REVISED
AGENDA
Academic Standards and Assessments
Subcommittee Meeting

Monday, January 12, 2026
10:00 A.M.
Room 433, Blatt Building

I.   Welcome and Introductions ....Dr. Patty Tate

II. Approval of Minutes of November 17, 2025 ....Dr. Patty Tate

III. <u>Action Items:</u>
     CTE Data Project Report ....Bunnie Ward, Director
     TransformSC,
     Ivy Coburn, Division Director,
     Education Workforce, SREB
     & Brooke Culclasure, Director
     Research & Strategic Learning, Furman University

     Inclusion of Seal of Biliteracy in CCR..............................Dr. Matthew Lavery
     EOC Deputy Director

IV. <u>Information Items:</u>
     Multilingual Learners' Progress Indicator ....Dr. Matthew Lavery

     Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) Parental Satisfaction
     Survey, SY2025-26...Dr. Jenny May
     Director
     Qualitative Research
     & Stakeholder Engagement

     Requests for New Industry Certifications (CCR) .... Dana Yow,
     Ivy Colburn
     & Dr. Herb Bocchino
     Office of Career Readiness, SCDE

V.   Adjournment

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

Academic Standards & Assessments Subcommittee

Minutes of the Meeting

November 17, 2025

Members Present (in-person or remote): Dr. Patty Tate, Barbara Hairfield, Melissa Pender, Sen. Ross Turner, Tammy Achziger, and Rep. Bill Hager.

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

Dr. Patty Tate opened the meeting and asked for a motion to approve the ASA subcommittee minutes from the September 15, 2025, meeting. Senator Turner motioned to approve the minutes which was seconded by Ms. Pender. After the minutes were approved, Dr. Rainey Knight presented on the Cyclical Review of South Carolina College and Career Ready Social Studies Standards. State law requires the State Board of Education, in consultation with the Education Oversight Committee, to conduct a cyclical review of state academic standards and assessments at least every seven years.

After each review, recommended revisions must be reported to both entities for approval, and current standards remain in effect until that approval is granted. A task force—including parents, community and business leaders, and educators, including special education teachers—must evaluate the standards and assessments for rigor and relevance. A national panel of seven social studies standards experts and a state panel of 34 representatives—including parents, social studies teachers, ELL and special education teachers, community members, and business leaders—reviewed the standards and suggested revisions. Both panels evaluated the standards using the same criteria: comprehensiveness and balance, rigor, and organization/communication.

Recommendations focused on strengthening clarity, rigor, and coherence in the social studies standards. Suggestions included placing U.S. and world history standards within chronological time periods; ensuring students receive necessary historical context; supporting the reinstatement of social studies testing in grades 3-8; creating a K-12 civics strand; reducing redundancy across grade levels; increasing access to primary sources; and improving representation of diverse groups. Panels recommended a stronger global perspective, prioritization of essential standards, and benchmarking rigor against national and international frameworks. They also advised using the C3 Framework to build a clear K-12 progression of inquiry and skills, ensuring developmental

appropriateness, adopting consistent language, providing greater specificity for grade-level expectations, and improving alignment documents—using Kentucky's standards as a model.

A motion was made to accept the recommendations with the amended notes, and it was accepted.

Next, EOC Executive Director Dana Yow presented the 2025 South Carolina Report Card Release, marking the second year of full implementation of the Added-Value Growth Model for the Student Progress indicator. Due to changes in the English Language Arts standards, the Added-Value Growth Model currently includes only mathematics scores. High school Student Success indicators included the First Year On Track to Graduate, Second Year On Track to Graduate, and Five-Year Student Success Rate metrics, while the Third Year On Track to Graduate is reported but will not be scored until the 2026 Report Cards. Twelfth-grade students were again excluded from the School Climate Indicator calculation. The Preparing for Success indicator was calculated for one grade level in elementary and middle schools, focusing on Science. Updates to the South Carolina School Climate Surveys added six items to Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Focus and four items to Teacher Perceptions of Working Conditions.

Ms. Yow provided an update on the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Data Project. State law (S.C. Code Section 41-30-110) requires a CTE Report Card and seeks to coordinate, align, and enhance all publicly funded workforce development services with centralized oversight. The law aims to improve accountability and transparency while promoting a customer-focused workforce system that is easy to access, highly effective, and simple to understand.

The goal of the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Data Project is to increase the skills and experiences of South Carolinians to ensure they can progress through the career path of their choice. Strategies include increasing participation in work-based learning experiences, raising the percentage of the labor force holding high-value credentials, and ensuring that individuals who earn credentials are employed in South Carolina, participating in a year of service, or enrolled in further education. Key metrics include the percent of public high school students who are college- and/or career-ready, the percent entering full-time employment or postsecondary education after graduation, the percent of higher education credentials classified as high-value, and the percent completing work-based learning programs or gaining employment after earning a credential. The project aims to organize credentials with real employment value, aligning them with labor market demands and workforce priorities. Partners in the project include the South Carolina Department of Education, the Education Oversight Committee, the South Carolina Department of Employment & Workforce, SC Competes, and the Southern Regional Education Board. Benefits include better

workforce alignment, clearer credential differentiation, support for stackable credentials, and stronger connections between education and industry. Through robust information gathering, the project seeks to increase knowledge about career and technical education for students, families, educators, business and industry, and state leaders. Section 59-18-920 mandates that the Education Oversight Committee, working with the State Board of Education and the School-to-Work Advisory Council, develop a report card for career and technology schools.

After this update, the meeting was adjourned.

EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

DATE: <u>January 12, 2026</u>

<u>**SUBCOMMITTEE:**</u>
Academic Standards & Assessments Subcommittee

<u>**INFORMATION ITEM:**</u>
CTE Data Project Report

<u>**PURPOSE/AUTHORITY**</u>
§ 59-18-920: Report card requirements for charter, alternative, and career and technology schools.

A charter school established pursuant to Chapter 40, Title 59 shall report the data requested by the Department of Education necessary to generate a report card and a rating. The performance of students attending charter schools sponsored by the South Carolina Public Charter School District must be included in the overall performance ratings of each school in the South Carolina Public Charter School District. The performance of students attending a charter school authorized by a local school district must be reflected on a separate line on the school district's report card. An alternative school is included in the requirements of this chapter; however, the purpose of an alternative school must be taken into consideration in determining its performance rating. The Education Oversight Committee, working with the State Board of Education and the School to Work Advisory Council, shall develop a report card for career and technology schools.

<u>**CRITICAL FACTS**</u>
Project Partners:
SC Council on Competitiveness (lead partner), Riley Institute (survey development and analysis), SREB (subject matter expert)
Project Scope and Outcomes:
- Pursuant to S.C. Code Section 59-18-20, "The Education Oversight Committee, working with the State Board of Education and the School to Work Advisory Council, shall develop a report card for career and technology schools."
- Provide research and stakeholder feedback about potential metrics for career and technical education.
- Ultimately, develop a public dashboard for technology centers that allows stakeholders to: (1) monitor participation and access, (2) track student experiences and results, and (3) understand the economic and community impact of CTE.

Project Process:
- An advisory working group and SCDE's CTE Advisory Committee provided feedback to project partners.
- Project partners conducted small-group interviews and administered stakeholder surveys to both the CTE and business/industry communities.

<u>**TIMELINE/REVIEW PROCESS**</u>

The development of a statewide CTE data visualization tool must occur in phases, recognizing differences in data readiness and the need to build confidence and trust before full public release.

<u>**ECONOMIC IMPACT FOR EOC**</u>
      Cost: $87,500: FY 2025

<u>**ACTION REQUEST**</u>

☐ **For approval**   ☒ **For information**

ACTION TAKEN

☐ **Approved**
☐ **Not Approved**

☐ **Amended**
☐ **Action deferred (explain)**

South Carolina CTE Data Project Summary

Project Partners:
SC Council on Competitiveness (lead partner), Riley Institute (survey development and analysis), SREB (subject matter expert)

Project Scope and Outcomes:
- Pursuant to S.C. Code Section 59-18-20, "The Education Oversight Committee, working with the State Board of Education and the School to Work Advisory Council, shall develop a report card for career and technology schools."
- Provide research and stakeholder feedback about potential metrics for career and technical education.
- Ultimately, develop a public dashboard for technology centers that allows stakeholders to: (1) monitor participation and access, (2) track student experiences and results, and (3) understand the economic and community impact of CTE.

Project Process:
- An advisory working group and SCDE's CTE Advisory Committee provided feedback to project partners.
- Project partners conducted small-group interviews and administered stakeholder surveys to both the CTE and business/industry communities.

Proposed Data Sets

Participation Data Group Elements	Student Experiences Data Group Elements
1. Enrollment by geography (bubble map by zip code, showing student origins) 2. Enrollment by program/cluster area, including gender and special populations 3. Program funding streams, especially breaking out federal, state, local, and business/industry contributions 4. Participant vs. regional demographics (comparing CTE participation to overall district demographics) 5. Program progression (enrollment → concentrator → completer → credential attainment)	1. Student engagement in work-based learning activities 2. Dual credit and post-secondary exposure/awareness 3. Program choice vs. placement (Was the student assigned or did they self-select? How did the decision occur?) 4. Job placement and awareness of post-secondary/career options 5. Quality and support of educators (certifications, in-field status, years of business/industry experience)

Results Data Group Elements	Impact Data Group Elements
6. Work-based learning participation (levels and types recorded)	

Results Data Group Elements	Impact Data Group Elements
1. Student completion, graduation, and dropout rates (end-of-program outcomes) 2. State assessment proficiency scores (CTE students vs. all students) 3. Perkins accountability indicators (federally required) 4. Credentials earned, types, and tiers at graduation 5. Scholarships awarded to CTE students 6. Job/college placement after graduation (two-year/four-year college, technical, work, military, gap year)	1. Economic impact/regional jobs and wage forecasts (JobsEQ data, regional priority occupations) 2. Alumni outcomes (1, 3, 5 years out: employment, wages by field/credential) 3. Advisory committee and business/industry engagement (nature and extent of advisory participation) 4. Community recognition of student leadership and awards 5. Business and industry survey results

Conclusions:

Conclusion 1: A Phased Approach Is Necessary
The development of a statewide CTE data visualization tool must occur in phases, recognizing differences in data readiness and the need to build confidence and trust before full public release.

Conclusion 2: Stakeholders Interpret Data Differently
CTE leaders, educators, business and industry, and the public bring different contexts and levels of understanding to data, requiring intentional design and testing to ensure clarity and shared interpretation.

Conclusion 3: Data Confidence Must Precede Public Use
Early data visualizations should rely only on clean, validated, and readily available data to ensure accuracy, credibility, and responsible use.

Conclusion 4: The Value of the Tool Is in Its Use
The effectiveness of a CTE data tool is defined not by its publication but by how well it supports understanding, informed decision-making, and continuous improvement.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Develop Data Visualizations Through an Iterative, Collaborative Process

Data visualizations should be developed incrementally, beginning with readily available, trusted datasets and refined through structured stakeholder feedback. This process should allow users to respond to how data is visualized and to share the information they can—or cannot—derive from it. Stakeholder feedback should directly inform revisions before any broader release.

Recommendation 2: Use Clear, Intentional Language to Educate and Reframe Understanding of CTE

Clear, intentional language should be embedded throughout all data tools to educate stakeholders on the modern value of Career and Technical Education and to address outdated misconceptions rooted in past perceptions of CTE. Data visualizations, examples, and accompanying narratives should reinforce the rigor, relevance, and economic value of today's CTE programs for students, communities, and the state. This approach positions the data tool as both an information resource and a means to elevate understanding of CTE across South Carolina.

Recommendation 3: Implement a Tiered Approach to Professional Learning and Data Use

A tiered series of professional learning and facilitated work sessions should be developed to guide the use of data, beginning with CTE leaders and administrators. Initial sessions should focus on interpreting data, identifying patterns, and surfacing priority challenges, followed by ongoing work sessions that support strategy development and implementation. Over time, the state should facilitate best-practice sharing sessions in which CTE leaders highlight strategies used to address data-identified challenges and the outcomes achieved.

Recommendation 4: Design the System to Evolve Through Continuous Review and Expansion

The data system should be intentionally designed to evolve as additional data becomes available and confidence in data quality increases. New data elements should be incorporated only through a collaborative stakeholder review to ensure clarity, accuracy, and appropriate interpretation. This approach supports continuous improvement while maintaining trust and credibility across stakeholder groups.

Proposed Timeline and Sequencing Approach

Step 1: Select an Initial Data Group Based on Readiness and Value

Begin by identifying one data group with high stakeholder value and strong confidence in data quality and availability. The group discussed starting with the **Results data group** to ensure early work is grounded in clean, readily available data.

Step 2: Develop Initial Data Visualizations

Create preliminary visualizations for the selected data group using existing, validated data. These visualizations are intended as draft tools for testing and refinement, not for immediate public release.

Step 3: Field Test Visualizations Through Structured Town Halls

Use a town hall or convening structure to share draft visualizations with stakeholders and gather feedback on clarity, interpretation, and usefulness. Feedback should focus on both how the data is displayed and the insights stakeholders can draw from it.

Step 4: Refine and Strengthen the Data Group

Use stakeholder feedback to refine visual design, language, and contextual explanations until the data group communicates clearly and consistently across audiences. This step continues until there is shared confidence in interpretation and use.

Step 5: Develop Surveys to Support the Next Data Group

While refining the initial data group, begin developing the survey instruments needed for the next phase, starting with student-completer **surveys** to support the **Student Experience** data group. Surveys should be reviewed through appropriate governance structures before implementation.

Step 6: Repeat the Cycle for Subsequent Data Groups

Apply the same cycle—visualization, field testing, refinement, and support—for each additional data group until all four groups have initial, stakeholder-validated tools. Each cycle builds on lessons learned from prior phases.

Step 7: Expand and Enhance as Data Readiness Increases

As additional data becomes available and confidence in data quality grows, re-enter the cycle to embed new elements through stakeholder review. This ensures the system evolves deliberately while maintaining clarity, trust, and credibility.

EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

DATE: **January 12, 2026**

SUBCOMMITTEE:
Academic Standards & Assessments Subcommittee

ACTION ITEM:
Inclusion of Seal of Biliteracy in CCR

PURPOSE/AUTHORITY
§SECTION 59-18-900(C) In setting the criteria for the academic performance ratings and the performance indicators, the Education Oversight Committee shall report the performance by subgroups of students in the school and schools similar in student characteristics. Criteria must use established guidelines for statistical analysis and build on current data-reporting practices.

(D) The comprehensive report card must include a comprehensive set of performance indicators with information on comparisons, trends, needs, and performance over time which is helpful to parents and the public in evaluating the school. In addition, the comprehensive report card must include indicators that meet federal law requirements. Special efforts are to be made to ensure that the information contained in the report card is provided in an easily understood manner and a reader-friendly format. This information should also provide a context for the performance of the school. Where appropriate, the data should yield disaggregated results to schools and districts in planning for improvement.

CRITICAL FACTS
In SC's current accountability system, a High School student in the fourth-year cohort (also called the graduating cohort) may be identified as College- or Career-Ready on any of up to 11 criteria. Under the current proposal, earning the Seal of Biliteracy would be added as a College-Ready Criterion, since several postsecondary institutions in SC and in other states award college credit to incoming students who have earned the seal.

TIMELINE/REVIEW PROCESS
Information regarding the Seal of Biliteracy would be added to the Accountability Manual and included in the calculation of CCR ratings as soon as the change has been communicated to the field.

ECONOMIC IMPACT FOR EOC
      Cost: no impact

ACTION REQUEST

☒ **For approval**   ☐ **For information**

ACTION TAKEN

☐ **Approved**   ☐ **Amended**
☐ **Not Approved**   ☐ **Action deferred (explain)**

From:	Zalba, Rocio <rzalba@ed.sc.gov>
Sent:	Thursday, December 11, 2025 3:16 PM
To:	Yow, Dana; Lavery, Matthew
Cc:	Stokes, Stephen
Subject:	[External] Updated Proposal for the SC Seal of Biliteracy-
Attachments:	Inclusion of the SC Seal of Biliteracy in State Report Card- Proposal.docx

Follow Up Flag:	Follow up
Flag Status:	Completed

Dear Ms. Yow and Mr. Lavery,

 In late July, I submitted a proposal to include the SC Seal of Biliteracy on our State Report Card. At the end of that proposal, I listed states that recognize their Seal of Biliteracy in their accountability systems.

 I recently learned that three more states have joined this initiative: Nebraska, Rhode Island, and Virginia.

 With this in mind, I took the opportunity to update the proposal with the following information:

- added these three states, along with corresponding links to the Comparable National Data category at the end of the document
- corrected a broken link to ACTFL's proficiency levels in the workforce
- updated our **state data and growth metrics to include the 2025 number of recipients**, languages, and local education agencies (LEAs)
- included a **live link to all participating districts**, detailing the number of recipients and languages from 2021 to 2025.

I have attached the updated proposal to this email.

 Please let me know if you have any questions.

 I look forward to hearing from you,

Kindly,
Rocío

Rocio Zalba, PhD
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Inclusion of the SC Seal of Biliteracy in the State Report Card

Request

Districts are requesting that the SC Seal of Biliteracy be included in the State Report Card under the indicator of College & Career Readiness. It is our recommendation, that the SC Seal of Biliteracy be added as one more criterion that would deem High School students "College Ready".

Overview of the SC Seal of Biliteracy

The Profile of the South Carolina Graduate highlights "Multiple Languages" and "Global Perspective" as a vital asset that equips every learner for college and career readiness in a growing globalized community. The South Carolina Seal of Biliteracy further supports this commitment by recognizing students who achieve proficiency in English and at least one other world language.

To earn a SC Seal of Biliteracy a student in either their Junior or Senior year of High School must meet the following two requirements:

- earn *at least* a 3.0 or above GPA in all ELA requirements for graduation or, if the student is a multilingual learner, they must attain a minimum of an overall composite score of 4.4 on the ACCESS 2.0 English Proficiency Test.

- earn *at least* an Intermediate-Mid level of proficiency through a state approved nationally recognized language proficiency assessment designed to measure a student's skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in a language other than English.

Student Population Served

The South Carolina Seal of Biliteracy is available to all students, including multilingual learners, heritage speakers, and those learning a second language other than English. Any student, regardless of their primary or heritage language, or whether they are enrolled in a language program at their school, can apply to test for the SC Seal of Biliteracy.

Rationale

Districts ever increasing request to include the SC Seal of Biliteracy in the State Report Card is based on the following data:

As of January 2025,

- Universities in South Carolina are recognizing the credential as a tool for initial placement and award credit or retroactive credit. More SC Colleges and Universities are added every year.

- A growing list of Higher Ed institutions at the national level award credit for the Seal of Biliteracy. More Universities and Colleges are added every year.

- State approved nationally recognized language proficiency assessments have been recognized to be of equal or higher value than the Advanced Placement test[1].
  - ➢ AP Score of 3 = Intermediate Mid (SC Bronze Tier)
  - ➢ AP Score of 4= Intermediate High (SC Silver Tier)
  - ➢ AP Score of 5 = Advanced Low (SC Gold Tier)

- Districts unable to offer an AP course in a language they teach can now provide students with an opportunity to earn the SC Seal of Biliteracy, which holds the same recognition and value as an AP credit.

- The American Council on Education has recommended that STAMP4S, the most widely used proficiency test in our districts for assessing students' proficiency in a language other than English, be eligible for college credit. Their recommendations are as follows: 8 credits for Intermediate-Mid (SC Bronze Tier), 12 credits for Intermediate-High (SC Silver Tier), and 14 credits for Advanced-Low (SC Gold Tier).

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[1] "Anecdotal evidence and examination of the scoring rubric indicate that students who are showing evidence of Intermediate Mid proficiency are likely to score a 3 (passing score) on the AP Language and Culture Exam; students showing evidence of Intermediate High proficiency are likely to score a 4 or 5; students showing evidence of Advanced level proficiency are the most likely to score a 5 on the AP exam. Intermediate High language users are able to function at the Advanced level, but are not able to sustain that performance across the tasks and contexts of the Advanced level" (Microsoft Word - Seal of Biliteracy - Comparison of Scales - Talking Points v3.docx p.2-3)

- Students who obtain the Seal of Biliteracy are more likely to attend college and to enroll in a four-year university, according to national data[2,3]

How does SC Seal of Biliteracy further prepare students for career and military readiness?

SC Seal of Biliteracy recipients must earn at least an intermediate-mid level of proficiency in all four skills (SC Bronze Tier). The intermediate- mid level of proficiency is the baseline required for bilingual candidates to effectively function in the workforce, as established by the *American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages* (ACTFL).

The importance of this skill set is essential, especially considering the following data:

- 45/46 counties in SC are home to international companies

- More than 170,000 South Carolinians are employed in more than 1,100 foreign-affiliated companies with significant operations in SC, according to the SC Department of Commerce.

- 9 out of 10 employers rely on employees who can speak languages other than English. 56% of these employers anticipate an increased need for bilingual or multilingual talent in the next five years. [4,5]

- Intelligence and Security rely on multilingualism (CIA- proactive threat detection and intel gathering; Military-intel, international relations and negotiation; Cybersecurity- detecting and diffusing international threats; ICE- communication with community members)[6]

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[2] Mihaly, K., Arellano, B., & Prier, S. (2022). Biliteracy seals in a large urban district in New Mexico: Who earns them and how do they impact college outcomes? (REL 2023–140). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Publication/100913 2

[3] Davin, K. J., Cruz, K. R., & Hancock, C. R. (2024). An examination of the postgraduation benefits of earning a Seal of Biliteracy. Foreign Language Annals, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12753

[4] Not Lost in Translation: The Growing Importance of Foreign Language Skills in the U.S. Job Market. (2017). New American Economy.https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/03/NAE_Bilingual_V9.pdf; The study found that the number of listings targeting bilingual individuals increased from around 240,000 to around 630,000 between 2010 and 2015. See this report for information about the national demand for language skills.

[5] ACTFL. (2019). Making languages our business: Addressing foreign language demand among US employers. https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/MakingLanguagesOurBusiness_FullReport.pdf; Survey data cited in this report revealed that a majority of employers said their need for foreign languages has increased over the past five years. See this report for information about the national demand for language skills.

[6] The Director of National Intelligence's Foreign Language Program Office (FLPO) works with the Intelligence community (IC) to integrate and synchronize initiatives to enhance its foreign language capabilities. These efforts include support for language skill development, human language technology development, language education and training, language proficiency assessment,

State Data & Growth

Each year, more Local Education Agencies (LEAs) aim to prepare their students for the opportunity to test and earn a SC Seal of Biliteracy. The data below shows the growth in LEAs participation from 2021 to 2025.

Participating Local Education Agencies (2021-2025)
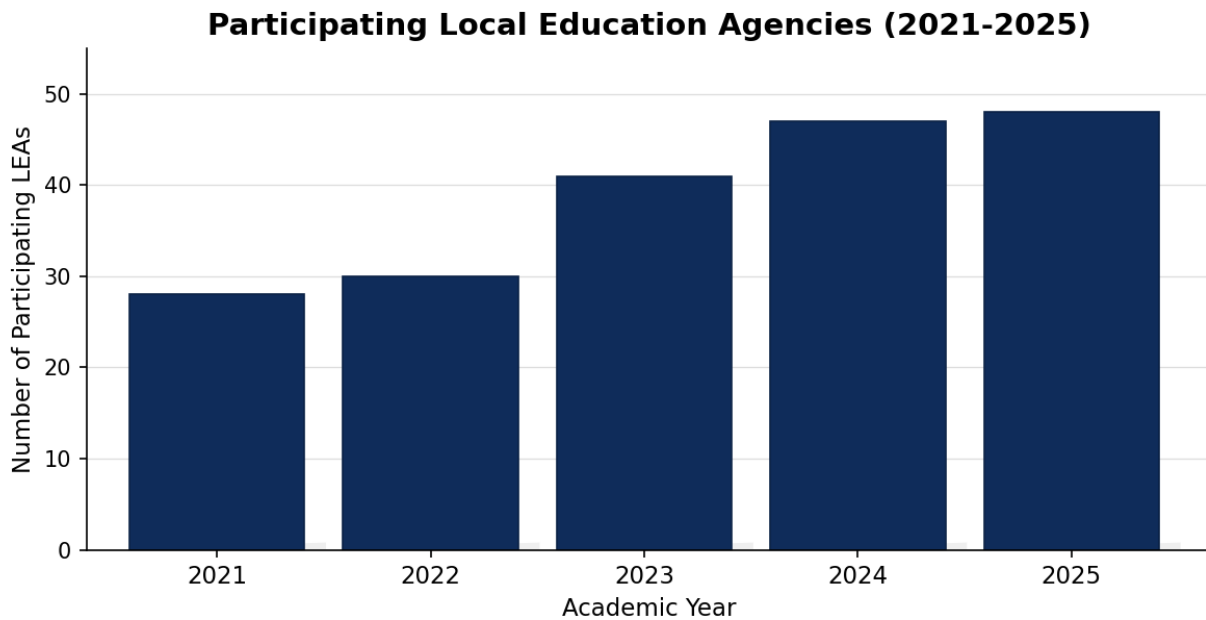
The data presented indicates the number of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that reported recipients. In some years, a small number of LEAs did not submit a report and were therefore excluded from the chart. As of Spring 2025, a total of **41 districts and 17 independent, charter, and private schools have participated in the SC Seal of Biliteracy**.

Growth in Seal of Biliteracy Recipients per Academic Year

SC Seal of Biliteracy Recipients
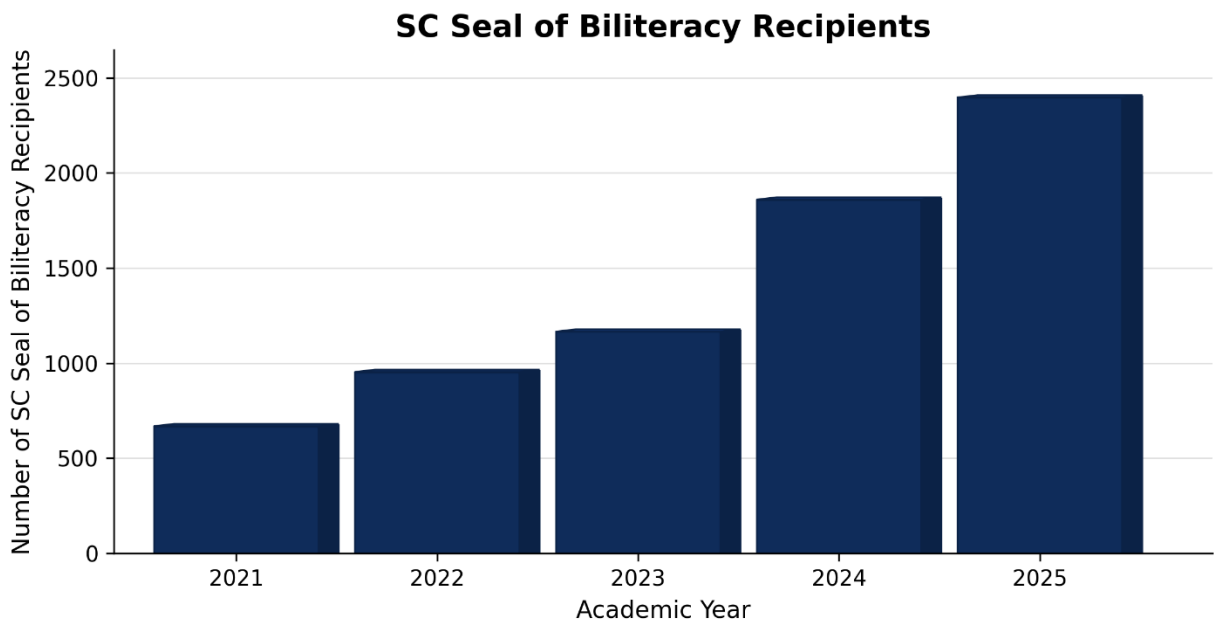
The [number of recipients](#) per academic year is as follows: **669 in 2021, 954 in 2022, 1166 in 2023, 1860 in 2024 and 2397 in 2025**

Comparable National Data

The Seal of Biliteracy is a nationally recognized credential that has been implemented in all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

States such as Arizona, California, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island and Virginia include their state Seal of Biliteracy as part of their College and Career Readiness category.

Below are the identified states along with explanations of how their Seal of Biliteracy is reflected in their State Report Card or contact information.

State	Description of Inclusion in State Report Card
Arizona	The Arizona Department of Education includes the state Seal of Biliteracy in their College and Career Readiness Indicator (CCRI) which is part of Arizona's [A-F Accountability System](#). Each student who receives a Seal counts for 0.5 points (up to one point per student) and is added to their CCRI score.
California	The Seal of Biliteracy is one of the options that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) may select for the [College and Career Indicator](#) for high schools. LEAs indicate which students earned the Seal of Biliteracy when exiting

	students in the California Longitudinal Pupil Data System (CALPADS). Recipients are reflected in the California School Dashboard.
Missouri	The Seal of Biliteracy is one of the indicators for the Success-Ready Students category in their Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP 6 pg.9 H). Districts are awarded points for students who demonstrate on-track performance across multiple success measures by either meeting or exceeding state standards or demonstrating significant measurable improvements. The Seal of Biliteracy is valued as an important employability skill.
Nebraska	The Seal of Biliteracy was approved to be counted as part of the state report card in the summer of 2025. No public information has yet been released. For more information and details, contact Dr. Xianquan (Chrystal) Liu, World Language Specialist. chrystal.liu@nebraska.gov
New York	The NY Seal of Biliteracy is part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Accountability System (pg. 42-43, 50-51). It is recognized as one of the indicators in the College, Career, and Civic Readiness category. The College and Career Readiness index ranges from 0 to 200 and is calculated by awarding extra credit for students who demonstrate higher levels of readiness, as well as partial credit for students who earn a high school equivalency certificate.
North Carolina	The Global Languages Endorsement (GLE) serves as North Carolina's Seal of Biliteracy. It is one of the five diploma endorsements that graduates can earn and is included in the School Report Card under the Career Ready category.
Rhode Island	New in 2024, RIDE has also published data on students who earned the Rhode Island Seal of Biliteracy. The results for students who left high school in 2023 can be found here. The Seal of Biliteracy will be factored into RIDE's accountability system beginning in 2025. https://reportcard.ride.ri.gov/202324/StateAccountability
Virginia	Passed bill HB2360 (04/2025) recognizes bilingual proficiency as a career- and workforce-relevant credential for students. Students who earn the Seal can count it towards certain graduation-readiness requirements, and it will be included in the state's official list of credentials used in school accountability and student readiness evaluations.

EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

DATE: <u>January 12, 2026</u>

<u>**SUBCOMMITTEE:**</u>
Academic Standards & Assessments Subcommittee

<u>**INFORMATION ITEM:**</u>
Report of the Parental Satisfaction Survey of the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) 2025-26 School Year

<u>**PURPOSE/AUTHORITY**</u>
§ 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.

<u>**CRITICAL FACTS**</u>
This is the second report the EOC has produced following the completion of a satisfaction survey to parents whose children are recipients of ESTF dollars. The EOC has not yet received assessment data to report on associated learning gains and graduation rates of participating students.

<u>**TIMELINE/REVIEW PROCESS**</u>
    This report was sent to members of the SC General Assembly on December 30, 2025.

<u>**ECONOMIC IMPACT FOR EOC**</u>
        Cost: no impact

<u>**ACTION REQUEST**</u>

☐ **For approval**   ☒ **For information**

<u>**ACTION TAKEN**</u>

☐ **Approved**   ☐ **Amended**
☐ **Not Approved**   ☐ **Action deferred (explain)**

Parental Satisfaction Survey of the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) 2025-26 School Year

SC EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Reporting facts. Measuring change. Promoting progress.

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Appendix A

Introduction and Background

In June 2023, Act 8 of 2023, or the South Carolina Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) became effective. The law provided guidelines for implementation and evaluation of the program beginning in the 2024-25 school year. During the first year of implementation, a Supreme Court ruling changed allowable use of funds by eligible families and changes were made to the source of funds used. As a result the enabling legislation changed, and the current program, managed by the SC Department of Education, is governed by Act 11 of 2025. While there were changes made to implementation of the program, the requirement remained that the Education Oversight Committee complete an annual parental satisfaction survey and share results with the General Assembly by December 31st each year. This report is provided in accordance with that requirement, and a report of learning gains and academic performance will be completed when required data are available.

Enabling Legislation

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

(E) The Education Oversight Committee 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.

Differences Between Act 8 of 2023 and Act 11 of 2025:

During the 2024-25 school year, eligible students were those who were residents of South Carolina, attended a public school or had not yet been Kindergarten-eligible due to age, and household income did 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 SCDE. Students were required to leave their home school district to access funds. During the 2025-26 school year, eligible students were those whose household income did not exceed 300% of the federal poverty rate ($96,450 for a family of 4), and the award per child is $7,500, with a cap of 10,000 participating students. Students were not required to leave their home district to access funds.

Table 1: Changes in ESTF

CRITERIA	ACT 8, 2024-25 SCHOOL YEAR	ACT 11, 2025-26 SCHOOL YEAR
FAMILY INCOME	**200%** Federal Poverty Rate	**300%** Federal Poverty Rate
SCHOOL ENROLLMENT	To access funds, student must have been enrolled in SC public school the previous school year and be enrolled in different district or private school for the 2024-25 school year. Student may NOT participate in ESTF and Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children's Fund program and funds may NOT be used for home instruction.	To access funds, student must NOT be enrolled in resident school for the 2025-26 school year. Student may NOT participate in ESTF and Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children's Fund program and funds may NOT be used for home instruction.
CAP	**5,000** students total	**10,000** students total
RESIDENCY	Must be a SC resident	Must be a SC resident
AMOUNT GRANTED	**$6,000**	**$7,500**
ALLOWABLE USE OF FUNDS	Reading books Curriculum Instructional Materials Tutoring Computer Hardware Technological Devices Educational Therapies Services Provided by a Student's Non-Resident School District Fees for Transportation *Education Service Provider Tuition and Fees *Tuition and fees for an Approved Non-public Online Education Service Provider or Course *Asterix denotes funding was allowable during initial implementation but changed during the 2024-25 school year.	Textbooks Reading books Instructional materials/school supplies Tutoring Education service provider tuition and fees Tuition and fees for an approved nonpublic online education service provider or course Computer hardware Educational therapies Services provided by a student's non-resident public school Technological devices Fees for transportation Required school uniforms

Allowable Use of Funds

For the 2025-26 school year, there were **12 categories of approved expenses** outlined and described in the Educational Scholarship Trust Fund Participant Guide. These allowable expenses include:

Textbooks *(K-12 in the following subject areas only)*:

- Math
- English (including grammar, reading, and writing)
- Science (including Coding and Engineering)
- Social Studies (including History)
- Foreign Language
- Art
- Music

Reading books: Fiction and non-fiction literature in hardcover or paperback form, consistent with literature allowed in school libraries subject to SC Code 59-31-15 and all related regulations.

Required School Uniform: Uniform clothing items that are required for school attendance, complying with school dress code policy (limited to $500/year).

Instructional Materials/School Supplies *(no bulk, individual student use only)*:

- calculators (including graphing—calculators are limited to $200 a year, graphing calculators are limited to a purchase of one every two years)
- index cards and card "holders"
- markers (to include dry erase and highlighters)
- notebooks (including composition notebooks)
- paper (lined, copy and/or graph)
- binders
- pencils
- pens
- colored pencils
- crayons
- erasers
- rulers
- folders
- glue
- scissors
- USB cards

Educational Therapies:

- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Therapy
- Speech Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Vision Therapy
- Dyslexia and Dysgraphia Therapies

Computer Hardware *(used primarily for a scholarship student's educational needs and approved by department or a licensed physician)*:

- Laptop, desktop, and tablet computers- computer and tablet are limited to $1,500 each (those identified as "gaming" will not be approved).
- Printers and ink - monitor and printer are limited to $300 each, one per student every two years (3D printers are not approved).
- Headphones- headsets are limited to $200 per year.
- Printer toner cartridges – printer toner cartridges are limited to $100/purchase and $300/year (product warranties included as part of the purchase are approved).

Technological Devices *(Used primarily for a scholarship student's educational needs and approved by the department or a licensed physician)*:

- Keyboard
- Mouse/mouse pad
- Apple pen
- Protective case for technology (IPad case, laptop case etc.)

Tutoring:

- Math
- English (including Grammar, Reading and Writing)
- Science (including Coding and Engineering)
- Social Studies (including History)
- Foreign Language

Education Service Provider Tuition and Fees *(invoiced by independent schools, not to include food, field trip, fundraising, graduation, and child care fees)*:

- Enrollment/registration fees
- Technology fees
- Supply and book fees for classes or courses taken during the school day
- Academic testing and assessment fees

Tuition and Fees for an Approved Nonpublic Online Education Service Provider or Course:

- Math
- English (including Grammar, Reading and Writing)
- Science
- Social Studies (including History)
- Foreign Language
- National norm-referenced examinations, advanced placement examinations, or similar assessments, industry certification exams, or examinations related to college or university admission
- Test preparation classes/courses are also approved

Services Provided by a Student's Non-Resident Public School:

- Out-of-district fees
- Individual classes
- After-school tutoring services
- Transportation (up to $3,000/school year)
- Fees or costs associated with participation in extracurricular activities.

Fees for Transportation: Paid to a fee-for-service transportation provider for the scholarship student to travel to and from an eligible provider, not to exceed $3,000 for each school year.

Parental Satisfaction Survey Development

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 initial parental satisfaction survey administered by the EOC in partnership with SCDE in 2024. The survey that was developed last year using other states' parent satisfaction surveys for school choice programming was reviewed for this year's implementation by the SAG and while some items were added or edited, the items largely remained the same to determine the overall level of parent satisfaction. Survey items can be found in Appendix A.

Recommendations from the SAG resulted in a final version of the survey with eleven items designed to take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey was developed using the SurveyMonkey platform and was shared to all ESTF families approved to participate using the Classwallet platform. 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.

Respondents:

Rolling admissions maintain a waitlist with 10,000 students accepted for the 2025-26 school year. Of these 8,980 students were active at the time of survey administration (November 3, 2025). Classwallet sent a message to 5,271 parent emails alerting families of the opportunity to participate in the parent satisfaction survey. Because some parents have multiple children participating, these emails represent all 8,980 students participating in the ESTF program, according to Classwallet. During the two-week survey administration window, there were 1,669 responses reflecting the experiences of participating students. Of the parents who completed the satisfaction survey, 1,288 (77%) were participating for the first time and 374 (23%) were returning for the second year.

The survey response rate was calculated two ways to ensure that findings were representative of all participants. The parent-level response rate was calculated by dividing the number of parent responses by the number of parents invited to complete the survey. This 32% response rate exceeds the typical 25% benchmark for open-response surveys, indicating that the results are reliable and reflective of the group overall. The student-level response rate was calculated to determine the student experience as reported by the parent. This response rate was 19% which falls below the commonly-accepted benchmark. However, surveyed parents reported having 2,973 students participating in the ESTF program, which is 1,304 more than there were reflected in completed surveys. This discrepancy suggests that there may have been confusion created by the request to complete the survey once for each child participating which may have impacted the slightly lower response rate. This will be considered in future parent satisfaction survey administrations.

Respondents were asked why they applied to participate in the ESTF program, and several themes emerged:

- Financial support or relief
- Academic or behavioral supports
- Desire to access different educational options
- The program was recommended or required by an educational institution

> *"(We applied to ESTF) For lots of reasons: 1. We were referred by our school to apply, 2. We are a family in need, 3. We transport our child outside of his district and school zone to meet his IEP needs."*

Financial Support or Relief:

There were 1,606 narrative responses to this open-ended question, and 922 (57%) stated financial relief as the reason for applying for ESTF funds. Of the comments that were primarily about other reasons for applying, finances were still mentioned 60 more times. Financial motivation was by far the most noted reason for applying to the ESTF program.

> *"We are financially tight and this was a huge blessing for us! As it provided the funds for my daughter to attend school!"*

Academic or Behavioral Supports:

One hundred and thirty-five (8%) parents referenced unique student needs, such as health or additional special education supports, as a reason to apply for a specialized school. Other parents reported their student was behind academically and needed tutoring they report as being unaffordable without ESTF.
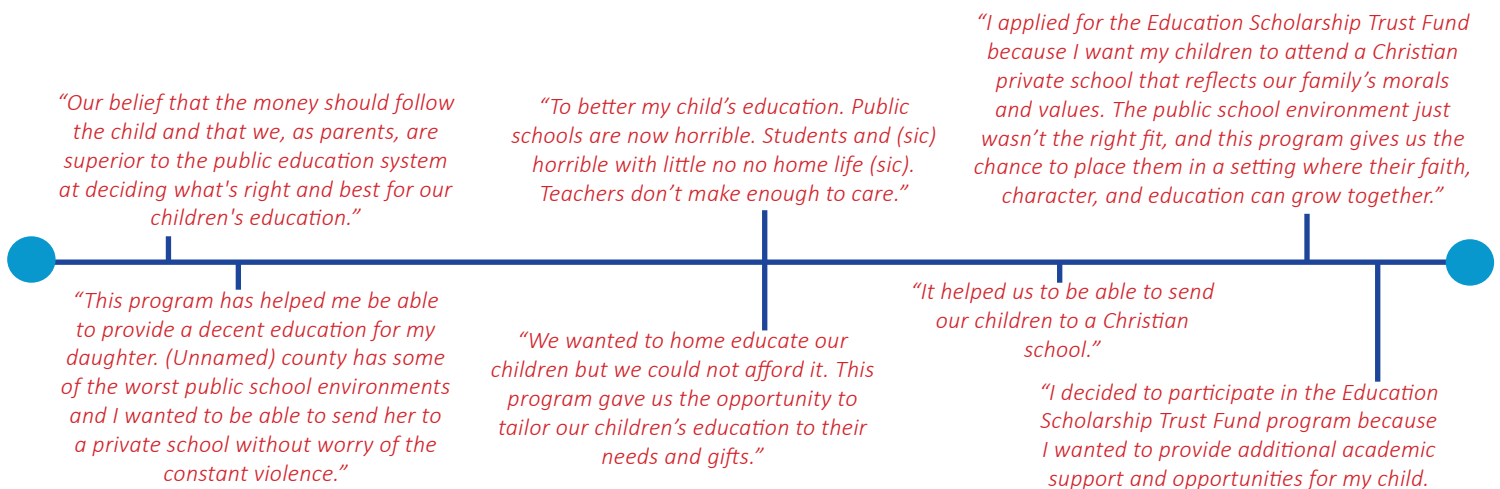
> *"(We applied) To receive assistance in covering costs for my son's educational needs. He is special needs and going to a public school would cause a lot of anxiety for him."*

> *"My son has autism and needed a special school for autistic children."*

> *"My daughter has sickle cell disease and sometimes miss a lot of school. I think this can help with tutors and provide other options."*

Desire for School Choice and Educational Options:

While some respondents referenced a mistrust of their residential public school or district or poor performance, most referenced a desire for specialized services, smaller class sizes or a religious or cultural environment parents perceived as "better". Over 400 parents (25%) referenced a desire for choice and options as their motivation for applying to the ESTF program.

> *"Our belief that the money should follow the child and that we, as parents, are superior to the public education system at deciding what's right and best for our children's education."*

> *"To better my child's education. Public schools are now horrible. Students and (sic) horrible with little no no home life (sic). Teachers don't make enough to care."*

> *"I applied for the Education Scholarship Trust Fund because I want my children to attend a Christian private school that reflects our family's morals and values. The public school environment just wasn't the right fit, and this program gives us the chance to place them in a setting where their faith, character, and education can grow together."*

> *"This program has helped me be able to provide a decent education for my daughter. (Unnamed) county has some of the worst public school environments and I wanted to be able to send her to a private school without worry of the constant violence."*

> *"We wanted to home educate our children but we could not afford it. This program gave us the opportunity to tailor our children's education to their needs and gifts."*

> *"It helped us to be able to send our children to a Christian school."*

> *"I decided to participate in the Education Scholarship Trust Fund program because I wanted to provide additional academic support and opportunities for my child.*

Program Recommendation or Requirement:

Some parents reported that they applied to participate in ESTF because it was recommended to them by their child's participating school, tutor, therapist, or another parent who has been pleased with the program. Of the 129 (8%) of parents who applied because it was encouraged by providers or other parents, two parents reported it was required by the school they are sending their children to. Additionally, five respondents stated that their employer required it.

Findings

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 for 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:
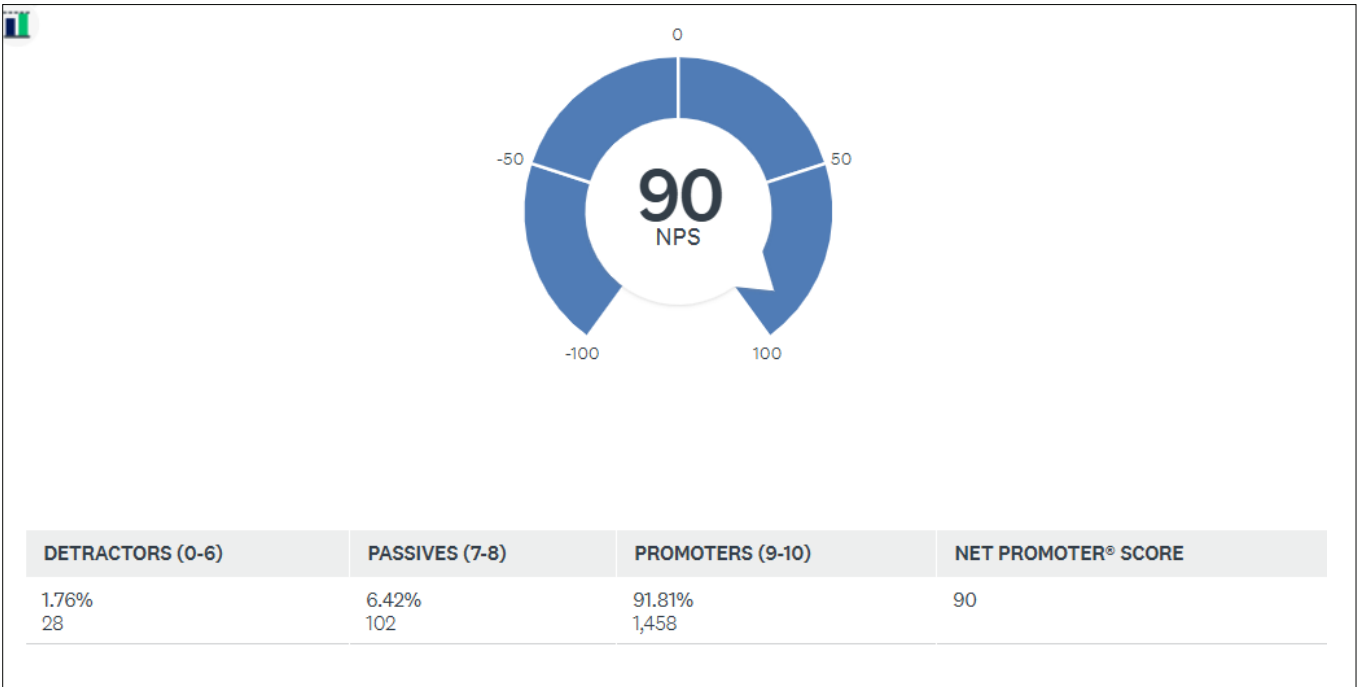
- Promoters respond with a score of 9 or 10. These participants are enthusiastic and happy with their experience with the program.
- Passives respond with a score of 7 or 8. These participants are satisfied with service but are not happy enough to be considered promoters.
- Detractors respond with scores 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. The developers of this method of analysis frame NPS:
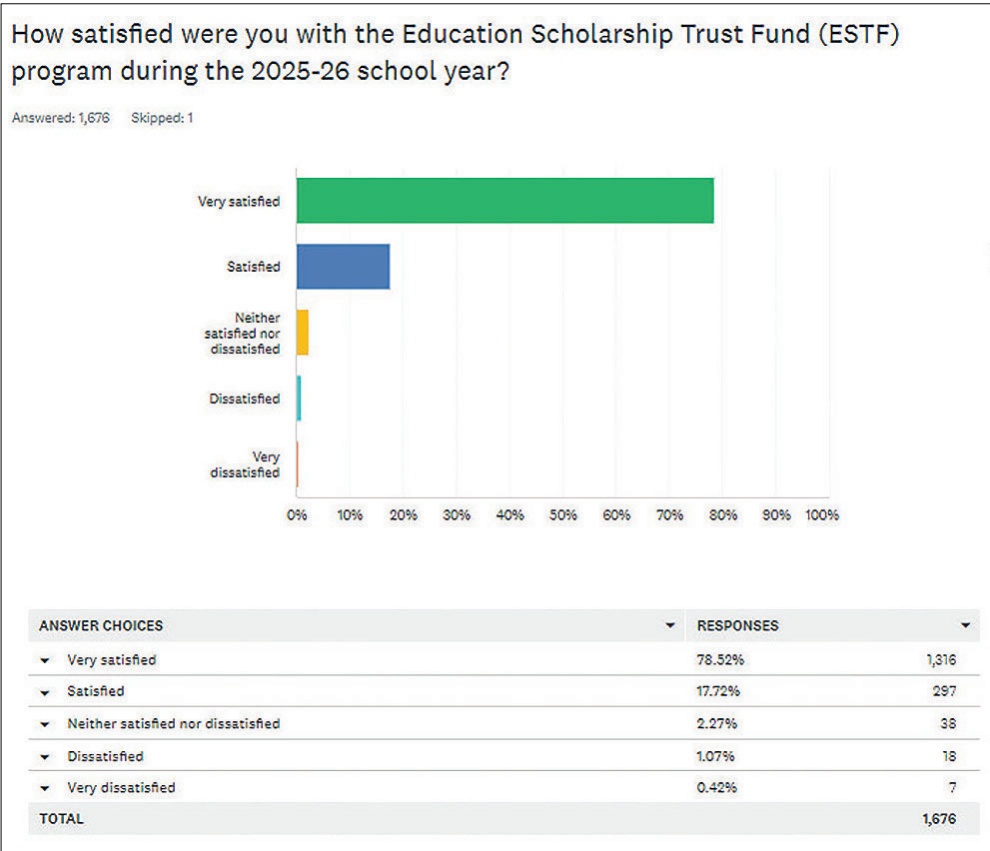
- Above 0 is good as there are more promoters than distractors.
- Above 20 is favorable.
- Above 50 is excellent.
- Above 80 is world class.

When asked how likely they were to recommend the ESTF program to others, 1,668 respondents (9 skipped) gave the program an NPS score of 90. There were 29 detractors (2%), 108 passives (6%) and 1,531 promoters (92%).

Graph 1: ESTF NPS for 2025-26 School Year:

DETRACTORS (0-6)	PASSIVES (7-8)	PROMOTERS (9-10)	NET PROMOTER® SCORE
1.76% 28	6.42% 102	91.81% 1,458	90

How satisfied were you with the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program during the 2025-26 school year?

Answered: 1,676   Skipped: 1

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very satisfied	78.52%	1,316
Satisfied	17.72%	297
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	2.27%	38
Dissatisfied	1.07%	18
Very dissatisfied	0.42%	7
TOTAL		1,676

Strengths of the Program

This NPS and satisfaction rating illustrate a marked improvement from the initial year of implementation. Respondents were particularly satisfied with the financial relief provided by the program, the flexibility in how ESTF funds could be used—such as for school tuition, tutoring and other supports. Student learning and well-being—along with the quality of customer service and the ease of accessing funds were also prevalent strengths of the program this year

"It's a wonderful program making choice possible for many families; thank you!"

"I have nothing but amazing things to say about this scholarship."

"(the best thing about this program is that it is) helping a mom like me who is disabled but wants more for their child."

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Financial Relief:

The $7,500 in financial relief available for educational expenses was overwhelmingly viewed as the strongest aspect of the ESTF program. Approximately 40% of respondents identified funding as the program's top benefit, and many others reinforced this by citing funding as a secondary strength with products/services purchased using ESTF funds as the primary strength. Families reported being able to "keep their children in private school" because of these funds, stabilizing the educational environment. Of families who achieved this stability with ESTF dollars, most were first-year participants, suggesting that while the opportunity to enroll in private school previously existed, the program increased families' comfort and confidence in doing so. Others reported a benefit to their family being able to purchase school supplies, technology, or pay for tutoring with ESTF funds rather than relying on their family budget.

> *"Being able to purchase a computer for the family"*
>
> *"Not having to pay tuition fees-- a break on my pockets!"*
>
> *"Having the freedom to add tutoring. Math tutoring, especially, is expensive but so helpful!"*
>
> *"Being able to continue my son on the path he started on. Private school education."*

Allowable Use of Funds:

Many families appreciated the flexibility and variety of services and products to enhance their child's education that ESTF funds could provide. Of the 1,417 open responses identifying the strengths of the ESTF program, 219 (15%) stated flexibility and variety as the best part of the program.

> *"Giving my children another opportunity for learning outside of the traditional schooling atmosphere"*
>
> *"My son being able to get vision therapy"*
>
> *"The best part is being able to teach my daughter at home."*
>
> *"Having Outschool classes & tutoring for my kids to pursue their academic interests, plus the technology (iPad, tablet, laptops) to support those online courses."*

Student Learning and Well-Being:

While only 4% of parents reported an improvement in student learning or well-being as a strength of the program, those that did reported joy in being able to watch their children achieve on grade-level, experience confidence in the classroom, and engage with academic material.

> *"Finally seen my son smile again, he was depressed and hated school. This opportunity changed all that and helped him finally make friends for the 1st time in the 8 school years."*
>
> *"I have been able to provide the correct testing and therapies that my daughter needs to help make sure she has a successful education."*
>
> *"My child/learner has complex needs that would not be met in a traditional classroom. I have been able to order instructional materials that are tailored to his interests, which sparked his interest in learning. This learner has avoidant behaviors but is very smart. So by ordering regulating material as well as custom material based on interest, we have been able to make great progress in learning. Additionally, the learner is often sick, and by at home educating, we don't have to worry about missing days or being absent, as in a traditional school setting."*

Administration of the Program:

The administration of the program was reported as a strength by 25% of respondents. The ease of application, paying invoices and the platforms used were noted specifically as strengths of the program. Many parents found the system simple and intuitive and there was a great deal of appreciation for customer support available.

"(It was a) smooth process overall from beginning to end."

"Very easy to use, website is good! We're very grateful"

"I can do everything online and without having to make calls or attend meetings. This allows me to fit this into my schedule."

Customer Service:

Respondents noted that while the process to apply and access funds or services was easy, when there were problems or questions, help was available. More than 80 parents (6%) described the customer service as the best aspect of the program.

"Once I understood the process it was very easy."

"Amazing customer service and support in everything that I needed help (with)."

"Very educational videos and zoom meetings to get help with everything from applying to submitting invoices."
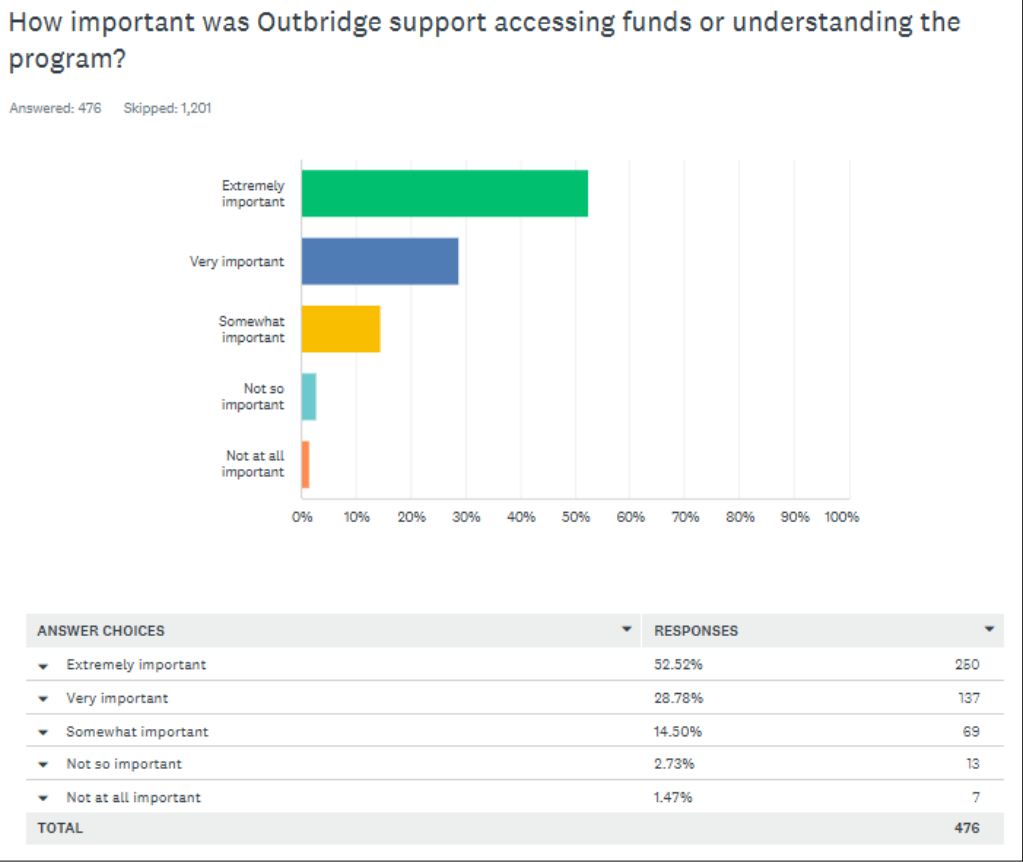
"The support is phenomenal, every time I contacted someone they seemed enthusiastic to help. This isn't just a job to them. They actually care… The encouragement was humane and more than is expected from an institution serving so many people."

Outbridge Support:

Outbridge was used again for the second year of implementation to support families participating in ESTF with the process of applying and using funds. Not all families interacted with Outbridge support, but for those that did, items were included on this survey to determine satisfaction with experiences with Outbridge. Approximately 470 families or 29% of respondents used Outbridge support navigating the ESTF program, and of those, 388 or 82% found Outbridge support extremely or very important to their success accessing funds or understanding the program. Only 20 respondents, or 5% found Outbridge support "not important." When asked how likely they were to recommend Outbridge support to other participants of the ESTF program, 469 respondents gave Outbridge support an NPS score of 69, which is excellent. There were 43 detractors (9%), 59 passives (13%), and 367 promoters (78%).

How important was Outbridge support accessing funds or understanding the program?

Answered: 476   Skipped: 1,201

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely important	52.52%	250
Very important	28.78%	137
Somewhat important	14.50%	69
Not so important	2.73%	13
Not at all important	1.47%	7
TOTAL		476

> "The ease of applying, using Outbridge and knowing my grandson is getting a better education than he was before thanks to this program."

Graph 4: Outbridge NPS for 2025-26 School Year

DETRACTORS (0-6)	PASSIVES (7-8)	PROMOTERS (9-10)	NET PROMOTER® SCORE
9.19%	12.61%	78.21%	69
43	59	366	
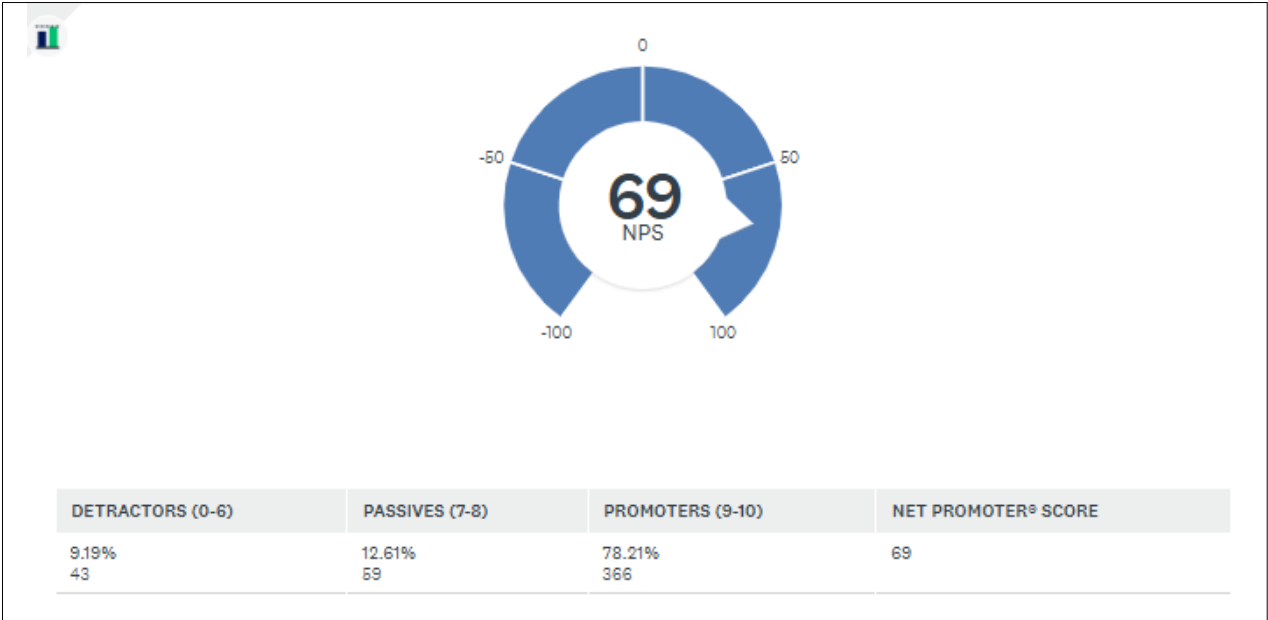
Opportunities to Improve the Program

When parents were asked to report the worst part of their experience with the ESTF program, less than 800 parents completed this open response question and of those, 43 or 5% reported how happy they were with the program. *"I am so grateful for the program, nothing is bad."*

Comments that only expressed satisfaction and did not mention an area for improvement are included in the report but are not counted when calculating the percentage of respondents who were dissatisfied with a specific topic.

"I cannot complain about free money, no complaints"

Communication and Customer Service:

While many parents reported satisfaction with the information provided about the program and customer support, not all participants had a positive experience with the administration and communication of program policies, leaving some opportunity to improve.

"It would have been nice to receive information about how exactly the program worked - such as money being received quarterly & how to purchase/order school supplies."

"It is hard to get a response email back."

"Not many vendors know the program and there needs to be a support or faq"

"Wording can be difficult to understand"

"Customer service does not get back to customers at all."

Administration:

Despite many parents being pleased with program administration, there were challenges related to the administration of the program that were described by 216 (29%) of respondents. They span a variety of topics including: technology, application process and requirements, and vendor approvals.

Technology:

Challenges and confusion resulted from a variety of platforms used to implement the ESTF program which respondents reported creating interface errors and confusion regarding which platform to use for what activity and process. The most commonly reported point of dissatisfaction was difficulty related to uploading documents.

"We had trouble getting the right document from our children's healthcare provider for verification. The website wasn't specific as to what form they required and kept rejecting the forms the healthcare provider sent us"

"Being able to submit the right proof of a "bill" for tuition; the drag and drop option wasn't working for me (as I had an email bill) and it took me hours to figure out that I needed to convert something to a PDF for it to accept it"

"(The worst part has been) Uploading invoices and supporting documents to Class Wallet; the preferred method is screenshot. I had been frustrated before figuring this out."

Application Procedures:

Application Procedures were also reported as a challenge for families who would prefer for the application for the next school year to be automatic and more streamlined.

"The application process was difficult and not very clear."

Vendor Approvals:

Another common difficulty was determining approvals from vendors and reporting inconsistencies between the same service from one quarter to the next.

> *"The seemingly moving target of getting invoices approved. It seems like the team managing this process follows different criteria for approvals, as I've submitted MANY invoices identically and weren't always approved."*

A lack of clarity around why certain schools/vendors were approved, while others that weren't approved created dissatisfaction and frustration.

> *"(the worst part was) Them not approving the school our children attend to be service providers. They were discriminated against by the SC State Department of Education."*

Approved Use of Funds/Vendors:

While some parents considered the variety of products and services that could be funded through ESTF dollars a strength of the program, 202 (27%) were frustrated by what was not allowable and what vendors needed to be used. School uniforms, transportation, school lunch and field trips were most frequently described as weaknesses of the program. While school uniforms and transportation are allowable, the required uniform for some students is sold from an unapproved vendor making it allowable, yet inaccessible. The same challenge was described when attempting to pay for transportation. School lunches, field trip fees and extracurricular programming (specialized sport or art training) are not allowable use of ESTF funds, and some parents reported dissatisfaction with that.

"realizing that we couldn't go anywhere to use the money, only approved vendors. We were hoping things like Ballet class would be covered."

"it was difficult to tell if my educational vendor was "real" -- there was no address, no identifier to verify the location"

"I couldn't use the allocated fund as I projected for my son. (sic)"

"...I wanted to be able to pay for my child's extracurricular trainings. For example, he plays a school sport but some of the players train on the weekend a specialty coach. That coach is not censored through the school so I wasn't able to pay him using the funds."

"We can't use it for the tuition for dance or golf or art supplies."

"The worst part has been the lack of options for vendors (which I understand we are still early in the program). And also because of trying to use a specific reading tutor for my son. She applied back in July 2025 and STILL has not been approved. She has reached out and so have I. Class Wallet keeps saying they haven't received her background check from the state and the state says they never received the request to run the background check from Classwallet. She has the receipt and everything to show she paid and sent everything off on her side. I am still having to pay out of pocket for these weekly sessions, for most of the school supplies and for the uniforms. This will be a great program and I am excited about how well my son is doing, but unfortunately it has been very costly for me out of my own pocket when I have plenty of funds sitting there."

"Trying to get vendors approved! PLEASE HIRE SOMEONE that this is the sole purpose of their job. VENDOR APPROVAL"

"Having to resubmit invoices repeatedly due to rejection, when previous ones submitted without issue" "I am not as tech savvy as most, I struggled a little with the sign ins, navigating the website and downloading my information to qualify."

"It is difficult to get national brand uniforms paid for, such as Lands End or Athleta"

"Transportation does not allow outside vendors , it has to be through the school and my son does not offer transportations so I'm am paying for Lyft everyday, which is expensive."

"Why is the ESTF micromanaging to the point that the program is difficult for those using it? Students who need more educational opportunities are being denied those options. Equestrian Science was denied as being a vendor because it "doesn't match the scope and sequence of the program". The Governor's School that specializes in agriculture offers equestrian science, but not every child is old enough for the program or parents don't want to have their child live away from home for high school. When trying to utilize the option for extracurriculars through the school district the school district doesn't know how to categorize some students and what legally is available since its not specifically listed in legislation..."

Some parents reported that they would like to use funds in 4K settings. While South Carolina offers a variety of free, state-funded 4K programs for families at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, or for children at risk of not being ready for kindergarten, including Head Start 4K, families who qualify for ESTF may not be able to access these programs because the ESTF financial threshold is 300% of poverty. It is recommended that CERDEP eligibility be expanded to align with ESTF financial threshold, or that ESTF funds be approved for use in 4K settings.

Vendor Charges:

Respondents reported that charges for private school tuition, or school supplies were more expensive than if payments were made without ESTF funding procedures.

(The worst part of the program is) "Paying more than the others that pay cash."

"Some needed items were not covered, or were much more expensive in the market place."

"We thought our funds would go further, but when the school found out we had received the ESTF scholarship, they no longer gave us a previous discount. We would have preferred to have the option of reimbursement so that we can choose how to spend those funds without schools setting prices based on what they know families are receiving."

"The costs of supplies with vendors is more expensive than outright purchases from the same vendors."

"That (the worst part of the program) would have to be that the school has access to the amount that we are getting before we do. They knew how much my son was getting before I did and raised the amount of tuition to match the amount my son was awarded. Before the amount my son was awarded would have paid for the tuition and the before/after school care that I need since I am a single parent."

Wait Time:

Two hundred and thirty-five (31%) parents were dissatisfied with the length of time for acceptance to the ESTF program, for approval for items/services, or approval of a desired vendor to be approved to participate in the program. Waiting for funds limited opportunities to enroll in online classes before they were full and paying for tuition out of pocket before the funds were available was a challenge for some families.

"Order approvals take very long- in the webinar, it stated that it takes 2-5 business days. I have orders that have taken over 15 business days to be approved."

"…some families can't afford to pay and wait on you guys to pay back I think you guys should provide a debit card for that. I also there should be more supplies available for kids like I could purchase pencil pouches and I also could purchase protection for electronics."

"It would be very convenient if we could opt to have the entire amount just sent to the school for tuition at the beginning of the year. Maybe parents who are paying schools directly could have that option?"

Amount of Funds:

The overwhelming response to satisfaction with the ESTF program illustrates how pleased most families were to have $7,500 to offset educational costs this school year, and there was some dissatisfaction with the amount of funds.

"(We)Need a little bit more funds for materials. With $7500 tuition did not have any left over for supplies."

"The amount doesn't fully cover for middle and high school level grades (tuition)."

"I wish the scholarship was larger."

For the 2026-27 school year, there is a planned increase in funding per family, which will likely address this issue.

Parent Pressures:

Roughly 7% of respondents reported feeling anxious while learning the process and platforms of the ESTF program. Some nerves were the result of using technology to apply for the program or use funds, and some were simply the result of uncertainty with the new program.

"Being new to the whole process (was the worst part of the program)."

"not knowing what to expect (was the worst part)--much better as I go!"

"Learning what and how to submit invoices for tuition payment took a bit of learning."

"I'm not always sure what to do on the computer.."

While rare, some parents were concerned about the impact their participation in ESTF had on the community at large.

"(I) Wonder if my participation hurts the public schools."

Discretion:

Some parents reported feeling self-conscious because there is a financial component to ESTF eligibility and the school community would have knowledge about their financial status.

"A lot of parents work at the school and I would rather do a reimbursement to keep the financial assistance discreet."

"Feeling a little singled out among school families... I can feel aware that we are one of the 10 percent of families at the school who qualify for the aid, and that can feel a little intimidating... My family just felt grateful for the award, so it put us in an awkward position."

Policy Considerations of Administration Practices

Employee Benefits:

Results of the parent satisfaction survey alerted staff to a practice used by at least one private school that is worthy of consideration to ensure the ESTF program is administered in alignment with the priorities and intent of the law. It is the practice of some private schools to offer tuition for employees' students as a benefit, and the tuition break is covered by the school. At least one school has required employees with children at the school to apply for ESTF and use the funds for tuition, so the tuition break is now covered by ESTF funds, saving the school money but not increasing the benefit to the family.

"I received no benefit since the covered expenses were previously covered by my employer."

"To maintain my education benefit at work, I was required by them to put 100% of the funds toward tuition and could not put any towards any other educational expenses."

It is worth state level administrative time to determine if this process in aligned with the goals of ESTF and take steps to ensure that administration of ESTF funds benefits the priority stakeholder first.

Some parents reported a desire to access the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children (ECENC) in addition to the ESTF program. Many parents have been applying or were advised to apply for both programs and select one as law prohibits participation in both. This process can create confusion, and parents in need of funds for children with complex needs will be forced to choose between two programs they qualify for. In cases when parents did attempt to utilize both programs and it was discovered, rectifying the problem required administrative time at the local level and the family experienced a loss of funding.

> *"I'd hoped to have access to a specialty school for my child, but because SPED students cannot stack the ESTF with the exceptional needs credit it makes the tuition still too much. Other states also allow more funding for SPED students that I hoped we would have access to in order to enable access to those additional educational opportunities. My child still needed access to more than what the school was providing, and this allowed that to happen to some degree."*

It is worth time considering if the ESTF and ECENC programs can be braided for families who qualify for both. Another option is for administrators of both programs to work together to identify families approved for both at the state level. They could then help those families choose one program before they plan their budgets, since currently they are legally allowed to use only one supplement.

Recommendations

From the research completed to determine parent satisfaction with the ESTF program, several recommendations have emerged:

1. Administer the survey once to families regardless of how many children are participating in the ESTF to reduce burden on parents and have cleaner response rates to determine reliability of findings. Additionally, it is recommended that EOC staff convene a group of parents participating in ESTF to review survey items and administration instructions to improve completion rate.

2. While some parents reported dissatisfaction not being able to braid ESTF funds with other scholarship funds for students with disabilities, EOC staff completes school approval processes for the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children program and completes an evaluation annually. Because of this unique perspective, staff has been made aware that some students are receiving both grants, which is expressly prohibited in the law. It is the recommendation that SCDE staff implementing the ESTF program connect with Exceptional SC staff and determine a process to identify and prohibit students from accessing both funds, or that using both funding sources be made allowable for families. Either of these options will protect agency staff and families from violating the law.

3. Home instruction is expressly prohibited in Act 11 as it was in Act 8, yet some surveyed parents report satisfaction being able to use ESTF funds for homeschool curriculum to provide home instruction to their children. This allowable use of funds creates confusion, so it is recommended that homeschooling be an allowable choice for ESTF or that homeschool curriculum be removed from the allowable use of funds.

4. Dissatisfaction was reported at not being able to purchase school uniforms, which is allowable, from unapproved vendors that sell the uniforms specific to private school. The cost of items at approved vendors compared to other, unapproved vendors was also noted in open responses. It is recommended that the SCDE convene a group of parent participants to: make recommendations about vendors and the process for purchasing items, and review communication (processes and messages) regarding approved or unapproved items.

5. Consider vendor and educational providers obligations to families in SC by participating in the program and require certain behavior to participate. For example, private schools requiring employee participation to offset the cost of a tuition benefit to the employee family should be considered. While the curriculum cannot be influenced by ESTF administrators, participation agreements can be made that do not influence school programming so that families benefit in a noticeable way from this program. Similarly, reports that approved venders charge more for items through the Classwallet marketplace than as an individual purchase not associated with the ESTF program should be investigated, and if found true, regulated through ESTF participation agreements.

6. It is recommended that 4K tuition be considered as an allowable use of funds, or that CERDEP eligibility be expanded to align with the ESTF financial threshold with students under 200% of poverty served first.

Appendix

Appendix A: 2025-26 School Year ESTF Survey Items:

Survey items and instructions (in SurveyMonkey)

Please complete this survey designed to measure parent satisfaction of the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program during the 2025-26 school year. Your open and honest feedback will be used to improve the program in the future. You and your child's identity will remain anonymous when survey results are shared with the General Assembly. Your words may be quoted to share your experience, but any identifying details like names and locations will be omitted to protect privacy. Your feedback is important for improvement of the program.

Please complete a separate survey for each child accessing ESTF funds one time. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Thank you for your participation!

Section I:

1. Is this your first year participating in the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program

Yes   No

2. How many children do you have participating in the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program? (Please complete this survey separately for each child's experience, so we can understand the program experience for each individual child participating)

Enter number

3. How likely are you to recommend the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program to others?* (10 options)

4. How satisfied were you with the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program during the 2024-25 school year?* (10 options)

Section II:

5. 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.)

6. Overall, how satisfied are you with (use of funds) so far?

7. Do you see an improvement in your student's academic achievement that you believe is the result of (use of funds)? (yes, no, I'm not sure)

8. Have you used Outbridge support during your participation in the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program? If yes, 2 Outbridge items:

   a. How important was Outbridge support accessing funds or understanding the program?

b. How likely would you be to recommend Outbridge support to another family participating in the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program?

Section III.

   9. What was the best part of your experience with Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program this school year? (text box)

   10. What was the worst part of your experience with the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF)program this school year? (text box)

   11. What else should we know about your experience with the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program, but haven't asked about? (text box)

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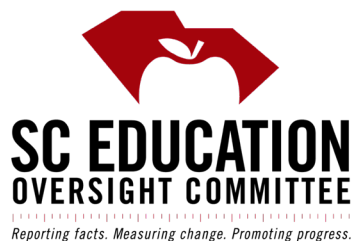
The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC) is an independent, nonpartisan group of 18 educators, business people, and elected officials appointed by the legislature and governor. The EOC enacts the South Carolina Education Accountability Act of 1998, which sets standards for improving the 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.