

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Full Committee Meeting

Minutes of the Meeting

April 13, 2026

Members Present (in-person or remote): April Allen, Rep. Neal Collins, Dr. Brian Newsome, Barbara Hairfield, Melissa Pender, Dr. Patty Tate, Sen. Ross Turner, Melanie Barton, Laura McKinney, Tammy Achziger, Sidney Locke, Rep. Terry Alexander, and Dr. Abbey Duggins (for Superintendent Weaver).

Guests: Heather Bolinger, K-12 Assessment Solutions, University of Georgia; Dr. Kacey Cook, SC Department of Education; and Dr. Herb Bocchino, SC Department of Education.

EOC Staff Present: Crystal Garcia, Gabrielle Fulton, Tenell Felder, Hope Johnson-Jones, Dr. Rainey Knight, Dr. Matthew Lavery, Dr. Jenny May, Amina Asghar, and Dana Yow.

April Allen opened the meeting and introduced new EOC member Laura McKinney, who was appointed by Senator Hembree to fill the unexpired term previously held by Jeri McCumbee. Dr. Abby Duggins also attended, representing the superintendent. The committee then approved the February 9, 2026 Full Committee minutes.

April Allen invited Dr. Jenny May, EOC Director of Qualitative Research & Stakeholder Engagement, to present the State Funded Full-Day 4K Report for fiscal years 2024-25 and 2025-26. This annual evaluation is required by proviso and was due by March 1. The report was submitted to members of the General Assembly on February 27 and was presented as an information item, requiring no vote from the committee.

Dr. Jenny May presented the State Funded Full-Day 4K Report, which evaluates South Carolina's Child Development Education Pilot Program (CERDEP) as required by Proviso 1.47. The report examines quality, access, and impact of state-funded 4K programming across both CERDEP 4K (district-run) and First Steps 4K (private settings).

On access, Dr. May reported 711 students on the 4K waitlist at CERDEP school districts, 1,739 open seats in First Steps 4K, and approximately 8,855 pupils in poverty with unknown 4K experience during 2024-25. Regarding financial investment, the state spent \$73.6 million on 14,143 CERDEP 4K students and \$40.6 million on 3,767 First Steps 4K students who later enrolled in public school kindergarten in 2025-26. Nationally, South Carolina ranks 15th in access

for 4-year-olds but 38th in state financial investment to early childhood, dropping to 42nd when other funds are considered.

Dr. May highlighted recent program changes, including moving the waitlist communication date from November 15 to September 1, formalizing a pilot for placing waitlisted children, and proposed 2026-27 changes that would expand CERDEP and allow First Steps 4K to serve children at or below 300% of poverty (currently 185% for Medicaid eligibility). Of nearly 18,000 children served in state-funded 4K, 84% in CERDEP 4K and 68% in First Steps 4K were in poverty.

On impact, Dr. May noted that 54,000+ kindergartners took the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), with 56% being pupils in poverty. Statewide readiness has remained around 37%, though children in poverty served by CERDEP performed better on the KRA than their peers in poverty who did not participate.

Key recommendations included piloting efforts to reduce CERDEP waitlists, expanding infrastructure using data to prioritize recruitment, improving consistency in waitlist and seat reporting, meeting additional NIEER quality benchmarks related to screening and teacher qualifications, and enhancing marketing to recruit families for available seats. Next steps include the 4K Data Dashboard, a CERDEP Collaborative Convening, Year 2 of the 4K Waitlists Pilot, including CERDEP assessment data in the assessment audit, and examining teacher preparation and retention along with universal hearing, vision, and developmental screening in CERDEP classrooms.

Laura McKinney asked whether data exists on private or religious schools that provide PreK. Dr. May replied that data is available only for schools affiliated with SC First Steps; unaffiliated providers are not tracked.

Melanie Barton expressed concern that statewide kindergarten readiness declined from 39% to 37% this year, but praised the full-day 4K program for nearly closing the readiness gap for children in poverty. She urged expansion to more public and private providers, thanked the House and Senate Finance Committee for expanding access to private providers, and challenged public and charter schools to reach the 30% of eligible students not participating, noting transportation as a common barrier. She also called on the General Assembly to expand birth-to-three services and identified program expansion, along with addressing barriers like space, teacher shortages, and childcare operator challenges, as the next priority.

Rep. Alexander raised concerns about teacher qualifications and called for a unified approach to early childhood programs, noting that DSS, First Steps, Head Start, and other entities each operate independently despite significant funding, while many eligible children remain unserved. He urged that consolidating and examining these programs together should be a statement of purpose moving forward. Dr. May responded that her reporting authority is currently limited to CERDEP programming but offered to expand her review informally and collaborate with the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), which is facilitated by First Steps.

Dr. Patty Tate presented the report from the Academic Standards and Assessments Subcommittee, which met on March 16. The subcommittee addressed three action items and received three information items. Before summarizing them, Dr. Tate invited Dr. May back to the podium to present a report on the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children (ECENC) program.

Dr. May presented the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children (ECENC) Program Report, required by Act 247, which documents the program's impact on student achievement and includes school-level data when at least 51% of enrolled students participate in the program and at least 30 participating students have test scores (with potential reduction to no fewer than 10 students if privacy can be maintained).

The report covers three areas: information on the approval process, participation, and compliance for ECENC schools; the process for collecting assessment results to document program impact; and updates to previous EOC recommendations. Dr. May reviewed the approval timeline, which includes application availability in January, application deadlines by late February, completed grants submitted by June 30, school-level assessment results due September 1, and compliance audits by November 15.

Dr. May offered three recommendations. First, convene the ECENC Advisory Committee as required by Act 247, which consults with the EOC on curriculum exemption requests and provides recommendations on matters requested by the EOC. Second, offer summative state assessments to ECENC students in public schools to help evaluate program impact. Third, consider coordination at the state level between the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) and ECENC by either implementing safeguards to prevent parents from receiving both funds or allowing the two funding sources to be braided.

Ms. Barton recommended adding context to the self-reported data in Appendix F of the ECENC report, noting that scores such as a mean scale score of 365 are meaningless to the public without

an explanation of what they correlate to. She emphasized that this will be an ongoing challenge as the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) moves forward, since comparing assessments requires a common frame of reference. Ms. Barton stressed that the EOC, the Department, and other stakeholders will need to work together to help the public understand whether special needs students are scoring at levels comparable to their peers, framing this as a key future issue for education.

Tammy Achziger asked whether any audit process exists to verify that ECENC schools are actually serving students with special needs as stated.

Dr. May responded that no audit process currently exists, nor is there a formal complaint procedure, though the office has received a few complaints this year. In those cases, staff gathered as much information as possible but found schools were not out of compliance with their stated accommodations and special services. Dr. May noted this is an area she would like the Advisory Committee to address by recommending a formal process for handling complaints. She explained that the EOC has no authority to investigate unless invited and cannot require action from schools; the only available recourse is removing a school from the approved participation list, which would likely impact families more than the school itself.

Ms. Allen then moved to approve the report. The motion was approved unanimously by the members.

Dr. Tate reported that the ASA Subcommittee's first action item was the technical review of the SC READY Science assessments for grades 4 and 6, conducted by K-12 Assessment Solutions at the University of Georgia, with UGA team members available on Zoom for questions. The review included blueprint analysis, content alignment, depth of knowledge (DOK) analysis, psychometric evaluation, and performance classification, with subject matter experts examining all items for alignment and rigor.

Findings indicated that the grade 4 and 6 SC READY test blueprints are well-aligned to state standards and emphasize DOK Level 2, with most items appropriately aligned, though a small number were flagged for potential realignment or DOK miscalculation. Recommendations included reviewing flagged items, strengthening overall DOK alignment, exercising caution with sub-domain scores, incorporating additional psychometric analyses, adding items near cut scores to improve classification precision, and exploring models to enhance decision accuracy. The subcommittee approved the report unanimously.

Melanie Barton asked whether the general solution is simply to add more test items.

Ms. Yow deferred to others, and Heather Bolinger replied that from a psychometric perspective, the answer is “not necessarily”, since the test has four reporting categories and adding too many items would be inappropriate for the purpose of the assessment.

Daniel Cammisa and Kelvin Pompey of the SC Department of Education clarified that two separate issues were being conflated: the four performance levels (does not meet, approaches, meets, exceeds) and the DOK levels (one, two, and three). The UGA recommendation noted that classifying students into two groups is statistically easier than classifying into four, which relates to decision classification. On DOK, they confirmed that the state summative assessment appropriately assesses at all applicable levels, with some disagreement only around a few items, reflecting the inherently subjective nature of DOK assignment.

They added that Dr. Madison, at the subcommittee meeting, suggested replacing some items with ones closer to the cut score rather than adding more items, acknowledging this would be complex and require recalibration but worth considering. They also noted Dr. Madison affirmed that the SCDE's current practices are in line with field standards, and his recommendations reflect broader challenges the field is working through.

Ms. Allen then moved to approve the report. The motion was approved unanimously by the members.

Dr. Tate reported that the ASA Subcommittee's second action item was the 2026 Report on the Educational Performance of Military-Connected Students, required by Act 289 of 2014 (the Military Family Quality of Life Enhancement Act), which mandates annual EOC reporting on academic outcomes for this student population.

The report included demographic data from 2024-25, an overview of state data collection practices, academic performance, attendance, and existing supports. Under federal ESSA requirements, districts must identify military-connected students, typically through parent surveys entered into PowerSchool, though 18 districts reported having no such students. Of the 18,824 identified students, about 74% were concentrated in 10 districts. Military-connected students in South Carolina outperformed their non-military peers across all tested areas, including math, ELA, and science.

Recommendations included requiring consistent data collection during enrollment, continuing collaboration with the Department of Education to improve military-related data, and exploring

partnerships with postsecondary institutions to better support these students. Dr. Tate also noted an updated military-connected students dashboard at dashboard.sc.gov and invited members to visit. The subcommittee approved the report unanimously.

Ms. Allen then moved to approve the report. The motion was approved unanimously by the members.

Dr. Tate reported that the ASA Subcommittee's final action item was a request to approve new industry certifications for career readiness and accountability purposes. The Department of Education submitted 19 new certifications, and EOC staff asked the subcommittee to reconsider six of them. Following discussion and concerns from EOC members about the process, the subcommittee unanimously approved a motion to delay action on the credentials until technical advisory committees could meet in the spring.

Dr. Tate reported on two information items received by the ASA Subcommittee. Dr. Rocio Zalba of the SC Department of Education presented on the South Carolina Seal of Biliteracy, a nationally recognized credential signifying high proficiency in English and at least one additional language. In May, the subcommittee will consider additional South Carolina-specific data to decide whether the Seal should be added as a measure of college and career readiness. The subcommittee also discussed the inclusion of courses taken by students pursuing the high school employability credential and additional issues affecting other CCR measures, both of which will return at the May meeting.

April Allen then introduced an action item regarding nomination to the South Carolina Public Charter School District Board of Trustees. Under Section 59-40-230 of the Code of Laws, five board members are appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of other bodies, including the EOC, and with Senate approval. Jonathan Butcher has served as the Governor's nominee from the EOC since 2021, and both Mr. Butcher and the Public Charter School Board leadership expressed interest in his continued service. Ms. Allen moved to approve Mr. Butcher's nomination for a three-year term, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Dana Yow shared two calendar items during the Executive Director Update.

First, the EOC is beginning its strategic planning process for 2025 and beyond, building on the initial work launched in 2020-2021 under former Director Dr. Ferguson, which centered on defining the committee's mission, values, and goals. The EOC staff is working with Dr. Christina Melton, former Lexington-Richland Five superintendent and current consultant, to review the plan internally and identify areas needing change, strengthening, or addition. Members are

invited to a strategic planning session following the ASA meeting on May 18 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. in the building. More information and invitations will follow.

Second, Ms. Yow announced a "save the date" for the EOC retreat on August 9-10 in historic Camden, South Carolina, just after the nation's birthday. Additional details will be provided.

After the update the meeting was adjourned.