

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Full Committee Meeting

Minutes of the Meeting

June 15, 2026

Members Present (in-person or remote): April Allen, Barbara Hairfield, Melissa Pender, Dr. Patty Tate, Sen. Ross Turner, Melanie Barton, Rep. Terry Alexander, Russell Baxley, and Rep. Bill Hager.

Guests: Stephanie Lai and Matthew Madison, K-12 Assessment Solutions, University of Georgia, Herb Bocchino and Josh Black, SC Department of Education, and Ivy Coburn, SREB.

EOC Staff Present: Crystal Garcia, Gabrielle Fulton, Tenell Felder, Dr. Rainey Knight, Dr. Matthew Lavery, Dr. Jenny May, and Amina Asghar.

April Allen opened the meeting with a welcome to members and guests. At the outset, two modifications to the agenda were announced. The discussion on Industry Certifications and Credentials for School Year 2026–27 would be facilitated by Ivy Coburn, Education and Workforce Division Director for the Southern Regional Education Board, while Dr. Rainey Knight, EOC Director of Strategic Innovation, would present the staff recommendations. Additionally, Dr. Knight would present the final information item regarding the Fiscal Year 2026-27 EIA Budget Update. Following these announcements, the committee approved the Full Committee minutes from the April 13, 2026 meeting.

Dr. Rainey Knight presented the Rural Recruitment Initiative Evaluation Report, which fulfills the requirements of Proviso 1.045 and will be submitted to the Governor and General Assembly by June 30. She provided a brief history of the initiative, noting that it was established in 2015-16 with \$1.5 million in funding and has since grown to \$7 million. Over time, eligibility criteria have been revised to focus resources on rural and less affluent districts, and additional incentives, such as teacher loan forgiveness, have been added to support recruitment efforts.

Dr. Knight also outlined upcoming changes for fiscal year 2026-27, including the transfer of RRI funds from CERRA to SC TEACHER and new district eligibility requirements based on wealth and teacher retention rates. She reported that 46 districts participated in the initiative during fiscal year 2024-25 and reviewed several key incentives supported through the program, including

alternative certification pathways, bridge programs, certification exam support, Teacher Cadet programs, and district website enhancements designed to improve teacher recruitment.

Dr. Knight reviewed the additional incentives available through the Rural Recruitment Initiative, including international teacher recruitment, national employment advertising, recruitment expenses, critical-need salary stipends, housing assistance, travel stipends, first-year teacher stipends, graduate coursework support, mentoring and induction programs, and professional development opportunities. She explained that districts may select the incentives that best meet their recruitment and retention needs.

The report addressed two primary questions: how districts utilized the \$7 million allocated for the initiative in fiscal year 2024-25 and the return on investment for selected incentives. Of the \$7 million available, districts expended approximately \$6.9 million. Dr. Knight reported that recruitment expenses were the most commonly used incentive, followed by mentoring and induction programs, alternative certification pathways, and certification exam support. In terms of expenditures, the largest investments were made in international teacher recruitment, recruitment expenses, and mentoring and induction programs. She also provided committee members with six-year trend data showing how districts have used recruitment funds over time. Sen. Ross Turner asked for clarification about what expenditures are included under recruitment expenses and whether they consist primarily of staff costs, signing bonuses, or other recruitment-related activities. Dr. Knight explained that recruitment expenses include costs associated with attending recruitment fairs, travel, booth setup, marketing materials, and promotional items provided to prospective teachers. She noted that while districts report total recruitment expenditures, the data do not allow the state to determine how many teachers were hired as a direct result of those activities.

In response to additional questions, Dr. Knight shared survey data from participating districts showing that recruitment funds were most frequently used for marketing and promotional efforts. Districts reported spending approximately \$546,000 on marketing, \$323,000 on items for prospective teachers, \$90,000 on travel, and \$21,000 on career fair fees. Examples of promotional items included branded giveaways such as cups, pencils, towels, and other materials used to attract potential applicants at recruitment events. When asked how many teachers were recruited through these expenditures, Dr. Knight stated that the available data do not track hires attributable specifically to recruitment expenses. The report concluded with several recommendations from the EOC to strengthen the Rural Recruitment Initiative. Recommendations included creating an integrated teacher data system to better track recruitment

and retention outcomes, reviewing the availability and effectiveness of incentives that demonstrate positive results, and developing an online application and training process for participating districts. The EOC also recommended revising district eligibility criteria by considering districts with a five-year average teacher turnover rate at or above a designated threshold and excluding the top one-third wealthiest districts based on the Index of Taxpaying Ability to better target resources to districts with the greatest recruitment challenges.

Dr. Patty Tate reported on the May 18 meeting of the EOC Academic Standards and Assessment Subcommittee, which considered five action items and received two informational items. The meeting began with a presentation from Lieutenant Colonel Gerald “Smoke” Isabel, manager of the Fort Jackson Military Entrance Processing Station, and other military representatives regarding concerns about test security for the ASVAB.

The subcommittee's first action item was the technical review of the SC READY ELA assessments and the English 2 End-of-Course exam. Conducted by K-12 Assessment Solutions at the University of Georgia, the review examined test blueprints, content alignment, depth of knowledge, psychometric quality, and item alignment with state standards. The review found that the assessments are generally well aligned with South Carolina's ELA standards and demonstrate strong technical quality. Recommendations included strengthening vertical alignment across grade levels, refining scoring guidance, adding more challenging grade 3 items to better assess higher-achieving students, and exploring methods to improve decision accuracy. The South Carolina Department of Education provided responses to the review findings, as required by state law, and those responses were included in the meeting materials.

As the report came forward from the Academic Standards and Assessment Subcommittee as an action item, no second was required before opening the floor for discussion. Members were reminded that representatives from the University of Georgia review team, as well as staff from the South Carolina Department of Education's Offices of Assessment and Standards, were available to answer questions regarding the technical review. During discussion, Melanie Barton referenced the report's discussion of assessment cut scores and expressed concern about ensuring consistency between South Carolina assessment results and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results. She cautioned that if state assessments indicate a high percentage of students are performing on grade level while NAEP results show lower performance, it could create conflicting measures of student achievement. Barton noted that future NAEP results should be monitored closely and suggested that significant discrepancies between state assessment outcomes and NAEP performance may warrant a reexamination of

the state's cut scores. Committee members briefly discussed the timeline for the next NAEP results, noting that testing had recently occurred and that results were expected to be released later in the year. Following discussion, the subcommittee unanimously approved the report.

The second action item considered by the Academic Standards and Assessment Subcommittee was a proposed revision to the Multilingual Learners (ML) Progress Indicator, which fulfills the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The indicator measures the progress of multilingual learners toward achieving English language proficiency within five years. Dr. Tate explained that the current model assumes language acquisition occurs at a steady, linear rate, expecting students to make similar gains each year until reaching proficiency. However, research on language development, along with South Carolina student data, indicates that language growth is not linear and that students often make more rapid progress during the early stages of learning English.

The proposed revisions were developed in consultation with state and national experts and were tested using both historical South Carolina and national data. The updated model follows a methodology similar to the value-added growth model used in the state's Student Progress Indicator. Under the revised approach, annual growth targets would be based on a student's most recent English proficiency assessment and would reflect expected patterns of language acquisition needed to achieve proficiency within five years. The revisions would also separate the calculation of indicator points from test participation calculations, allowing accountability measures to focus more directly on factors within a school's or district's control.

A draft of the Multilingual Learners Progress Indicator section for the 2027 Accountability Manual was included in the meeting materials for review. Following discussion at the subcommittee level, a motion to approve the recommended changes passed unanimously. When presented to the full committee, the item required no second because it originated from a subcommittee recommendation. With no additional questions or discussion, the committee voted unanimously to approve the revisions to the Multilingual Learners Progress Indicator.

The third action item considered by the Academic Standards and Assessment Subcommittee was a proposed revision to the High School Student Success Indicator to recognize progress toward earning the High School Employability Credential. Dr. Tate explained that the existing on-track-to-graduate metric was originally designed to measure progress toward earning a standard high school diploma within four years and did not adequately account for students pursuing the employability credential. Recommendations from the Accountability Advisory

Committee during its most recent cyclical review, as well as feedback from the field, including a resolution from the South Carolina School Boards Association, prompted a review of how these students are recognized within the accountability system. Working collaboratively with the South Carolina Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Workforce, EOC staff examined postsecondary outcomes for students who earned the employability credential. Preliminary findings indicated that non-diploma earners who obtained the credential earned wages approximately 8 percent higher than those who did not earn the credential, suggesting positive workforce outcomes associated with the program. EOC staff also partnered with the Department of Education's Office of Special Education Services to develop a proposed revision that would appropriately recognize progress for students whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams have identified the employability credential as the most appropriate outcome. The recommended changes would rename the "On-Track-to-Graduate" metric as the broader "On-Track" metric and allow a reasonable percentage of students with disabilities to be considered on track if they are progressing toward earning the employability credential within four years. The percentage would be determined in collaboration with the Office of Special Education Services and distributed proportionally among high schools based on the number of credential-seeking students they serve. A draft of the revised High School Student Success Indicator for inclusion in the 2027 Accountability Manual was provided in the meeting materials. The subcommittee unanimously approved the recommendation, and when presented to the full committee, the committee voted unanimously to approve the revisions.

The fourth action item considered by the Academic Standards and Assessment Subcommittee was a proposed revision to the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Indicator to include the South Carolina Seal of Biliteracy as a new college-ready designation. Dr. Tate explained that the Seal of Biliteracy is a nationally recognized credential awarded to students who demonstrate high levels of proficiency in English and at least one additional world language. Recognition of the credential within the state accountability system was recommended by the Accountability Advisory Committee during its most recent cyclical review and has also been requested by educators across the state. To inform the recommendation, EOC staff analyzed postsecondary outcomes for students who earned the Seal of Biliteracy. The analysis found that approximately 75 percent of seal recipients enrolled in college within one year of graduating from high school, compared to 57 percent of graduates who did not earn the credential. College enrollment rates were consistently high across all levels of the seal, including Bronze, Silver, and Gold, indicating a strong relationship between earning the credential and college-going success. Based on these findings, staff recommended that the Seal of Biliteracy be added as a college-ready criterion

within the College and Career Readiness Indicator beginning with the 2027 Accountability Manual. The recommendation was unanimously approved by the subcommittee and forwarded to the full committee as an action item. Because it originated from a subcommittee recommendation, no second was required. Following brief consideration, the committee unanimously approved the revision to include the Seal of Biliteracy in the College and Career Readiness Indicator.

The fifth and final action item considered by the Academic Standards and Assessment Subcommittee was a proposed revision to the process used to approve dual enrollment courses for inclusion in the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Indicator. Dr. Tate explained that students may be designated as college ready by successfully completing six credit hours of approved dual enrollment coursework, typically equivalent to two units of high school credit, with grades of C or higher. The proposed revisions were intended to clarify how course approvals are applied and to ensure that approved courses are likely to be accepted for credit toward a postsecondary program of study. The revised policy also established a requirement that approved dual enrollment courses undergo periodic review at least every five years. This review would examine postsecondary outcomes for students who completed the courses to determine whether they continue to support college readiness and success. Additionally, the policy called for an initial review of all currently approved courses following adoption of the new procedures. During discussion, members expressed a desire to broaden the scope of the review process. Rather than examining only those courses already approved for the college-ready designation, the subcommittee agreed that postsecondary outcomes should be reviewed for all dual enrollment courses taken by South Carolina students during the previous five years. A motion to amend the proposed policy to reflect this broader review process was approved by the subcommittee, and the final draft policy included in the meeting materials was updated accordingly. The amended policy was then unanimously approved by the subcommittee and forwarded to the full committee as an action item.

During discussion of the revised dual enrollment approval process, Melanie Barton emphasized the importance of collecting and analyzing postsecondary outcome data for dual enrollment courses. She noted that the information would be valuable to members of the General Assembly as they consider future dual enrollment policies and funding decisions. Ms. Barton expressed concern that some courses currently receiving state support may not be providing the level of rigor or quality originally intended when dual enrollment programs were established. She reflected on the original purpose of dual enrollment, which was to provide students with access

to true college-level coursework that would better prepare them for postsecondary education, support successful transitions to college, and increase the likelihood that earned credits would be accepted toward degree programs. Ms. Barton cautioned that, over time, there has been some erosion of those guiding principles and stressed the need to refocus on ensuring that dual enrollment courses maintain strong academic standards and produce meaningful college and career outcomes for students. Because the recommendation originated from a subcommittee, no second was required, and the full committee unanimously approved the revised dual enrollment course approval process.

For the final information item, the Academic Standards and Assessment Subcommittee received an update on the approval process for industry certifications under South Carolina's tiered certification framework. Ivy Coburn of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) reviewed the transition from a single-tier certification system to a three-tier framework designed to better align credentials with workforce value and career readiness outcomes. She explained that students must be Career and Technical Education (CTE) completers and earn at least three certification points through approved tiered credentials to be designated as career ready. Tier 1 certifications represent entry-level skills, Tier 2 certifications reflect intermediate knowledge and industry recognition, and Tier 3 certifications are high-rigor, end-of-program credentials that demonstrate workforce readiness on their own. Ms. Coburn highlighted the significant work completed since 2022 to develop the framework, including stakeholder engagement, research on other states' systems, and the creation of new resources such as an online certification guide, a live certification list, and an updated electronic application process. She also described the role of Technical Advisory Committees (TACs), which include business, industry, postsecondary, and K–12 representatives who review certifications for workforce relevance, postsecondary alignment, and appropriate tier placement. The presentation included recommendations regarding 19 new certifications and several requests to reconsider existing tier assignments. TAC feedback generally supported EOC staff recommendations, particularly in cases where certifications appeared to be assigned a higher tier than warranted. Ms. Coburn noted that future improvements will include expanded collaboration with the Technical College System and Commission on Higher Education to strengthen postsecondary alignment and continued review of CTE programs, standards, and certifications as the state transitions to the modernized career cluster framework.

Ms. Coburn concluded by outlining the next steps for implementation of the Tiered Credential Framework. Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) will continue meeting in August and

September to review certifications and provide feedback for the remaining six career cluster areas. The Office of Career Readiness (OCR) will also continue providing professional development for Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers, administrators, and counselors to support understanding and implementation of the updated framework. In addition, the cross-agency team will revisit the certification application process and may add a higher education review component to strengthen postsecondary alignment. New certification applications will be reviewed and submitted to the EOC by October 1. Ms. Coburn also emphasized plans for a second round of employer engagement focused on refining program sequences, updating curriculum standards, and ensuring certifications are appropriately aligned with courses and career pathways to better meet workforce needs.

Following Ivy Coburn's presentation, Dr. Rainey Knight reviewed EOC staff recommendations regarding the proposed industry certifications. She explained that staff agreed with 13 of the certifications under consideration but recommended that six certifications be classified as Tier 1 rather than Tier 2. Dr. Knight emphasized that the purpose of the tiered certification system is to preserve rigor and ensure that certifications reflect increasing levels of knowledge and workforce readiness. Tier 1 certifications are intended to represent introductory, foundational skills; Tier 2 certifications should demonstrate more advanced, job-related competencies; and Tier 3 certifications should prepare students for high-demand, high-wage careers. The six certifications staff recommended for Tier 1 designation were Agricultural Mechanics, Game Development, Retailing, NCCER Core, 3D Animation, and JROTC Leadership. Dr. Knight stated that EOC staff viewed these certifications as foundational in nature and believed classifying them as Tier 2 would unnecessarily inflate the tiered system. She also noted that feedback from Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members supported some of these recommendations, including concerns that certain certifications lacked clear industry recognition or demonstrated workforce value. Staff therefore recommended maintaining these certifications at the Tier 1 level to uphold the integrity and intended progression of the certification framework.

During discussion of the proposed certification designations, Melanie Barton expressed support for the EOC staff recommendations to maintain the six disputed certifications at Tier 1. She noted that South Carolina students have multiple pathways to earn a career-ready designation, including performance on WIN assessments and Career and Technical Education (CTE) completion measures, and therefore the state should avoid weakening the rigor of any single pathway. Speaking from the perspective of the Governor's Office, Ms. Barton emphasized the importance of ensuring that career-ready designations reflect meaningful workforce preparation

and provide students with skills that lead to successful employment opportunities. She stated that maintaining high standards within the tiered certification framework would help ensure that students graduate truly prepared for the workforce rather than simply accumulating credentials.

Melissa Pender stated that she had conducted additional research on the certifications under consideration after the previous meeting. She shared that she reviewed the credentials with colleagues in her district and sought feedback from individuals with relevant expertise. Pender noted that she had been hesitant to support the recommendations during the earlier discussion because the certifications had not yet undergone review by the Technical Advisory Committees (TACs). However, after the TAC process was completed and she conducted her own review, she felt confident that the necessary due diligence had been performed. She expressed appreciation for the additional work undertaken by staff and indicated her support for the EOC staff recommendations regarding the certification tier assignments.

Following discussion, a motion was made to accept the EOC staff recommendations regarding the tier designations for the proposed industry certifications. The motion received a second, and the committee proceeded to a vote. The recommendations were approved, affirming the staff position that the six disputed certifications should remain classified as Tier 1 credentials in order to preserve the rigor and integrity of the state's tiered certification framework.

Dr. Rainey Knight provided an informational update on the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Education Improvement Act (EIA) budget. She informed committee members that they had received a spreadsheet comparing EOC budget recommendations, the Governor's recommendations, the House-amended budget, and the Senate budget proposal. Dr. Knight explained that the House and Senate versions were currently in conference committee and that negotiations would continue following the meeting. She noted that once the General Assembly completes its work and a final budget is adopted, EOC staff will provide members with a detailed update at the August retreat. No questions or discussion followed the presentation.

A motion was made for the committee to enter Executive Session for the purpose of discussing the employment contract of the EOC's Executive Director pursuant to South Carolina Code Section 30-4-70(a)(1). Following a vote, the motion was approved by the committee. The Chair then directed that all individuals other than committee members be excused from the room before the committee entered Executive Session.

Following Executive Session, the committee reconvened in open session. A motion was made and approved to return to public session, April Allen reported that committee members, both in

person and online, had discussed the personnel matter during Executive Session. Ms. Allen then entertained a motion regarding the Executive Director's employment contract. A motion was made to extend Executive Director Dana Yow's current contract for an additional three years, with compensation to be based on the salary structure used for Deputy Superintendents within the South Carolina Department of Education. The motion received a second and was unanimously approved by committee members.

After the update the meeting was adjourned.