ability to learn and succeed in school without specialized instructional and associated supports and services tailored to the child's unique needs.

The EOC approves and posts on its website a list of eligible schools annually. The eligible schools approved in FY 23 can be found in [Appendix A](#). These eligible schools must document that they meet the following criteria:

- Independent school, including those religious in nature, other than public schools, that offer a general education to primary or secondary school students;
- Does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin;
- Is located in South Carolina;
- Has an educational curriculum that includes courses set forth in the state's diploma requirements, graduation certificate requirements for special needs children, and where the students attending are administered national achievement or state standardized tests, or both at progressive grade levels to determine student progress;
- Has school facilities that are subject to applicable federal, state, and local laws;
- Is a member in good standing of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the South Carolina Association of Christian Schools, the South Carolina Independent School Association, or Palmetto Association of Independent Schools; and
- Provides a specially designed program or learning resource center to provide needed accommodations based on the needs of exceptional needs students provides onsite educational services or supports to meet the needs of exceptional needs students or is a school specifically existing to meet the needs of only exceptional needs students with documented disabilities.

An [application form](#) to apply to be an ECENC approved school and the current ECENC Manual can be found in Appendices B and C respectively.

ECENC School Approval Timeline

The following process and timeline were used by the EOC to determine school eligibility in the ECENC Program for fiscal year 2022-23. Each school, new or recurring, was required to comply with the same program standards and reporting requirements.

January 2, 2023

1. Notification sent by email to schools currently in good standing with the ECENC program in the 2021-2022 school year that the application process is open. The Application to Participate in the ECENC Program for 2022-23 was made available on the [EOC's website](#) with direct links to the ECENC Manual for the SY 2022-23, designed to be used as a guide to the application process. All documents must be completed, signed, attached and returned to EOC staff.
2. The completed application of schools meeting the standards and reporting requirements for SY 2021-22 were published on the [EOC's website](#).

February 28, 2023

1. The [Application to Participate](#) and [Document A – Statement of Services](#) was required to be submitted to EOC staff by February 28, 2023 to be approved for participation in the program for the FY 2022-23.
 - a. EOC staff called programs that have previously participated to remind them of the legislative due date so that they may submit required documents and continue to be eligible for the students they serve. This annual process is not legislatively required; however, it does serve children and families in South Carolina.
2. The EOC publishes [a list of schools](#) meeting the standards and reporting requirements for participation in the program for the FY 23.

June 30, 2023

1. [Document B](#) – Grants received must be completed, signed, and returned to EOC staff by June 30, 2023. This document must contain information on the number of students (K-12) who were enrolled in the school in 2022-23 and information on the number and amount of grants received in 2022-23. No personally identifiable information of students may be submitted.

September 1, 2023

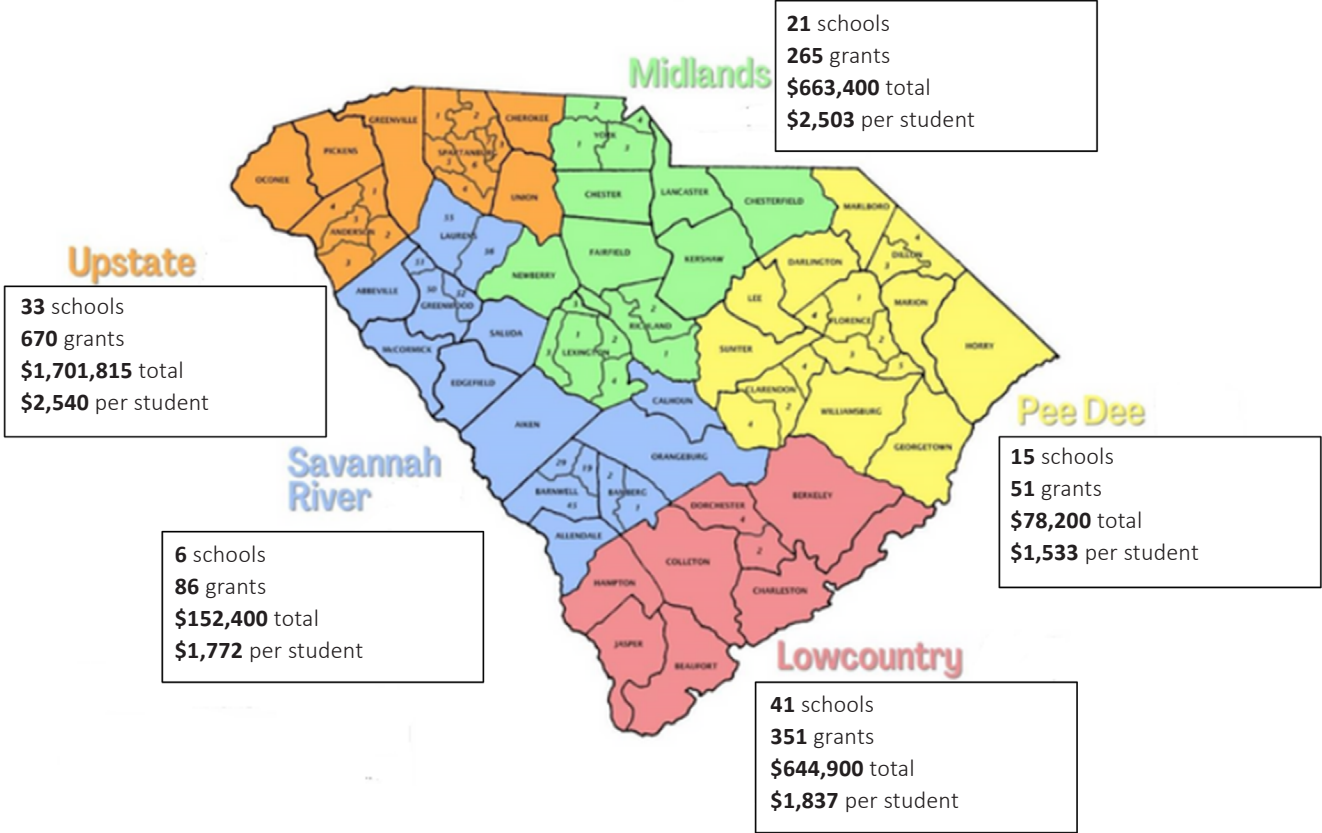
1. [Document C](#) – School level assessment results must be provided directly to the EOC with the name of each national achievement test administered and the scale scores/percentile rankings/stanines/grade level equivalents for ELA (Reading) and Mathematics. This information must be reported by grade level for classes with 10 or more students of all grades tested and attached by September 1, 2023. No personally identifiable information of students or teachers should be included in the submission.
2. [Document C](#) – Information on staff responsible for the submission of school level assessment results must be provided to the EOC staff by September 1, 2023. Document C must be completed, signed, and returned at that time.

November 15, 2023:

1. A “copy of compilation, review, or compliance audit of the organization’s financial statements as relating to the grants received, conducted by a certified public accounting firm” must be received by the EOC no later than November 15, 2023. No personally identifiable information of students should be submitted.

School Participation

Schools approved by the EOC to participate in the ECENC program in 2023-24 can be found in each of the five Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA) regions of South Carolina. The Upstate, Region 1, has 33 approved schools and serves the most student recipients with 670 ECENC receiving a total of \$1,701,815 in grants, for an average grant amount of \$2,540 per student. The Savannah River Basin, Region 2, has 6 approved schools and 86 student recipients receiving a total of \$152,400. The average student grant in Region 2 is \$1,772. The Midlands make up CERRA Region 3, where 21 approved schools serve 265 grant funded students receiving a total of \$663,400. The average grant for a student in the Midlands is \$2,503. Fifteen approved schools are in CERRA Region 4, the Pee Dee, and serve 51 grant funded students receiving a total of \$78,200, or an average of \$1,533 per student. The Lowcountry makes up CERRA region 5 and has the highest number of approved schools. Forty-one schools serve 351 grant funded students with an average grant of \$1,837, for a total of \$644,900. There were 23 approved ECENC schools in the state that did not receive any grants from the program.



The total amount of grants spent in ECENC approved schools has decreased by \$1,618,349 between 2022-23 and 2023-24. During the same time, approved schools decreased by one, and the number of grants increased by 97 while the average grant amount per student decreased by \$1,387.

Table 1: ECENC Funding and Grants 2022-23 to 2023-24:

Region	Schools		Grants		Total Funding		Average Amount per Student	
	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24
Region 1 Upstate	31	33	663	670	\$2,613,100	\$1,701,815	\$3,941	\$2,540
Region 2 Savannah River Basin	7	6	85	86	\$223,400	\$152,400	\$2,628	\$1,772
Region 3 Midlands	21	21	237	265	\$1,000,500	\$663,400	\$4,222	\$2,503
Region 4 Pee Dee	16	15	44	51	\$107,100	\$78,200	\$2,434	\$1,533
Region 5 Lowcountry	42	41	297	351	\$914,964	\$644,900	\$3,081	\$1,837
State Total	117	116	1,326	1,423	\$4,859,064	\$3,240,715	\$3,664	\$2,277

Each ECENC approved school represents one or more of the independent accrediting associations for private schools, and were in good standing at the time of approval. The independent accrediting associations accepted by the ECENC program include:

- South Carolina Independent School Association (SCISA) accredits 66 ECENC approved schools.
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accredits 63 with ECENC approved schools.
- South Carolina Association of Christian Schools (SCACS) accredits 20 ECENC approved schools.
- Palmetto Association of Independent School Accreditation (PAIS) accredits 16 schools.

Table 2 shows the Accrediting Association for ECENC schools by CERRA region for Fiscal Year 2022-23. Only the Pee Dee does not have representation of all four accrediting associations, as they have no PAIS accredited schools in the region. Several ECENC schools are members of more than one accrediting association, which is why there are more schools listed by accrediting association than the total of ECENC approved schools.

Table 2: Accrediting Associations by CERRA Region, Fiscal Year 2022-23

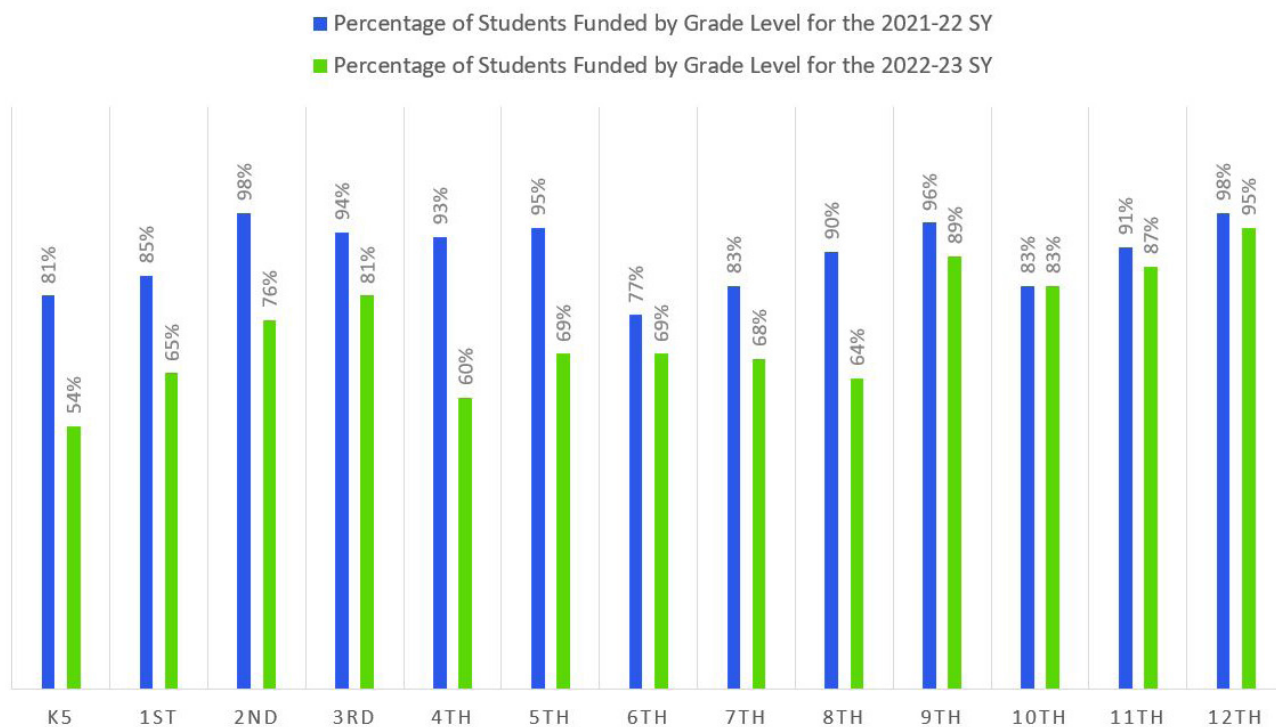
CERRA Region	SCISA	SACS	SCACS	PAIS
Upstate (1)	16	16	10	3
Savannah River (2)	4	4	1	1
Midlands (3)	11	9	5	4
Pee Dee (4)	8	4	3	0
Lowcountry (5)	27	30	1	8
Total	66	63	20	16

Student Participation

A total of 1,460 students (253 new and 1,207 incumbent) participated in the ECENC program in 2022-23, and nearly 68% of the scholarship recipients are from households earning \$100,000 or more annually. Approximately 23% of ECENC recipients are from households earning \$50,000 through \$100,000, which is an increase in this household income range from last year. Approximately 8% are from households earning \$50,000 or less annually. This data has been collected from the Department of Revenue and the full report published January 2024 can be seen in Appendix D.

Exceptional SC provided data on students rising Kindergarten through grade 12 who applied for and those who received an ECENC grant during the 2022-23 school year. Table 2 shows this data and indicates if that number is more or less than in the 2021-22 school year. In the 2021-22 school year, 1,387 or 90% of students who applied were funded, in contrast, for the 2022-23 school year, 74% of students applying received grants. There were 440 more applicants in the 2022-23 school year than in the previous year.

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO RECEIVED ECENC SC GRANTS IN 2021-22 AND 2022-23



According to data from Exceptional SC, in the 2022-23 year, 73 more students were funded through the ECENC program than in the 2021-22 year. Between the 2021-22 and 2022-23 years the distribution of students funded by grade level shifted only slightly.

Student Grants and Funding:

Act 247 states that student grants may not exceed eleven thousand dollars or the total amount of tuition, whichever is less. The Exceptional SC Board for the 2022-23 year funded all incumbent students who applied for the grant with a cap of \$9,000, in a one-time payment made in the spring. Families who applied for the parental tax credit, but not a grant could receive up to \$11,000. A family who did apply for the grant and a parental tax credit, the maximum amount the family could receive was \$11,000 total, so the grant had to be deducted from the tax credit. While \$11,000 is the maximum a family could receive, the amount given is typically less and determined by the Exceptional SC board. In the 2022-23 school year, all incumbent and new students received some form of funding. Applications in Table 2 reflect both applications for grants and those who applied for parental tax credits whether a grant application was also submitted.

Compliance: Assessments and the Impact on Student Success:

In evaluating the impact of the ECENC program on student achievement and academic growth, there are challenges due to a lack of student level data and comparable assessments administered. ECENC schools are not required to provide individual student test scores for students who received an ECENC grant; compliance is monitored by receipt of aggregate scores from approved schools and information about what assessments are given to all students in the school. All approved schools administered assessments and maintained compliance; however, there is a lack of student level data to make comparisons or determine whether students have experienced measurable improvements as a result of the ECENC program. Approved schools do offer standardized or criterion referenced assessments as a condition of participation and these assessments can be found in Appendix E. Private and independent schools that administer national assessments typically select an assessment or assessments that

measure English and Language Arts (ELA) and Math competencies at a minimum. Examples of these assessments include Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). The most used nationally normed assessments that ECENC approved schools administered in the 2021-22 school year include: PSAT, SAT, ACT, MAP and the Iowa Assessment which is similar to previous years.

Act 247 requires an evaluation of the ECENC program's impact on student achievement where a majority (51% or more) of students enrolled in a school received a grant from Exceptional SC. There are nine of these schools this year, as there were in the previous reporting year; seven of these schools have been on the list consistently. Schools meeting the reporting criteria in the 2022-23 are in the upstate, midlands or lowcountry.

Only one of the schools with more than 50% of the total enrollment accessing ECENC dollars is not identified on the website as a school specially designed to serve students with disabilities and admits students without disabilities as well. Appendix F contains more detailed data, including school assessment information for schools with more than 51% of total enrollment participating in the ECENC program. In accordance with Act 247, assessment information for fewer than 10 students are not shared to protect student privacy.

Table 3: Schools with Majority of Enrolled Students Accessing ECENC Funds

School	Percentage of Students Funded through ECENC	Total Amount per School	Average Amount per grant	Assessment(s) Used		CERRA Region
				Assessment	Grade	
The Chandler School	74%	\$137,600.00	\$3,276.19	Stanford 10	1-8 th	1
				OLSAT	1 st 3 rd 5 th 7 th	
				PSAT	8 th	
Hidden Treasure Christian School	68%	\$123,900.00	\$3,097.50	Woodcock-Johnson IV	K-12 th	1
Camperdown Academy	73%	\$520,250.00	\$3,689.72	Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, GMADE Math Assessment	1 st -8 th	1
HOPE Academy	71%	\$65,600.00	\$1,490.91	MAP/NWEA	1-12 th	1
Einstein Academy	54%	\$10,500.00	\$1,500.00	MAP	1 st -8 th	1
Hope Christian Academy	100%	\$33,600.00	\$2,240.00	Woodcock-Johnson IV	4 th -5 th & 8 th -12 th	3
Glenforest School	59%	\$115,200.00	\$2,742.86	Fast Bridge	1 st - 12 th	3
				SRA Mastery	K-8 th	
				PSAT	10 th	
				ACT/SAT	11 th -12 th	
Sandhills School	61%	\$243,700.00	\$3,637.31	Woodcock-Johnson IV	1 st -8 th	3
				Pre ACT	9 th -11 th	
				Stanford 10	K-4 th	
Miracle Academy Preparatory School	67%	\$43,200.00	\$1,800.00	OLSAT	5 th -9 th	5
				ACCUPLACER	10 th	
				ACT	12 th	

Recommendations:

Several recommendations that have been made in previous reports still remain relevant in the evaluation of the ECENC program.

Convene the Advisory Committee of the ECENC:

Act 247 requires that the EOC establishes an advisory committee and states that the advisory committee shall:

1. Consult with the EOC concerning requests for exemptions from the curriculum requirements
2. Provide recommendations on matters requested by the EOC

This advisory committee, Department of Education, EOC, and/or the Department of Revenue may not regulate the educational program of an independent school that accepts students receiving scholarship grants pursuant to Act 247, however the committee is required and a meeting will be held in June 2024. Members have agreed to meet and will: clarify the responsibilities of the Advisory Committee, hear from the SC Department of Education about implementation of the Education Scholarship Trust Fund, and determine next steps. The work of this committee and future steps will be provided in future ECENC Reports.

Member	Organization
Robbie Braciszewski	SCISA
Kimberly Tissot	Able SC
Amy Holbert	Family Connections SC
Patricia Parrish	SACSCOC
Ramsay Bokinsky	Sandhills School
Edward Earwood	SCACS
Matt Palyok	Parent

Offer Summative State Assessments to ECENC Students in Public Schools:

South Carolina students in private schools are not currently offered the opportunity to participate in South Carolina State Assessments. Examples of these assessments include SC-READY and End of Course (EOC) examinations. In the 2020-21, and 2021-22 ECENC Reports, a recommendation was made to allow students in private schools to participate in these assessments, and while that has not yet come to fruition, offering these examinations to students participating in the ECENC program would offer an assessment opportunity to determine ECENC program impact. It remains the recommendation of the EOC that ECENC funded students be offered the opportunity to participate in state summative assessments.

Consider Communication Around the ECENC Program and Other Scholarships:

Because the Educational Scholarship Trust Fund is in the first year of implementation and cannot be used in conjunction with ECENC funds by an individual student, it is the recommendation of the EOC to: 1. Remain informed about the implementation of the ESTF, and 2. Monitor if communication around the separate programs should be developed and distributed to prevent confusion. The EOC is involved in the evaluation of ESTF funds, per statute.

Next Steps:

The next steps for continued evaluation of the ECENC program include: convene an advisory committee, consider needed communication about the program, and consider any questions from the EOC and advisory committee. Questions can be directed to EOC staff. The phone number is 803-734-6148 and additional resources can be found at www.eoc.sc.gov.

The SC Education Oversight Committee is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected leaders. Created in 1998, the committee is dedicated to reporting facts, measuring change, and promoting progress within South Carolina's education system.

ECENC FY 22-23

Report

Appendices

Please visit eoc.sc.gov/ecenc-program and look under "ECENC Reports" to locate the appendices for this report or, click on the link above.