



# 2025 CYCLICAL REVIEW OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

## *Accountability Advisory Committee Report*

---

December 2025

---

Prepared by The National Center for the  
Improvement of Educational Assessment



**Center for  
Assessment**

National Center for the Improvement  
of Educational Assessment  
Dover, New Hampshire



2025 CYCLICAL REVIEW  
OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S  
ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM  
*Accountability Advisory  
Committee Report*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 4**

- Design Foundations: Users & Uses ..... 4
- Goals and Design Principles ..... 5
- Committee Recommendations ..... 6
  - Indicators ..... 6
  - Aggregation and Identification ..... 7
  - Reporting and Communication ..... 7
  - Resources and Supports ..... 8

**INTRODUCTION ..... 9**

- Figure 1: Profile of the South Carolina Graduate ..... 10

**SOUTH CAROLINA ACCOUNTABILITY  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ..... 10**

- Committee Composition ..... 10
  - Table 1: 2025 South Carolina Accountability  
Advisory Committee Membership ..... 11
- Role of the Committee ..... 12
  - Table 2: Summary of 2025 AAC Meetings ..... 12

**GOALS AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES ..... 13**

- Goals ..... 13
- Design Principles ..... 14

**ADDITIONAL OUTREACH ..... 15**

- Focused Convenings ..... 15
- Virtual Listening Sessions ..... 15
- Statewide Survey ..... 16

**SYSTEM COMPONENTS ..... 16**

- South Carolina’s Current Accountability System ..... 16
  - Accountability Indicators ..... 16
  - Palmetto Gold for Elementary  
and Middle Schools ..... 17
  - Palmetto Silver for Elementary  
and Middle Schools ..... 17
  - Palmetto Gold for High Schools ..... 17
  - Palmetto Silver for High Schools ..... 17



2025 CYCLICAL REVIEW  
OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S  
ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM  
*Accountability Advisory  
Committee Report*

**COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ..... 18**

- Indicators ..... 18
  - Academic Achievement..... 18
  - Student Progress ..... 18
  - Multilingual Learners’ Progress ..... 18
  - Graduation Rate, College and Career  
Readiness, and High School Student Success..... 19
  - Cross-Cutting.....20
- Aggregation and Identification ..... 21
- Table 3: Summary of School Designations ..... 21
- Reporting and Communications ..... 22
- Resources and Supports ..... 23

**NEXT STEPS ..... 24**

**CONCLUSION ..... 25**

**APPENDICES ..... 26**

# 2025 CYCLICAL REVIEW OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

## *Accountability Advisory Committee Report*



### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The South Carolina Code of Law ([Section 59-18-910](#)) calls for the Education Oversight Committee (EOC), working with the South Carolina State Board of Education (SBE), and a broad-based group of stakeholders, to conduct a comprehensive cyclical review of the accountability system. A principle charge of the cyclical review is to consider how the state's accountability system reflects evidence that students have developed the skills and characteristics outlined in the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.

Pursuant to this legislative mandate, the EOC and the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) convened the South Carolina Accountability Advisory Committee (AAC), comprising members who represented the interests and priorities of various educational constituents in South Carolina. The EOC and SCDE contracted with the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (the Center) to facilitate the cyclical review process.

AAC members participated in an orientation session in April of 2025, then met a total of five times from August to December 2025. The primary focus of the AAC's work was to identify educational policy priorities, review key requirements and elements of the current accountability system, and, if deemed necessary, recommend changes to the accountability system.

This document contains the recommendations of the AAC. It starts with foundational priorities for South Carolina's accountability system, then delves into key components including system indicators, weighting and aggregation methods, school designations, reporting, and supports for school improvement. Next, it includes a summary of the supplemental outreach activities that informed the AAC's work. These activities included listening sessions, focused topical convenings, and a statewide survey. The report ends with next steps for the EOC and SCDE.

### **Design Foundations: Users & Uses**

The committee discussed the various users and related priority uses of accountability results in South Carolina. Discussion was wide-reaching given the broad range of people interested in school performance. These themes arose as critical feedback:

- **Reports should be accessible to all users.** This means that the way the reports are designed and talked about, as well as the resources accompanying reports, should be easy to find and understand. It also means actively reaching out to distribute reports to audiences that may otherwise have difficulty accessing the information.
- **Users want to know what to do with information in the reports.** Identify and make clear to users appropriate actions for continuous improvement.

- **Reports should be designed to support these priority uses**

- Information should be **comparable** within and across years. This means that results should, to the extent practicable, be comparable across schools within a given year. It also means that multiple years of data should be included in reports so that users can easily see and better understand trends.
- For reports to be comparable within a year, **users may appreciate being able explore results for “similar schools.”** Such a use case necessitates a definition for “similar,” which was not in the purview of the committee’s work.
- Understanding that a key priority of accountability systems is to identify where there are educational needs in order to direct resources and supports to those schools and groups of students, report cards should also **highlight and celebrate successes** for specific outcomes (e.g., high growth or graduation rate) and for combined overall outcomes.

## Goals and Design Principles

Explicit goals and intended outcomes should guide the design of any accountability system. These goals articulate at a high level what the system is intended to accomplish. As part of the 2020 cyclical review process, the AAC devoted a significant amount of time to discuss and refine the goals listed below for the South Carolina accountability system.

The South Carolina accountability system should both reflect and incent:

- Attainment of knowledge, skills, and characteristics that support the components of the *Profile of the South Carolina Graduate*,
- Elimination of access and equity gaps across the state with respect to both academic performance and the broader set of trans-academic skills, and
- Improvement of student learning via dissemination of clear, actionable information to help districts, schools, and families evaluate and improve the effectiveness of their programs.

Design principles and priorities also inform the development of the accountability system, serving as guides along the path of accountability system design and implementation. Accountability design decisions, however, always involve optimization under constraints that require tradeoffs between competing priorities. Given that reality, the AAC considered a number of competing priorities in accountability design. While consensus was not an expectation, a majority of committee members agreed that the following design principles should be prioritized in the South Carolina accountability system:

- While most committee members preferred a **balance between simplicity and comprehensiveness**, some prioritized one over the other. All members agreed that transparency is a top priority.
- The majority of committee members felt that South Carolina should have **one accountability system that meets all federal and state requirements** instead of multiple systems to pursue state-specific priorities outside of the constraints of the federal system. Many committee members also agreed that a hybrid system, in which some but not all elements in the system satisfy federal requirements, is also a promising approach. Such a system requires some decision-making about how tightly to couple state and federal requirements.



- Most committee members agreed that the system’s ability ***to produce meaningful comparisons within the same year*** is more important than allowing flexibility in how schools earn points. Such comparisons would ideally allow users to examine performance for similar schools. As noted in one of the recommendations for intended use, no definition for “similar” currently exists.
- The committee members also largely preferred that the state ***pursue changes to the system with measured caution***, taking time to study some components more fully before determining if/how they should be included in the accountability system in favor of the ability to compare results over time. Relatedly, members emphasized the importance of reporting outcomes across years to enable such longitudinal comparisons.
- Given a priority to take time to study components before making changes, committee members generally preferred ***mid- to longer-term implementation timelines for system change recommendations***, compared to moving quickly.
- The committee largely preferred ***approaches or changes that minimize - or at least do not dramatically increase - burden for schools, districts, or report card users***. The collection of additional information, if pursued, should ***prioritize the ability to enhance understanding of school context***.
- The committee widely agreed that ***report cards should be accessible to a wide audience, prioritizing a simple interface that can translate from more complex measures and that explains what results mean and why they matter***.

Subsequent discussions about the South Carolina accountability system components, supports, and resources were grounded in and connected back to these agreed-upon goals and design principles, as well as to considerations of the needs of users of the system.

## Committee Recommendations

The committee’s recommendations organize into four categories:

- Indicators
- Aggregations and Identification
- Reporting and Communication
- Resources and Supports

### Indicators

Indicators are the components comprising the accountability system. They reflect priorities for the accountability system through what they measure and how. South Carolina’s accountability system entails a total of eight indicators: academic achievement, student progress, multilingual learners’ progress, preparing for success, school climate, college and career readiness, high school student success, and graduation rate. Some of these indicators apply only to high schools.

The committee had these recommendations pertaining to system indicators.

- Recommendation 1: Explore alternatives for incentivizing test participation.
- Recommendation 2: Study the impact of student progress with respect to prior performance.
- Recommendation 3: Promote accurate understanding and use of student progress scores.
- Recommendation 4: Adjust the relative weight of the multilingual learner progress indicator.
- Recommendation 5: Examine whether the testing window can be expanded.

- [Recommendation 6](#): Enhance reporting of multilingual learners' progress.
- [Recommendation 7](#): Explore approaches to increase the influence of the employability credential.
- [Recommendation 8](#): Recognize the seal of biliteracy in the college and career readiness indicator.
- [Recommendation 9](#): Strengthen reporting on college and career readiness.
- [Recommendation 10](#): Engage in ongoing research to validate and improve the college and career readiness indicators.
- [Recommendation 11](#): Study alternatives for a more comprehensive and balanced assessment system.

### ***Aggregation and Identification***

Outcomes from each indicator are aggregated using a 100-point index system which assigns weight to each indicator. Based on its overall score, each school is assigned one of five ratings: Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average, or Unsatisfactory. These ratings are also applied to each indicator based on that indicator's score. Additionally, per requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the overall scores for schools and for student subgroups (with at least 20 students) are used to produce these federal designations:

- Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI): lowest performing 5% of Title I schools based on overall scores; any high school with a graduation rate below 70%
- Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI): consistently underperforming student groups
- Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI): student groups with overall scores below the CSI fifth percentile threshold.

Finally, South Carolina also identifies Palmetto Gold and Silver schools based on indicator and/or overall ratings.

The committee had these recommendations pertaining to aggregation and identification.

- [Recommendation 12](#): Explore alternatives to create a more coherent and streamlined set of accountability designations.
- [Recommendation 13](#): Review and potentially revise accountability performance standards.
- [Recommendation 14](#): Adjust the relative weight of accountability indicators.

### ***Reporting and Communication***

The topic of reporting and communications was prevalent in every AAC meeting. Members understood the importance of attending to how outcome data from the accountability system are presented, how the system is described, and how results are communicated.

The committee had these recommendations pertaining to reporting and communication.

- [Recommendation 15](#): Continue to invest in dashboards and data visualizations with a goal of enabling a wide variety of users to access, understand, and use the available information.
- [Recommendation 16](#): Produce ancillary report materials and professional development to ensure that users can understand and use the information in the reports as intended.

### ***Resources and Supports***

Ultimately, accountability systems are intended to inform actions and decisions to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for students. Accountability system results should ideally be coherently connected to school improvement activities that are directly informed by those outcomes (e.g., resources are directed to schools identified for CSI in order to facilitate needs assessments; school improvement planning; interventions are directed toward student populations contributing to a TSI or ATSI identification).

The committee had these recommendations pertaining to resources and supports.

- Recommendation 17: Continue to route school improvement activities through district offices.
- Recommendation 18: Conduct research to look for shared characteristics of schools with federal support designations and those that exit such designations.
- Recommendation 19: The state should seek partnerships with institutions of higher education, parents, and community members, and others in efforts to continuously improve its support model.



# 2025 CYCLICAL REVIEW OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

## *Accountability Advisory Committee Report*



### INTRODUCTION

The South Carolina Code of Law calls for the Education Oversight Committee (EOC), working with the South Carolina State Board of Education (SBE), and a broad-based group of stakeholders, to conduct a comprehensive cyclical review of the accountability system. A principle charge of the cyclical review is to consider how the state's accountability system reflects evidence that students have developed the skills and characteristics outlined in the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.

Specifically, [Section 59-18-910](#) of the South Carolina Code of Law states:

Beginning in 2020, the Education Oversight Committee, working with the State Board of Education and a broad based group of stakeholders, selected by the Education Oversight Committee, shall conduct a comprehensive cyclical review of the accountability system at least every five years and shall provide the General Assembly with a report on the findings and recommended actions to improve the accountability system and to accelerate improvements in student and school performance. The stakeholders must include the State Superintendent of Education and the Governor, or the Governor's designee. The other stakeholders include, but are not limited to, parents, business and industry persons, community leaders, and educators. The cyclical review must include recommendations of a process for determining if students are graduating with the world class skills and life and career characteristics of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate<sup>1</sup> to be successful in postsecondary education and in careers. The accountability system needs to reflect evidence that students have developed these skills and characteristics.

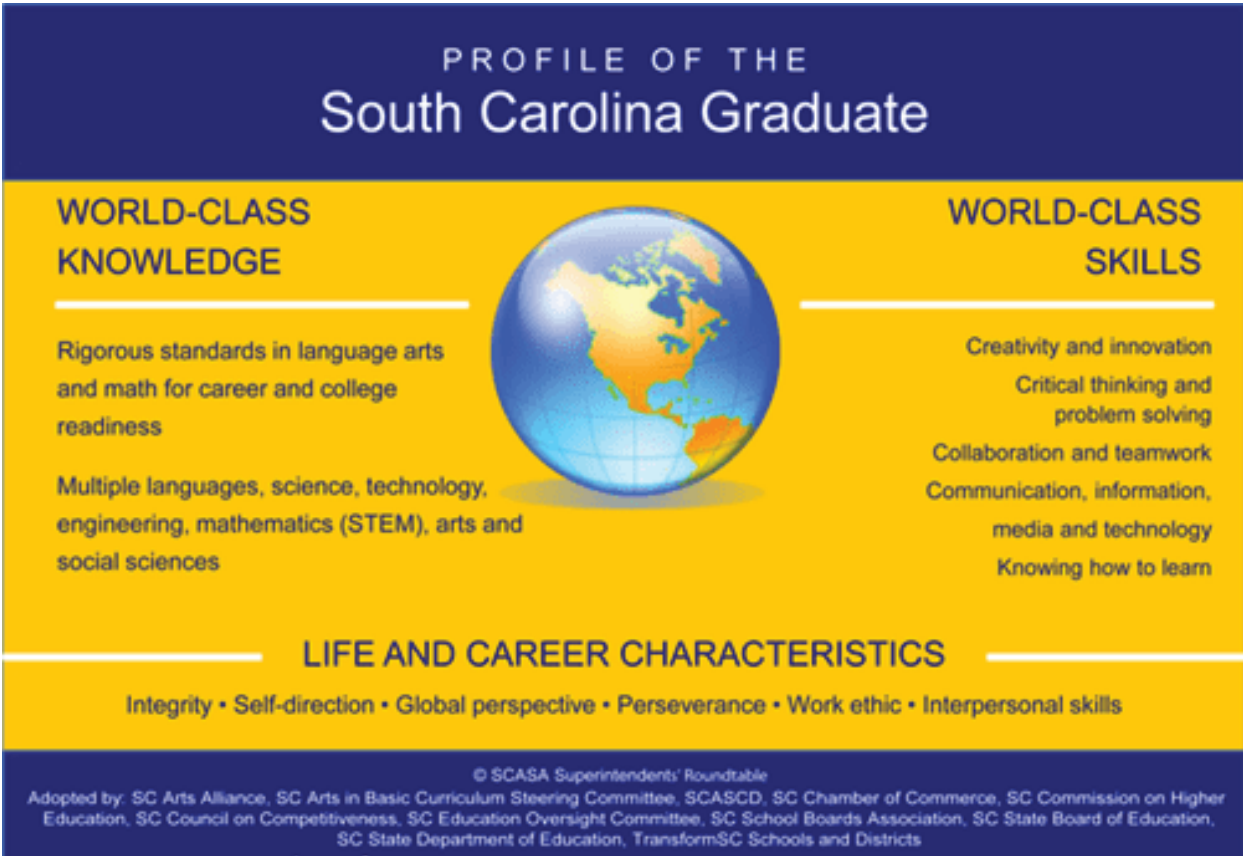
Pursuant to this legislative mandate, the EOC and the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) convened the South Carolina Accountability Advisory Committee (AAC), composed of members who represented the interests and priorities of various groups interested in the South Carolina public education system. The EOC and SCDE contracted with the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (the Center) to facilitate the cyclical review process. Chris Domaleski and Laura Pinsonneault served as facilitators and prepared this report.

This report is a summary of the cyclical review process and resulting recommendations. It includes a description of the Accountability Advisory Committee (AAC), the goals and design priorities agreed upon by the AAC, and recommendations by the AAC pertaining to components of the accountability system. Notably, this second cyclical review process, unencumbered by the challenges encountered in the 2020 cyclical review resulting from the COVID pandemic, included additional outreach to gather feedback and perspective from varied constituent groups. The report also describes key

<sup>1</sup> See Figure 1 for a visual summary of the knowledge, skills, and characteristics in the *Profile of a South Carolina Graduate*.

takeaways of this supplemental outreach. As required by the legislation, the intended audience of this report is the South Carolina General Assembly.

**Figure 1: Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.**



## SOUTH CAROLINA ACCOUNTABILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

This section describes how the South Carolina Accountability Advisory Committee (AAC) was constituted and chronicles the process that the committee went through to evaluate and make recommendations regarding the current accountability system.

### Committee Composition

The membership requirements of Section 59-18-910 stipulate that the AAC should include members that represent the interests and priorities of various parties interested in public education in South Carolina. Building on the experience of the initial cyclical review in 2020, the Center recommended a committee of 20-25 members comprising state leadership, schools, districts, advocacy groups, and the broader community, including parents. The EOC assembled the committee to fulfill the recommendations and legislative requirements. Table 1 lists the AAC composition. [Appendix A](#) provides a meeting schedule and attendance record for the webinars and meetings in 2025.

**Table 1: 2025 South Carolina Accountability Advisory Committee Membership**

| COMMITTEE MEMBER           | ROLE AND ORGANIZATION   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Whitney Broderick</b>   | Teacher, Anderson County School District 1  |
| <b>Jennifer Cauthen</b>    | Director of Special Projects, Fairfield County School District  |
| <b>Michelle Caya</b>       | Assistant VP of Academic Programs, Trident Technical College  |
| <b>Dee Christopher</b>     | Superintendent, Anderson County School District 4   |
| <b>Peter DeLorme</b>       | Community Member  |
| <b>Matthew Ferguson</b>    | Superintendent, Darlington County Schools   |
| <b>Janet Graham</b>        | School Board Member, Horry County Schools   |
| <b>Josie Kate Haupfear</b> | Director of Secondary Instruction and Career and Technical Education, Laurens County School District 56 |
| <b>Patrick Kelly</b>       | AP U.S. Government and Politics Teachers, Richland School District 2                                    |
| <b>Celestine LaVan</b>     | Executive Director of Elementary Schools, Beaufort County Schools                                       |
| <b>Sallie R. Lee</b>       | Retired Educator and Former Member, State Board of Education  |
| <b>Monique McDaniels</b>   | VP of Community and Workforce Development, Goodwill Industries of Upstate/Midlands South Carolina       |
| <b>Laura McKinney</b>      | Senior VP of Talent and Workforce Development, Columbia Chamber of Commerce                             |
| <b>Ashton Pearson</b>      | Executive Director, Midlands Business Leadership Group  |
| <b>Buffy Roberts</b>       | Associate Superintendent, Office of Accountability, Charleston County School District                   |
| <b>Frank Rodriguez</b>     | Superintendent, Beaufort County Schools   |
| <b>Yalonda Ross-Davis</b>  | Parent  |
| <b>Terrye Seckinger</b>    | Commissioner, South Carolina Commission on Higher Education   |
| <b>Molly Tuck</b>          | Interim Director of Research and Evaluation, SC First Steps   |
| <b>Ellen Weaver</b>        | State Superintendent  |
| <b>Audrey White-Garner</b> | Principal, Hopkins Elementary School, Richland 1  |

## Role of the Committee

The purpose of the AAC was, in partnership with the EOC, to make recommendations to inform the work of state leaders working to continuously improve the design and implementation of South Carolina's school accountability system, while ensuring the system complies with federal and state requirements. In service of that purpose, the AAC first focused on identifying the primary users and appropriate use cases for information from the accountability system. The group also focused on identifying educational policy priorities, reviewing specific elements of the accountability system, discussing system design, and considering options for implementation and support activities including data collection and reporting opportunities. The group also reviewed feedback gathered in ancillary outreach activities described in the Additional Outreach section of this report. Throughout the review process, AAC members were encouraged to offer innovative ideas for improving the existing accountability system, including changes to existing components, new reporting practices, and training and support activities and resources; they were advised not to consider prior practice as a constraint. At the same time, the committee attended to critical policy, technical, and operational considerations to ensure that even as the system may change, it remains coherent, defensible, useful, feasible, and compliant with state and federal requirements.

## Meeting Cadence

The AAC convened remotely in April 2025 for an orientation webinar to learn about the cyclical review process, the current South Carolina accountability system, and requirements of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The official cyclical review kicked off in August with a remote meeting followed by four in-person meetings.

Table 2 lists the dates and summarized topics addressed at each AAC meeting.

**Table 2: Summary of 2025 AAC Meetings**

| MEETING                           | DATE            | TOPICS ADDRESSED  |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| <b>AAC Meeting #1 (remote)</b>    | August 6, 2025  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Overview of accountability cyclical review process</li><li>• Fundamentals of school accountability</li><li>• Review and discussion of statewide survey feedback</li></ul>   |
| <b>AAC Meeting #2 (in-person)</b> | August 26, 2025 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Initial discussion of accountability system users and use cases</li><li>• Initial discussion of design priorities and principles for the system</li><li>• Review of feedback from focused convenings</li></ul>  |
| <b>AAC Meeting #3 (in-person)</b> | October 9, 2025 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction of approaches to including components in the accountability system</li><li>• Discussion of proposed structure for the cyclical review report</li><li>• Discussion and affirmation of accountability users and primary use cases and design priorities</li><li>• Review of accountability indicators<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Academic Achievement</li><li>- Preparing for Success</li><li>- College and Career Readiness</li><li>- High School Student Success</li></ul></li></ul> |

**Table 2 (continued)**

| MEETING                               | DATE                 | TOPICS ADDRESSED   |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| <b>AAC Meeting #4<br/>(in-person)</b> | November 12,<br>2025 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion about through-year assessment recommendations</li> <li>• Review of accountability indicators               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student Progress</li> <li>- Graduation Rate</li> <li>- Multilingual Learner's Progress</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Discussion of indicator aggregations, school designations, and school recognition</li> </ul> |
| <b>AAC Meeting #5<br/>(in-person)</b> | December 3,<br>2025  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of recommendations to date</li> <li>• Indicator weighting</li> <li>• Reporting and supports</li> <li>• School improvement activities in South Carolina</li> <li>• Evaluating performance expectations</li> </ul>   |

## GOALS AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES

### Goals

The design of any accountability system should be guided by explicit goals and intended outcomes. Clear goal statements both articulate at a high level what the system is intended to accomplish and serve to direct and help prioritize design decisions about the system. The AAC devoted a significant amount of time during the 2020 review to discuss and refine the goals of the South Carolina accountability system described below.

#### The South Carolina accountability system should both reflect and incent:

- **Attainment of knowledge, skills, and characteristics that support the components of the *Profile of the South Carolina Graduate*.**

South Carolina's vision for its education system is encapsulated in the *Profile of the South Carolina Graduate* (the Profile). The Profile serves as the guiding framework that motivated and informed the committee's discussion. The 2020 committee emphasized the importance of ensuring the state accountability system is tied to college and career readiness as expressed in the Profile.

- **Elimination of access and equity gaps across the state with respect to both academic performance and the broader set of trans-academic skills.**

The 2020 committee's commitment to promoting equity with the accountability system cannot be overstated. The need for the accountability system to identify and signal gaps in access and equity in the state for various student groups continues to be critical.

- **Improvement of student learning via dissemination of clear, actionable information to help districts, schools, and families evaluate and improve the effectiveness of their programs.**

The committee acknowledged that outcomes from the accountability system are only helpful if they are clearly understood, accurately interpreted, and appropriately acted on by the educational stakeholders that the system is intended to serve.

## Design Principles

Design principles and priorities also inform the development of the accountability system. If accountability system goals identify an intended destination on an educational roadmap (i.e., where we want to be), design principles and priorities help set the route (i.e., how to get there). They also serve as a basis for later evaluation, serving as guides along the path of accountability system design and implementation to check that the system is working as intended. However, one truth of accountability design is that there is no single “right” system, and accountability design decisions will always involve optimization under constraints. This optimization necessitates tradeoffs between competing priorities. Given that reality, the AAC considered a number of competing priorities in accountability design and agreed that the following design principles should be prioritized in South Carolina’s accountability system.

- The committee members largely preferred that the state ***pursue changes to the system with measured caution***, taking time to study some components more fully before determining if/ how they should be included in the accountability system in favor of the ability to ***compare results over time***. Relatedly, members emphasized the importance of ***reporting outcomes across years to enable such longitudinal comparisons***.
- Most committee members agreed that the system’s ability ***to produce meaningful comparisons within the same year*** is more important than allowing flexibility in how schools earn points. Such comparisons would ideally allow users to examine performance for similar schools. As noted in one of the recommendations for intended use, no definition for “similar” currently exists.
- While most committee members preferred a ***balance between simplicity and comprehensiveness***, some prioritized one over the other. All members agreed that ***transparency is a top priority***.
- The majority of committee members felt that South Carolina should have ***one accountability system that meets all federal and state requirements*** instead of multiple systems to pursue state-specific priorities outside of the constraints of the federal system. Many committee members also agreed that a hybrid system, in which some but not all elements in the system satisfy federal requirements, is also a promising approach. Such a system requires some decision-making about how tightly to couple state and federal requirements.
- Given a priority to take time to study components before making changes, committee members generally preferred ***mid- to longer-term implementation timelines for system change recommendations***, compared to moving quickly.
- The committee largely preferred ***approaches or changes that minimize - or at least do not dramatically increase - burden for schools, districts, or report card users***. The collection of additional information, if pursued, should ***prioritize the ability to enhance understanding of school context***.
- The committee widely agreed that ***report cards should be accessible to a wide audience, prioritizing a simple interface that can translate from more complex measures and that explains what results mean and why they matter***.

Subsequent discussions about the South Carolina accountability system components, supports, and resources were grounded in and connected back to these goals and design principles, as well as to considerations of the needs of users of the system. In addition to foundational goals and design principles, information gathered through ancillary outreach activities was shared with AAC members in order to inform later discussion and recommendations. Those ancillary activities are described in the next section.



## ADDITIONAL OUTREACH

A key goal of the EOC for the 2025 cyclical review of South Carolina's accountability system was to engage with wide-reaching groups of educational constituents across the state. To that end, the EOC sponsored or supported three ancillary outreach activities as part of the cyclical review.

1. Focused convenings on specific priority topics from the 2020 cyclical review
2. Virtual listening sessions
3. A statewide survey

### Focused Convenings

The EOC held four Focused Convenings in the spring and summer of 2025 to bring specific attention to topics that consistently emerged since 2020. There were the priority topics discussed in each convening:

1. Public expectations of school ratings
2. High school experience (college and career readiness)
3. Multilingual learners' progress in English language proficiency
4. Awarding performance

To assemble groups for each convening, the EOC requested nominations from teacher organizations, SCASA, SCSBA, members of State Board of Education, SC School Improvement Council, EOC, and others.

A summary of the discussion as well as the composition of participants in each convening is provided in Appendix B.

### Virtual Listening Sessions

In addition to the focused convenings, the EOC contracted with Rhodes Branding to host three virtual listening sessions in Spring 2025. There were 40 attendees representing 26 South Carolina cities across the three sessions. Attendees included parents, educators, and community members.

The listening sessions were intentionally broader in scope than the focused convenings. The discussions resulted in five key takeaways:

1. Stakeholders are generally aware of and make practical use of school report cards at the same time that they recognize there is room for improvement.
2. South Carolina schools are generally perceived as underperforming by listening session participants.
3. Those interested in South Carolina's educational system desire more comprehensive, relevant, and equitable data in the school report cards.
4. There is support for maintaining the current descriptive rating system (rather than switching to an A-F scale).
5. College and career readiness remains a top priority and area of concern regarding gaps between perceived and actual readiness.

The listening session report is available in Appendix C.

## Statewide Survey

Finally, the Center for Assessment developed and administered a survey about South Carolina's accountability system to a range of stakeholders in late May through early July. The survey gathered 1,621 responses, which lifted up four areas of interest:

1. Appropriateness and fairness → Setting expectations for school and district performance
2. Measuring what matters → System indicators
3. Understanding the system → Resources and communications
4. Serving all students → Community engagement; supports for school improvement

Survey responses were summarized and shared with AAC members in their August 6th meeting. Members agreed with the key areas of focus and these areas informed subsequent meetings.

A report summarizing the design, dissemination, and outcomes of the statewide survey is available in Appendix D.

By expanding the scope of the cyclical review and sharing that additional learning with the AAC, the EOC intended to help ensure that recommendations gathered during AAC convenings represented feedback from constituents across the state.

## SYSTEM COMPONENTS

After establishing the goals and design principles for South Carolina's accountability system, the AAC started to review components of the current system. In this process, facilitators provided information about federal and/or state requirements, South Carolina's current approach (described in South Carolina's approved [consolidated state plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act](#)), and the national landscape of approaches for each component. In response, members provided feedback about South Carolina's design, indicating what aspects they thought should continue, which should stop, and what, if any, new practices or approaches should be considered.

### South Carolina's Current Accountability System

The following components comprise South Carolina's accountability system, which differs for elementary/middle schools and high schools.

#### ***Accountability Indicators***

##### Elementary and Middle School

- Academic Achievement = 35 points
- Student Progress = 35 points
- Multilingual Learners' Progress = 10 points
- School Quality or Student Success (SQSS)
  - Preparing for Success (Science) = 10 points
  - School Climate = 10 points

##### High School

- Academic Achievement = 25 points
- Graduation Rate = 19 points
- Multilingual Learners' Progress = 10 points
- School Quality or Student Success (SQSS)
  - Preparing for Success = 10 points
  - College and Career Readiness = 19 points
  - High School Student Success = 12 points

Each school receives an overall score out of 100 possible points and is assigned one of **five state ratings**: Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average, or Unsatisfactory. The school is also assigned separate ratings, based on the same five performance categories, for each indicator. The school's performance is reported for all students and for each subgroup with at least 20 students.

Additionally, per requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the overall scores for schools and for student subgroups (with at least 20 students) are used to produce these **federal designations**:

- Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI): lowest performing 5% of Title I schools based on overall scores; any high school with a graduation rate below 70%;
- Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI): consistently underperforming student groups; and
- Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI): student groups with overall scores below the CSI fifth percentile threshold.

Finally, South Carolina also recognizes **Palmetto Gold and Silver schools** based on indicator and/or overall ratings.

#### ***Palmetto Gold for Elementary and Middle Schools***

To receive this recognition, a school may not be designated for CSI, TSI, or ATSI. Additionally, a school must receive any of the following combination of ratings for Academic Achievement and Student Progress.

- Academic Achievement and Student Progress = Excellent
- Academic Achievement = Excellent and Student Progress = Good
- Academic Achievement = Good and Student Progress = Excellent

#### ***Palmetto Silver for Elementary and Middle Schools***

To receive this recognition, a school may not be designated for CSI, TSI, or ATSI. Additionally, a school must receive any of the following combination of ratings for Academic Achievement and Student Progress.

- Academic Achievement and Student Progress = Good
- Academic Achievement = Average and Student Progress = Excellent
- Academic Achievement = Excellent and Student Progress = Average

#### ***Palmetto Gold for High Schools***

To receive this recognition, a school may not be designated for CSI, TSI, or ATSI. Additionally, a school must receive any of the following combination of indicator and overall ratings.

- Four indicators = Excellent; AND
- Remaining indicator = Good or higher; AND
- Overall rating = Good or above

#### ***Palmetto Silver for High Schools***

To receive this recognition, a school may not be designated for CSI, TSI, or ATSI. Additionally, a school must receive any of the following combination of indicator and overall ratings.

- Four indicators = Good; AND
- Remaining indicator = Average or higher; AND
- Overall rating = Average or above

## COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section we describe the AAC's recommendations, which fall into four categories.

- Indicators
- Aggregations and Identification
- Reporting and Communication
- Resources and Supports

### Indicators

The AAC reviewed all current indicators in South Carolina's school accountability model and developed the following recommendations. These recommendations are organized by the existing indicator categories: academic achievement, student progress, multilingual learner progress, graduation rate, college and career readiness, preparing for success, and high school success. An additional, cross-cutting recommendation addresses the need to explore alternatives for a more balanced and comprehensive assessment system, given its relevance across multiple indicators.

#### ***Academic Achievement***

Recommendation 1: Explore alternatives for incentivizing test participation.

The AAC recognized the importance of incentivizing participation in state assessments and reaffirmed the need to comply with federal requirements mandating an adjustment when participation falls below 95%. However, many members expressed concern that the current approach of counting non-tested students against achievement scores results is excessively punitive. While the committee did not develop a specific alternative, and recognized the constraints of current federal requirements, members recommended exploring alternative approaches.

#### ***Student Progress***

Recommendation 2: Study the impact of student progress with respect to prior performance.

The AAC reviewed the student progress indicator and acknowledged that the current approach contains appropriate and defensible elements. For that reason, they did not propose any immediate changes. However, they identified areas requiring further study. In particular, members urged the state to evaluate whether the model performs appropriately and fairly for schools serving students with higher prior test scores. Such studies would examine the distribution of growth scores for students across the full range of prior achievement to determine the extent to which the resulting growth measures are comparable. Results from these studies may inform future refinements to the growth model and/or business rules.

Recommendation 3: Promote accurate understanding and use of student progress scores.

Committee members suggested that the state continue efforts to simplify the explanation of this indicator for various audiences. They noted that while the underlying methodology is technically appropriate, it remains difficult for many constituents to fully understand how progress scores are generated and interpreted. Clearer, more accessible communication materials would improve transparency and strengthen the appropriate use of the indicator.

#### ***Multilingual Learners' Progress***

Recommendation 4: Adjust the relative weight of the multilingual learner progress indicator.

AAC members expressed support for modifying the weight of this indicator to better reflect its role within the overall accountability system and the variation in multilingual learner populations across

schools in the state. Specifically, they endorsed options that would either reduce the indicator's weight from 10 percent to 5 percent or establish a weighting approach that is scaled to the proportion of ML students within each school.

Recommendation 5: Examine whether the testing window can be expanded.

Several committee members expressed concern that the testing window for multilingual learners occurs too early in the academic year, limiting students' opportunity to learn before assessment. AAC members encouraged the state to work with WIDA to explore options for extending the window so that students may test later in the year.

Recommendation 6: Enhance reporting of multilingual learners' progress.

The AAC expressed wide support for the state to provide additional information about the indicator on the report card site and to more clearly report the outcomes for students who recently exited multilingual learner services.

Additional Note: Native language testing

The review of the multilingual learner progress indicator prompted a broader discussion about assessing academic content in students' native languages, particularly for recently arrived language learners. Although members recognized that current state statute is prohibitive, some AAC members emphasized the importance of exploring the feasibility of native language assessments. Others expressed concern that such an approach would be overly resource-intensive given the wide range of languages represented in the state. While this conversation did not result in a formal recommendation, members agreed that the issue should be acknowledged and earmarked for future study.

***Graduation Rate, College and Career Readiness, and High School Student Success***

Recommendation 7: Explore approaches to increase the influence of the employability credential.

AAC members affirmed that the employability credential, an alternative certificate for students with disabilities, represents a meaningful accomplishment and should be appropriately valued within the accountability system. Some members argued that it should be treated as equivalent to a regular diploma for inclusion in the graduation rate; however, federal requirements prohibit this. Although the employability credential is included in the completion rate used for the High School Student Success indicator, members encouraged the state to consider adjustments that would increase the weight of this component so that its influence more closely aligns with that of the graduation rate.

Recommendation 8: Recognize the seal of biliteracy in the college and career readiness indicator.

Most AAC members expressed support for adding the seal of biliteracy to the list of college and career readiness criteria; but this was not a unanimous recommendation. Those supporting it noted that it would provide multiple pathways for students to demonstrate their college and/or career readiness and that it represents an important achievement, increasingly valued in higher education and the workforce.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen reporting on college and career readiness.

The AAC affirmed the importance of recognizing a broad range of college and career-ready indicators, noting that the distinction between these categories is often blurred. Although some members discussed eliminating separate reporting for college and career readiness, the committee ultimately favored improving the reporting structure to provide more granular and specific

information about the accomplishments students earn. In particular, the AAC opposed the current practice of reporting the percentage of students who are both college and career ready, noting that this metric is misleading. For example, many students who are college ready may simply choose not to pursue career ready credentials.

Recommendation 10: Engage in ongoing research to validate and improve the college and career readiness indicators.

AAC members support ongoing research to strengthen the validity evidence for the CCR measures, especially by linking them to postsecondary and workforce outcomes. This could include examining the extent to which different CCR indicators predict college enrollment, persistence, and course performance, as well as employment outcomes. Such studies would strengthen the evidence base for the CCR measures and help ensure they reflect meaningful indicators of post secondary readiness.

***Cross-Cutting***

Recommendation 11: Study alternatives for a more comprehensive and balanced assessment system.

Because assessment issues influence many elements in the accountability system, the AAC identified assessment-related priorities that rise to the level of a cross-cutting recommendation.

Throughout the AAC convenings, members repeatedly suggested opportunities to strengthen South Carolina's state assessment system. One major area of discussion focused on science and social studies testing. Members strongly endorsed efforts to improve teaching and learning in these subjects and emphasized the importance of maintaining high-quality standards and assessments. Several members expressed concern that, within the accountability model, science and social studies assessments are overshadowed by ELA and mathematics, and they supported exploring ways to increase the influence of these subjects. Others cautioned that such changes could unintentionally increase testing burden. Although strategies such as matrix sampling were discussed as potential ways to mitigate this concern, members acknowledged that these approaches carry trade-offs and would require careful consideration.

A second topic examined in depth was the potential role of through-year assessment. Through-year testing, an approach in which multiple assessments administered across the school year contribute to a final summative result, generated substantial support among AAC members. The group encouraged continued exploration of through-year models but did not take a position on whether or how such assessments should ultimately factor into school accountability. Members agreed that any exploration should occur in phases. First, the state should clarify its highest priorities for through-year assessment and review relevant research and practice to identify models that best align with those priorities. Once a coherent model is articulated, the state could then consider whether through-year results should be incorporated into South Carolina's accountability system.

These discussions highlighted the importance of examining assessment issues collectively rather than in isolation. Decisions about testing in one area inevitably influence others, and improvements must contribute to a balanced, comprehensive, and coherent assessment system that supports teaching and learning and can be appropriately integrated into accountability.

To that end, AAC members supported launching an initiative to identify the state's highest assessment priorities and to study models best suited to support them. Members also recommended conducting a statewide assessment audit to evaluate the scale and utility of existing



assessments. Findings from this work could inform revisions to the state testing system so that it more effectively addresses the priorities surfaced by the AAC.

### Aggregation and Identification

In school accountability systems, aggregation refers to the process of combining multiple indicators into an overall rating or score that summarizes school performance. Identification refers to determining which schools require additional support, intervention, or recognition based on that aggregated information. As part of the cyclical review process, the AAC examined the existing designations and the methods used to generate them. The recommendations emerging from these discussions are summarized in this section.

#### Recommendation 12: Explore alternatives to create a more coherent and streamlined set of accountability designations.

There are at least four types of school designations produced by the state as detailed in the following table.

**Table 3: Summary of School Designations**

| DESIGNATIONS              | DESCRIPTION  | LEVELS  |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Federally Required</b> | Federally required designations to comply with requirements in ESSA            | Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI), Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) |
| <b>State Support</b>      | Designations required by state statute to identify schools in need of support. | Priority, Underperforming, Chronically Underperforming  |
| <b>State Ratings</b>      | Ratings produced for indicators and schools to describe levels of performance. | Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average, Unsatisfactory   |
| <b>State Commendation</b> | Recognizes and rewards schools for attaining high levels of performance        | Palmetto Gold, Palmetto Silver  |

The AAC noted that the current designations can make it difficult to form a clear picture of school performance, particularly when state and federal identifications are not aligned. For example, a school may receive a state support designation but not a federal one, or vice versa.

Moreover, state commendation designations are tied to federal ratings that are produced on a different timeline. This hinders timely reporting to the field. Consequently, many AAC members favor decoupling the Palmetto Gold and Silver awards from the federal ratings.

Finally, some AAC members raised concerns about the terminology used for designation categories, recommending adjustments that enhance clear and helpful messaging.

Considered collectively, the AAC recommends exploring alternatives to create a more coherent and streamlined set of accountability designations. This may involve 1) examining if some designations should be removed or combined; 2) reviewing the relationships between designations to see if they should be adjusted; and 3) reconsidering the nomenclature and descriptions for the categories to ensure they are clear and useful.

### Recommendation 13: Review and potentially revise accountability performance standards.

Performance standards define the levels of performance that schools are expected to meet on individual indicators and in their overall accountability ratings. In an index-based system such as South Carolina's these standards are operationalized as cutscores that represent the minimum level of performance required to attain each rating category.

There is not widespread agreement on what constitutes appropriate performance standards. For example, results from the statewide survey reviewed by the AAC (see Appendix D) showed that fewer than one-third of respondents believe the current standards are "about right," while the remainder viewed them as either too lenient, too rigorous, or were unsure. Additionally, the AAC discussed potential concerns that the current standards may lead to over or under identification of students in certain student groups (e.g., students with disabilities). Accordingly, they called for a review and potential revision of the performance standards.

The AAC stressed the importance of establishing performance standards through a transparent and defensible methodology. After reviewing different options, the committee agreed that South Carolina should adopt a "hybrid" accountability standard-setting process that incorporates both criterion-referenced and norm-referenced elements. Criterion refers to establishing a fixed definition of performance for schools based on desired performance. Normative refers to using data to determine thresholds that are ambitious but achievable. When combined within a structured, transparent process involving experts, policymakers, and educational leaders, these approaches can produce performance standards that are both credible and clearly communicated. A further intended outcome is the development of clear descriptions of schools in each rating category, providing constituents with better context and more meaningful interpretation of accountability results.

### Recommendation 14: Adjust the relative weight of accountability indicators.

As is common in school accountability models, overall scores are produced through a weighted composite, with each weight reflecting the relative priority or influence assigned to a given indicator. The AAC reviewed and discussed the current weighting structure, including completing an exercise in which members submitted individual proposed weights for the system. The mean of these proposed weights was then compared with the current weights to identify areas where adjustments might be warranted.

The AAC's mean recommendations for the achievement and growth indicators were generally aligned with the existing weights, although individual responses varied. However, the results indicated a preference for reducing the weight assigned to multilingual learners' progress. In addition, members expressed interest in decreasing the influence of the graduation rate and increasing the relative importance of the college and career readiness indicator. These findings align with recommendations four and seven, respectively.

## **Reporting and Communications**

Every accountability system involves consideration of how to present and describe the system outcomes and overall results. Decisions about reporting include attention to what data to include, how to organize that information, and what features to include to make the data easier to understand and interact with. Communications help users understand system results and situate those results within appropriate contexts. This involves messaging about results (e.g., overall performance was higher this year compared to last year for elementary schools) as well as providing

information to help people understand the accountability system (e.g., this document provides a quick overview about the academic achievement indicator).

The group identified these recommendations pertaining to reporting and communications.

Recommendation 15: Continue to invest in dashboards and data visualizations with a goal of enabling a wide variety of users to access, understand, and use the available information.

The group spent time reviewing the [South Carolina School Report Card](#) website as well as features of reports and dashboards from other states. They agreed that there are many excellent features about South Carolina's reporting system, highlighting the clear and simple layouts, comparison function, and links to additional information. At the same time, the group recognized that continuous improvement of reporting systems should remain a priority. This includes ensuring that data can be disaggregated for all student groups that meet minimum group sizes to balance transparency with student privacy and making multiple years of data available for those interested in trend information. The group also suggested that an audit of current reports (e.g., What data are available and where?) and reporting practices (e.g., What are the features of how we present data publicly?) could be helpful when planning future system enhancements.

Overall, the group agreed that even the best designed accountability system will not have its desired impact if the information is not highly accessible and accompanied by helpful resources and supports.

Recommendation 16: Produce ancillary report materials and professional development to ensure that users can understand and use the information in the reports as intended.

Statewide survey results and listening sessions made clear that people representing various interest groups and roles across South Carolina are interested in understanding school performance. Many of these partners are interested in identifying ways that they can support school improvement. In order for these educational constituents, including educators and educational leaders to community members, parents, and members of the business community, etc., to make appropriate decisions about what and how they can contribute, they must first understand what the data do and do not signal regarding areas to celebrate for success and target for intervention and support. Materials like FAQs, indicator guides, and/or short videos about the accountability system can help users engage in asynchronous learning that can inform their engagement with the data. Professional development, most likely targeted toward educators, can play an important role in ensuring school and district improvement practices involves attention to appropriate data.

## **Resources and Supports**

Ultimately, accountability systems send signals that are used to inform decisions about where to allocate resources in interventions and other support activities. After learning about current school improvement cycles and supports facilitated by the South Carolina Department of Education, members had these recommendations.

Recommendation 17: Continue to route school improvement activities through district offices.

Members, particularly those representing district-level roles, noted with appreciation efforts to connect with both district- and school-level leaders regarding identifications and resulting school improvement requirements. According to members, this practice is leading to greater coherence and less confusion across schools and between schools and district offices. Continued collaboration between school improvement and school and district leadership will enhance the effectiveness of support initiatives.

Recommendation 18: Conduct research to look for shared characteristics of schools with federal support designations and those that exit such designations.

As the state understands any shared characteristics of schools with CSI, TSI, or ATSI designations, it can better direct resources and invest in interventions that may mitigate future identifications by addressing needs before or early as they arise. Additionally, schools that exit designation status and sustain improvement may be helpful examples for other identified schools; the state should gather and share these lessons learned.

Recommendation 19: The state should seek partnerships with institutions of higher education, parents, community members, and others in efforts to continuously improve its support model.

AAC members recognize the importance of a “group effort” in continuing to address disparities and improve outcomes for students in all schools across South Carolina. To that end, members support continued outreach and partnership to identify root causes of persistent educational challenges and ways to address those challenges through policy, practice, and resource distribution.

## NEXT STEPS

The recommendations in this report are intended to inform refinements to South Carolina’s state school accountability system. They are framed to reflect key policy priorities, articulate the underlying rationale, and outline features or criteria that should guide appropriate implementation. However, the recommendations are not sufficiently detailed to support full implementation on their own. Accordingly, we propose three guidelines to help inform next steps.

- **Engage in ongoing research:** Given the scope and complexity of several recommendations, particularly those that introduce more novel or sweeping changes (i.e., through year assessment), South Carolina should engage in a careful study of promising practices, relevant research, and lessons from other states. Such an inquiry will help ensure that proposed refinements are evidence based, feasible to implement, and aligned with the state’s policy priorities.
- **Define operational specifications:** While the committee’s recommendations articulate high-level features and criteria for the indicators and overall system design, they do not specify the operational definitions and business rules necessary for implementation, which is understandable given the committee’s policy advisory role. In subsequent phases, South Carolina should collaborate with subject matter experts (e.g., specialists in career readiness), technical advisors, practitioners, and other constituents to translate the recommendations into detailed specifications.
- **Pilot and Refine:** Once additional specifications have been established we recommend piloting indicators (particularly novel measures) and other aspects of the system such as the system reports to better understand the extent to which the system supports the intended interpretations and uses. Refinements to the indicators or overall design decisions may be necessary based on pilot results

## CONCLUSION

The Accountability Advisory Committee (AAC) conducted a review of the South Carolina accountability system in a series of meetings from August to December 2025. The AAC took care to develop clear goal statements, articulate design priorities, consider input from other outreach efforts, and produce recommendations coherent with these foundational principles.

This report documents the recommendations resulting from this review. The recommendations address revisions to the system, reporting enhancements, and priorities for ongoing research. The AAC hopes these recommendations will promote equity, better incentivize and reflect a wide range of skills associated with the *Profile of the South Carolina Graduate*, and provide more useful information to support student and school improvement.

# APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A – AAC MEETING SCHEDULE AND ATTENDANCE RECORD .....27**

**APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF FOCUSED CONVENINGS.....28**

- Summary of EOC Focused Convenings.....28
- Public Expectations of School Ratings.....28
- High School Experience (College and Career Readiness) .....29
- Multilingual Learners’ Progress in English Language Proficiency.....29
- Awarding Performance .....30

**APPENDIX C: LISTENING SESSION REPORT .....32**

**APPENDIX D: STATEWIDE SURVEY REPORT .....49**



## APPENDIX A – AAC MEETING SCHEDULE AND ATTENDANCE RECORD

| MEMBER\MEETING DATE | 4/14  | 8/6 | 8/26 | 10/9 | 11/12 | 12/03 |
|---------------------|---|-----|------|------|-------|-------|
| Melanie Barton      |   |     | √    | √    |       | √     |
| Whitney Broderick   | √   | √   | √    | √    | √     | √     |
| Jennifer Cauthen    | √   | √   | √    | √    | √     | √     |
| Michelle Caya       | √   | √   | √    | √    | √     | √     |
| Dee Christopher     |   | √   | √    | √    | √     | √     |
| Peter DeLorme       | √   | √   | √    | √    |       |       |
| Matthew Ferguson    | √   |     | √    | √    |       | √     |
| Janet Graham        | √   | √   | √    |      | √     |       |
| Josie Kate Haupfear | √   |     | √    |      |       |       |
| Patrick Kelly       |   | √   | √    | √    | √     | √     |
| Celestine LaVan     | √   | √   | √    | √    |       | √     |
| Sallie R. Lee       | √   |     |      | √    | √     | √     |
| Monique McDaniels   | √   |     |      |      |       |       |
| Laura McKinney      | √   | √   | √    | √    | √     | √     |
| Ashton Pearson      | √   |     | √    |      | √     |       |
| Buffy Roberts       | √   |     | √    | √    | √     | √     |
| Frank Rodriguez     | √   |     | √    | √    | √     |       |
| Yalonda Ross-Davis  | <i>Invited to join the group in October</i> |     |      | √    | √     | √     |
| Terrye Seckinger    | √   |     |      |      |       |       |
| Molly Tuck          |   | √   | √    | √    | √     |       |
| Ellen Weaver        | √   | √   | √    | √    | √     | √     |
| Audrey White-Garner |   |     |      | √    | √     |       |

## APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF FOCUSED CONVENINGS

### Summary of EOC Focused Convenings

The EOC held four Focused Convenings in the spring and summer of 2025 to bring specific attention to topics that consistently emerged since 2020. EOC staff wanted to make certain that these topics were given priority in discussions. The results of discussions were shared with the Accountability Advisory Committee. Requests for nominations were sought from teacher organizations, SCASA, SCSBA, members of State Board of Education, SC School Improvement Council, EOC, and others.

### Public Expectations of School Ratings

#### Participants

Josie Kate Haupfear, *Director of Federal Programs at Laurens County School District 56*

Dr. Seath Young, *Anderson School District 1 Superintendent*

Scott Childers, *York 1 School Board Member*

Brad Johnson, *Lancaster County School District*

Genie Brainerd, *Parent*

Julius Scott, *Lexington Richland School District Five*

Shawnee Thrift, *Parent*

Denay Fullington, *Parent*

Kelly Scott, *Parent*

Dr. Latoya Dixon, *Assistant Superintendent of Student Services and Administration York County School District 1*

#### Summary of discussions:

- Expectation of Schools Rated Excellent: Participants indicated that 75% to 90% of students should be on grade level and should have academic growth from one year to the next in a school rated excellent.
  - "An excellent school will have first - high academic achievement, low truancy rates, high graduation rates for high schools, and high ratings in college and career preparedness"
  - "An excellent school should have good test scores, good teacher retention, good surveys"
- Expectation of Schools Rated Unsatisfactory: Participants indicated that 40% to 50% of students would be on grade level and have academic growth from one year to the next in a school rated unsatisfactory.
  - "An unsatisfactory school is one without any improvement in students' scores, lots of discipline issues, having a high number of students who regress"
  - "Low test scores, no improvement year-to-year, low attendance rates and high teacher turnover"
- Participants' perception of a school's report card page:
  - "I expect the grading system for the school would be the exact same that a student would receive (referring to the grading system). How is a 72% rated excellent?"
  - "If you are wanting fast interpretation, these rating points could be a problem. It is not clear, fast or concise because I have to figure it out."
- Participants' perception of what the overall rating points for report cards should mirror uniform grading scale.

## High School Experience (College and Career Readiness)

### Participants

Michael Belk, *Principal, Lancaster CSD*

Jamie Brown, *Parent*

Dr. Chad Cox, *Exec. Director of Schools, Beaufort*

Danny Fox, *Parent*

Ken Hitchcock, *School District: CTE*

Lena McCloud, *Parent*

Laura McKinney, *Business/Chamber of Commerce Rep.*

Dr. Tanika McKissick, *Conway High School Principal*

Glenda Morrison-Fair, *School Board Representative*

Dr. Latrice Ratcliff-Small, *Higher Education, University of SC*

### Summary of discussion / Main questions that the group addressed:

- Are current college and career designations valid – do students succeed in post-secondary and/or in the workforce?
  - Discussion centered around the current designations and the current efforts that were attempting to measure post-secondary outcomes for students who had current CCR measures.
  - Are these measures what they say they are?
- Is HS Grad rate overemphasized in the current system/does a diploma mean enough for students?
  - The group discussed whether it was possible to alter the calculation of the graduation rate to give more points for students who also achieved a measure of CCR or less points if students received recovered credits. Federal law currently prohibits this practice and also still requires on-time graduation rate count a large percentage in the system.
- Do other measures of CCR need to be considered?
  - This question is what is often asked by school and district leaders. It goes back to the overall question of whether CCR measures – those that currently count or those that school leaders want included – lead to post-secondary successful outcomes.

## Multilingual Learners' Progress in English Language Proficiency

### Participants

Adanays (Addy) Aranda, *ML Teacher, Fort Mill School District 4*

Dr. Kathleen Corley, *Principal, Beaufort County School District*

R. Nicholas Flowers, *Director of Accountability, Beaufort County School District*

Tanya Franca, *MLP Coordinator, Greenville County Schools*

Niki Porter, *School Board Member, Richland School District 2*

Dr. Angela Rush, *Director of ML Services, Charleston County School District*

### Summary of discussions:

- Participants discussed strengths of the current Multilingual Learners' Progress indicator, including:
  - Participants appreciated that an ML's target score can be known in advance of the English Language Proficiency (ELP) test window.
  - Participants believed that the five-year timeframe within which to achieve proficiency in English is appropriate.
  - Participants appreciated that schools and districts were only being held accountable for language growth fostered within their own district.

- Participants discussed challenges of the current Multilingual Learners' Progress indicator, including:
  - Since MLs are typically the most transient subgroup in SC schools, participants expressed challenges getting records from sending schools.
  - In addition, MLs who regularly transfer between districts may never reach five years in the same district, affecting assignment of targets.
  - Annual growth targets are evenly spaced across the five-year timeframe, which may not reflect the actual pattern of language growth for MLs.
  - Record keeping for MLs in the student information system is complex and can often be confusing for school personnel updating the information (who may or may not be familiar with ML programs and procedures).
- Participants expressed the desire for any future changes to the Multilingual Learners' Progress indicator to meet the following goals, whenever possible:
  - Annual growth targets, calculation of indicator points, and cut scores for ratings should be informed by data collected within South Carolina based on observations of MLs in South Carolina schools.
  - Annual growth targets should be based on the MLs most recent English language proficiency score, without requiring the calculation of a multi-year growth progression for a given ML.
  - Record keeping for MLs related to the MLP and to accountability should be simplified to ensure accuracy of data and of accountability calculations.
- WIDA experts in English language acquisition and assessment were consulted, at the request of participants, to advise on the typical pattern of English language acquisition demonstrated by MLs nationally.
- Historical data within South Carolina was consistent with patterns described by WIDA experts.

## **Awarding Performance**

### ***Participants***

Denean Green, *Richland 2*

Tim Hicks, *Richland 2*

Carole Ingram, *Beaufort*

Kelli Overcash, *Lancaster*

Gary Porth, *Calhoun*

Matt Sherman, *Richland 2*

Scott Smith, *Spartanburg 5*

### ***Summary of Discussions:***

- Look at how the state could include collective efficacy (Hattie model) in a school as part of the report card; may be look at a subset of the teacher survey questions
- Consider adding a parent voice to report card, especially as it related to climate in the schools
- Inclusion of Closing the Achievement Gap was viewed positively; schools that might not make it on achievement and growth, could be rewarded for subgroup performance

***Other ideas shared:***

- A question came up about using the state average on academic achievement for Closing the Achievement Gap; does using the state average work against schools? Specifically, a question was raised if using the state average, is this a normed approach with half the schools above and half below?
- Include another designation for schools that make Excellent/Excellent on academic achievement and growth and label it Platinum
- Include designations like "BTOIS" or Palmetto Gold and Silver status on the report cards.
- Consider rewarding schools that move 2 or more ratings in a given year such as Unsatisfactory to Average

## APPENDIX C: LISTENING SESSION REPORT

*Page intentionally left blank*



# Summary Report

Prepared for South Carolina Education Oversight Committee

April 2025



# Introduction

South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC) is an independent, nonpartisan group made up of 18 educators, business people, and elected officials who have been appointed by the legislature and governor to enact the South Carolina Education Accountability Act of 1998. The Act sets standards for improving the state's K-12 educational system.

In 2001, a result of South Carolina's education accountability system was the creation of School Report Cards for public schools. The report cards are prepared annually for each public elementary, middle, and high school. School Report Cards evaluate public schools on the following areas: School Climate, Academic Achievement, Student Growth, College and Career Readiness, Student Progress, High School Student Success, Multilingual Learners Progress, Graduation Rate, Student Safety, Preparing for Success, and Classroom Environment. Each South Carolina public school receives a report card rating of Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average, or Unsatisfactory based on the school's level of success on the indicators.

To inform future improvements, the South Carolina EOC recently conducted a five-year review of the state's accountability system. The EOC invited parents, educators, school administrators, and community members to participate in virtual listening sessions or submit written comments through an online portal. Participants were encouraged to share their insights on how South Carolina schools are evaluated and help shape the future of education in the state.

On April 3 and April 7, 2025, Rhodes Branding facilitated three separate listening sessions to gather feedback on the effectiveness, usage, and improvement areas of the state's School Report Cards and accountability system. Rhodes Branding also solicited written feedback between March and April 2025.

This report provides a comprehensive summary of the high-level themes gleaned from the listening sessions and written comments.

---

# Summary of Feedback

## Key Takeaways

1. **Stakeholders generally are well aware and make practical use of report cards**, though concerns exist about timeliness, depth, selective communication, and effectiveness in driving improvement.
2. **South Carolina schools are generally perceived to be underperforming** compared to national standards, with notable disparities between rural versus urban or suburban areas. There are pockets of excellence in well-resourced suburban districts.
3. **Stakeholders desire more comprehensive, relevant, and equitable data** in school report cards, including student growth, teacher quality, community context, and long-term outcomes.
4. **There is support for maintaining the current descriptive rating system** (Excellent, Good, Average, etc.) over switching to an A–F grading scale, citing clarity and reduced stigma, but both systems are viewed as effective.
5. **College and career readiness remains a top concern**, with a gap between expectations and the perceived actual preparedness of graduates, particularly for marginalized students.

## [Detailed Themes and Insights](#)

### Awareness and Use of School Report Cards

Stakeholders across listening sessions and written comments generally reported high familiarity with the South Carolina School Report Cards.

- **Widespread use** of school report cards exists among school administrators and families, especially for decision-making, strategic planning, and relocation decisions.
- **The general public is mixed in their familiarity** with school report cards. Some use report cards for academic research, understanding school performance, or evaluating arts/specialty programs.

#### Use Cases:

- Parents and caregivers use report cards to choose schools or housing.
- Teachers and administrators use them for school improvement planning and job-seeking.
- Policymakers and advocates rely on them for strategic planning, setting goals, and communicating school performance.

*"I use the school report cards to decide where I want to work and live."*

*"They're helpful in strategic planning but can be too surface-level."*

*"I use the report cards to reference data almost daily."*

*"I use the report cards to know what to help our child with or emphasize while doing homework."*

*"We used the school report cards when we were looking at what area we wanted to move to, and that influenced our choice in school district and schools. The information was tremendously helpful."*

## Perception of School Report Card Effectiveness

### Positive Perceptions:

- School report cards serve as a helpful communication tool about statewide education goals and performance.
- School report cards support research and goal-setting.
- School report cards provide data for school comparisons and decision-making.

### Concerns Identified:

- **Timeliness:** Some participants noted that the data seems outdated by the time it's published.
- **Labeling effects:** Stakeholders believe there is a risk of stigmatizing low-performing schools. Example: If families use report cards to decide where to live, do under-performing schools suffer more if people avoid moving to those areas?
- **Selective communication:** Schools may highlight good ratings but avoid publicly revealing or addressing areas of concern.
- **Complexity of metrics:** Some participants mentioned that the metrics can feel overly technical and difficult to interpret.

A few responses emphasized that while the school report cards are generally easy to understand, they do not always reflect the full picture of a school, including school culture and student behavior.

*"The growth model is really helpful; it's for teachers, students, and schools, and it gives us a growthpost and lets us know where we need to move."*

*"School report cards can be effective tools for improvement, because they highlight areas of strength, areas of need, and things that we need to consider in planning and programming. But by the time we (a school district) get the final report card—and some of the metrics are pretty complicated to calculate—it isn't as useful as it could be. We are always having to respond after the fact, as opposed to either having the information along the way or in a more timely fashion."*

*"When a school is labeled as average or below average or unsatisfactory, that is a label, and it doesn't always communicate some of the good things that are going on in those schools."*

*"I believe they are helpful and a way of communicating statewide education goals for the public."*

*“If people are picking where they live based on these report cards, are underserved areas becoming even more underserved?”*

*“For those of us who moved from somewhere else, it was helpful to have that information to decide where we were going to end up and be able to make that choice. For other folks, they don't necessarily have that option. I can understand how it might be creating division. If the information can be shared in a timely fashion to help inform decisions about resource allocation and things are acted on, then great.”*

*“From the school perspective, we're having teacher meetings, and principals are emphasizing various parts of the report card. I'm assuming that those taking the surveys are honest, fair, and not overinflating just to get the school rating higher.”*

## Desired Information and Improvements in Report Cards

Across all feedback sources, there was a push for broader, more meaningful, and equity-minded data to be included in school report cards. Key suggested additions include:

- **Academic metrics:** Subject-specific breakdowns (arts, music, languages, etc.)
- **Student growth:** Year-over-year student achievement and improvement as longitudinal indicators of school effectiveness
- **Post-graduation outcomes:** College acceptance, trade school, military, or employment
- **Teacher- and leadership-related data:** Retention, qualifications, satisfaction, experience
- **Special programs:** Information on enrichment, intervention, and special education services
- **Equity indicators:** Economic disparity, school funding levels, and demographic breakdowns
- **Parent and community engagement:** Metrics around involvement and support

*"The report cards don't show what makes a school special, like language immersion or community ties."*

*"We need to know if students are getting jobs or into college, not just if they passed a test. Post-graduation information would be helpful."*

*"I think a lot of the things we expect are already in the report cards—reading, math, science, social studies, and other academic areas—the core things we expect out of our schools. And I know in talking to parents and families that they also care about things like school safety, sense of belonging, anti-bullying, and those types of things, too. Those things are hard to capture from a quantitative perspective. There are a bunch of other things that matter, but those things are harder to capture and measure, right?"*

*"I would like to see examples of how things are measured for the report cards, like scales used."*

*"I would like to see evidence of student achievement and growth in comparison to economic disparities."*

*"I'd like to see information about teacher retention."*



*"I'd be interested in the percentage of students going into different paths, employment, two-year school, four-year school."*

*"I think information about change over time would be extremely helpful. We get a one-year snapshot or maybe compared to the year before, but not that five-year or ten-year longitudinal look at the data."*

## Perceptions of School Performance

### Statewide Perceptions:

- South Carolina schools are generally viewed by participants as underperforming or middle-of-the-road nationally.
- Stakeholders commonly cited challenges include outdated curricula, limited resources, and lagging academic rigor.

### Regional Comparisons:

- Participants often compared South Carolina less favorably to North Carolina and Georgia, especially in education quality and investment.
- Several constituents noted that South Carolina's assessment systems differ, making direct comparisons difficult.

### In-State Disparities:

- Participants repeatedly mentioned concerns about the urban/rural divide:
  - Urban/suburban schools are seen as stronger and well-resourced.
  - Rural areas face challenges in funding, facilities, teacher recruitment and retention, and curriculum relevance.

*"I believe our rural communities are underserved due to a lack of funding and weak representation in the Legislature."*

*"Across the state, there's a lot of variety in the quality of education. Compared to other states around us—North Carolina and Georgia—the impression is that they have better quality education."*

*"I think we're in the middle of the pack."*

*"Compared to nearby states, South Carolina schools are fair. Much room for growth."*

*"I've taught in five states, and I think South Carolina is about 10 years behind other states that I've taught in, especially in reading. Concepts that I was teaching 10 years ago, they hadn't even heard of them when I came to South Carolina. We're moving in the right direction, but it is very hit or miss here. I work in a rural district, and we are next to a much larger district with brand new schools, a higher curriculum, and great PTOs. In this rural district, there is high poverty, and the Title I*

*funds do not even move us close to where other districts are around us, so it makes it hard to recruit and retain teachers. The curriculum is out of date, it's hard to maintain student data, and we don't have all the things we need to support our students in the ways we should."*

*'How do you compare? Having a comparison scale would be helpful."*

*"When districts and states publish student performance data, it's not an apples-to-apples comparison, because the expectations and standards vary from one state to the next."*

## School Rating Expectations and Labels

Participants shared an expectation that schools achieving an “Excellent” rating would have at least 80% of students performing at grade level.

Among the feedback, a preference emerged for retaining the current rating labels (Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average, At Risk) over switching to an A–F scale.

### **Why some stakeholders prefer the current rating labels:**

- Seen as more nuanced and less stigmatizing (For example, “At Risk” gives hope for improvement, whereas “F” may suggest defeat.)
- Thought to better reflect school contexts and challenges
- Provide more constructive framing for improvement

Alternatively, some participants suggested that an A-F rating scale could be preferable because the A-F scale is widely recognized and used across many states; it could provide consistency in expectations; and it may allow a finer level of differentiation between performance levels (whereas “Excellent,” “Good,” and “Average,” may be too broad or ambiguous.)

*“It doesn’t matter what system you use, just be transparent about what the rankings mean and why schools are ranked as they are.”*

*“Letter grades reduce complex realities into something too simplistic and judgmental.”*

*“When a school is labeled as average or below average or unsatisfactory, it doesn’t always communicate some of the good things that are going on in those schools. And so, if there is a way to label a school where it doesn’t feel as threatening and judgmental, and it expresses some of the good things going on there, the EOC should consider that.”*

*“If the goal is clarity and comparability on a broader scale, I’d recommend the A-F rating system. It provides greater precision and familiarity and would likely help ensure clearer communication between schools, parents, and other stakeholders. However, if you’re aiming for a more nuanced or less stressful way to assess schools, South Carolina’s current grading system might have a place, though it may benefit from some refinements or additional metrics. Ultimately, both systems could be effective depending on the goals and the audience.”*

## Communication and Transparency

Participants expressed that communication from schools about ratings is inconsistent.

- Some schools are consistent about informing parents of ratings through websites or newsletters.
- Schools with strong ratings may celebrate publicly, while those with lower ratings may remain silent.
- Schools may opt to only report on good ratings and avoid addressing areas of concern on their school report card.
- Stakeholders recommended a less divisive, more growth-oriented approach to how ratings are communicated.

*“Our school does a great job communicating when they start to collect the data. And then once the report card rating comes out, they talk about it at a PTA or PTO meeting as well as in the newsletter.”*

*“My school communicates about the report card rating, but it always highlights the positive.”*

*“I do not recall our school district informing us about its ratings.”*

*“My child’s school is below average, however, the school only talks about Blue Ribbon, National Merit without any emphasis on how to improve the school report card.”*

*“We need to frame school performance in a way that motivates, not demoralizes, schools and communities.”*

*“Schools should put their report cards on their website homepage.”*

## College and Career Readiness

Stakeholders agreed that high school graduates should be ready for college, career, or other postsecondary paths, but they expressed deep concerns about the reality.

### Key concerns included:

- Gaps exist between test proficiency and real-world readiness.
- “SC Ready” scores often suggest students may only perform at C-level in college.
- There is a need for more robust tracking of actual post-graduate outcomes (college acceptance, employment, trade school, military enlistment).
- There is interest in having more pathways and support for underserved students, including undocumented students and those with disabilities.

*“Our students graduate, but that doesn’t mean they’re ready.”*

*“We need better metrics and support for kids who face serious barriers.”*

*“How are profile characteristics for readiness measured?”*

*“College or career readiness is an expectation, but the different criteria used to meet this designation are not always indicative of the student's readiness.”*

*“As a teacher, I know that many graduates are not ready for either college or career.”*

*“There are a lot of students whose life situations preclude them from having the opportunities either to pursue college or be employed. So you have some kids who can't enroll in college; they are prevented by laws and policies from enrolling in college. Therefore, they're not inclined to take the ACT or the SAT, which chips away at how we define college readiness on the report card. For most students, ideally, they should come away from high school prepared to be able to do either college or career, but the reality is that for some students, they have barriers that keep them from moving in those directions.”*

# Recommendations

Based on participant feedback, the following actions are recommended:

1. **Revise report card metrics** to include measures of student growth, post-graduation data, teacher satisfaction and quality, economic equity, and special programs.
2. **Improve the timeliness and usability** of data to ensure it supports real-time decisions and is presented in accessible ways for families, educators, and community members.
3. **Maintain the descriptive rating system** (“Excellent” through “At Risk”) if deemed satisfactory, rather than shifting to A–F grades.
4. **Redesign communication strategies** to encourage honest communication about both strengths and challenges in school performance and reduce stigma.
5. **Address systemic disparities** between districts by reporting contextual information to stakeholders and assessing how lower-rated schools can meet state standards.
6. **Develop cross-state comparison tools** to assess the progress of South Carolina’s schools regionally and nationally, if desired.
7. **Clarify post-graduate readiness standards and enhance reporting** to include outcome data for all student groups in performance metrics.

---

## Summary

Stakeholders in the South Carolina educational system see potential in school report cards as a tool for transparency, planning, and community engagement. However, to truly reflect school quality and student outcomes, the system must evolve. Stakeholders expressed a desire for a school accountability system that reflects the full picture of educational quality, respects community context, and supports improvement over stigmatization. Thoughtful updates would include expanding metrics and improving communication from schools. This feedback provides a strong foundation for strengthening the state’s accountability framework.



# Appendix

## Listening Session Dates & Attendance

### Session #1: April 3, 2025, 1:00-2:00 pm

- Number of registrants: 34
- Number of attendees: 18
- Attendees' cities:
  - Capital City
  - Chapin
  - Charleston (2)
  - Columbia (2)
  - Columbia
  - Greenville (2)
  - Hilton Head Island
  - Irmo
  - Pamplico
  - Spartanburg (4)
- Attendees' Affiliations (participants could check more than one affiliation):
  - Educator (8)
  - Community Member (5)
  - Parent/Guardian (5)
  - Philanthropy (1)
  - PreK-12 Arts Learning Director (1)
  - SC Arts Commission (1)
  - Principal (1)

### Session #2: April 3, 2025, 3:30-4:30 pm

- Number of registrants: 23
- Number of attendees: 12
- Attendees' cities:
  - Boiling Springs
  - Clinton (2)
  - Columbia (2)
  - Hanahan
  - Spartanburg (5)
- Attendees' Affiliations (participants could check more than one affiliation):
  - Educator (6)
  - Parent/Guardian (5)
  - Community Member (2)
  - District Data Manager (1)
  - Instructional Specialist (1)
  - SC Arts Commission (1)

### Session #3: April 7, 2025, 4:30-5:30 pm

- Number of registrants: 29
- Number of attendees: 10
- Attendees' cities:
  - City of Newberry
  - Columbia
  - Greenville
  - Lake Wylie
  - Spartanburg (3)
  - Union
  - York (2)
- Attendees' Affiliations (participants could check more than one affiliation):
  - Educator (7)
  - Parent/Guardian (5)
  - Community Member (3)
  - Arts Coordinator (1)
  - SC Arts Commission (1)

### All Registrants' Cities

Blythewood  
Boiling Springs  
Capital City  
Chapin  
Charleston  
City of Newberry  
Clinton  
Clover  
Columbia  
Darlington  
Greenville  
Greer  
Hanahan

Hilton Head Island  
Irmo  
James Island  
Lake Wyle  
Laurens  
Lugoff  
Okatie  
Pacolet  
Pamplico  
Spartanburg  
Union  
West Columbia  
York

## APPENDIX D: STATEWIDE SURVEY REPORT

*Page intentionally left blank*



# **SOUTH CAROLINA STAKEHOLDER SURVEY:**

*Design, Implementation,  
and Outcomes*

---

October 14, 2025

---

**André Rupp**

*National Center for the Improvement of  
Educational Assessment*



**Center for  
Assessment**

National Center for the Improvement  
of Educational Assessment  
Dover, New Hampshire



# SOUTH CAROLINA STAKEHOLDER SURVEY:

## *Design, Implementation, and Outcomes*

National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, Inc. (the Center for Assessment) is a New Hampshire based not-for-profit (501(c)(3)) corporation. Founded in September 1998, the Center's mission is to improve student learning by partnering with educational leaders to advance effective practices and policies in support of high-quality assessment and accountability systems. The Center for Assessment does this by providing services directly to states, school districts, and partner organizations to support state and district assessment and accountability systems.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY). To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

### SUGGESTED CITATION:

Rupp, A. A. (2025). *South Carolina Stakeholder Survey: Design, Implementation, and Outcomes*. Dover, NH: National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment.

### PHOTO CREDIT:

Cover image: Adobe Stock

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>SECTION 1 - SURVEY DESIGN, DISSEMINATION,<br/>AND RESPONSES .....</b>       | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>SECTION 2 - KEY FINDINGS .....</b>  | <b>8</b>  |
| • Respondent Characteristics.....  | 8         |
| • Familiarity with Report Card .....   | 13        |
| • Branch 1 - Respondents Unfamiliar<br>with the School Report Card.....        | 14        |
| • Branch 2 - Respondents Somewhat<br>Familiar with the School Report Card..... | 15        |
| • Branch 3 - Respondents Very Familiar<br>with the Report Card .....           | 18        |
| • Additional Reporting Recommendations.....                                    | 26        |
| <b>SECTION 3 - IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>                           | <b>29</b> |
| • Theme 1: Clear, Simple, Timely, and<br>Actionable Communication .....        | 29        |
| • Theme 2: State as Partner to Districts,<br>not Enforcer .....                | 29        |
| • Theme 3: Systemic Fairness and Equity Issues .....                           | 30        |
| • Theme 4: Improving Conditions for and<br>Outreach to Teachers.....           | 30        |
| • Theme 5: Other System Improvements .....                                     | 31        |
| • Limitations .....  | 31        |
| <b>EDITORIAL NOTES.....</b>  | <b>32</b> |

# SOUTH CAROLINA STAKEHOLDER SURVEY:

## *Design, Implementation, and Outcomes*



### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Center for Assessment partnered with the South Carolina (SC) Education Oversight Committee (EOC) to develop and administer a survey about the SC accountability system and its associated school report card. The survey was administered to a range of stakeholders during late May and early July 2025. This report summarizes the key methodological steps for all phases of this work as well as the key findings and recommendations.

A total of 1,621 responses were received and analyzed in multiple waves of outreach that reached parents, government officials, teachers, school administrators, superintendents, and the general public. Respondents received both common and unique question sets depending on their familiarity with the school report card.

In terms of the current school report card, users within the school system generally perceive the official school ratings as too low - indicating they thought that most schools are rated worse than they actually are - whereas members of the broader public generally perceive them as too high. Most users note that important information is missing and the survey contains detailed information on the relative importance of different aspects of school quality, indicators, and supplementary resources that are desired.

Generally speaking, reporting on academically-oriented areas, including postsecondary readiness, is desired the most along with school safety. Users generally like to look at the overall performance of schools and then make comparisons to other schools, districts, or the state/nation. Many respondents noted that various aspects of the system remained somewhat unclear to them, ranging from how the system is designed and used to how certain indicators are computed. Thus, more user-friendly, interactive dashboards with clearer explanations of rules and guidance on how to act upon the information are desired.

Respondents also provided a variety of suggestions for improving the system in the future. This included a call for clear, timely, and actionable information in user-friendly formats, having the state act more as a partner rather than enforcer, helping to reduce undue burdens of the system, and providing more outreach and support.



## INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the key design and dissemination steps as well as outcomes for a broad-based stakeholder survey administered between late May and early July in South Carolina (SC) as part of the cyclical review process of the statewide accountability system. The survey was designed by a team at the Center for Assessment in cooperation with the Education Oversight Committee (EOC).

The report reflects largely the content that was presented to the SC Accountability Advisory Committee (AAC) during a virtual meeting on August 6, 2025, although it also includes a few further details on the qualitative analyses and some select statistical breakdowns of information.

The report is divided into three main sections. In the first main section it discusses the design, dissemination, and overall response metrics for the survey. In the second main section it discusses the key response patterns for all questions. This includes a more detailed characterization of the respondent sample by key characteristics, the responses provided by respondents with different levels of familiarity with the school report card in three branches of the survey, and broader recommendations about reporting for the future. The third section includes strategic recommendations for next steps based on major themes and patterns from open-ended responses.

## SECTION 1 - SURVEY DESIGN, DISSEMINATION, AND RESPONSES

### Survey Design

The broad-based survey that is the focus of this report was designed by the Center for Assessment in close cooperation with the SC EOC. Specifically, the Center team reviewed past and present surveys, research questions, and outreach efforts that were part of SC's cyclical review process. The Center team then created an initial draft that was presented to the EOC for initial feedback.

After a few revisions were made, the overall vision for the survey design, implementation, and analysis was presented to the SC AAC on April 14, 2025, during a virtual webinar. Specifically, the presentation reiterated that the survey was one of several outreach efforts designed to capture the voices and insights of key stakeholder groups across the state. These voices included:

- School and district leaders
- Educators
- Parents / caregivers
- Business / community leaders
- Other relevant stakeholders

As illustrated further below, all of these different stakeholder groups were reached through the survey.

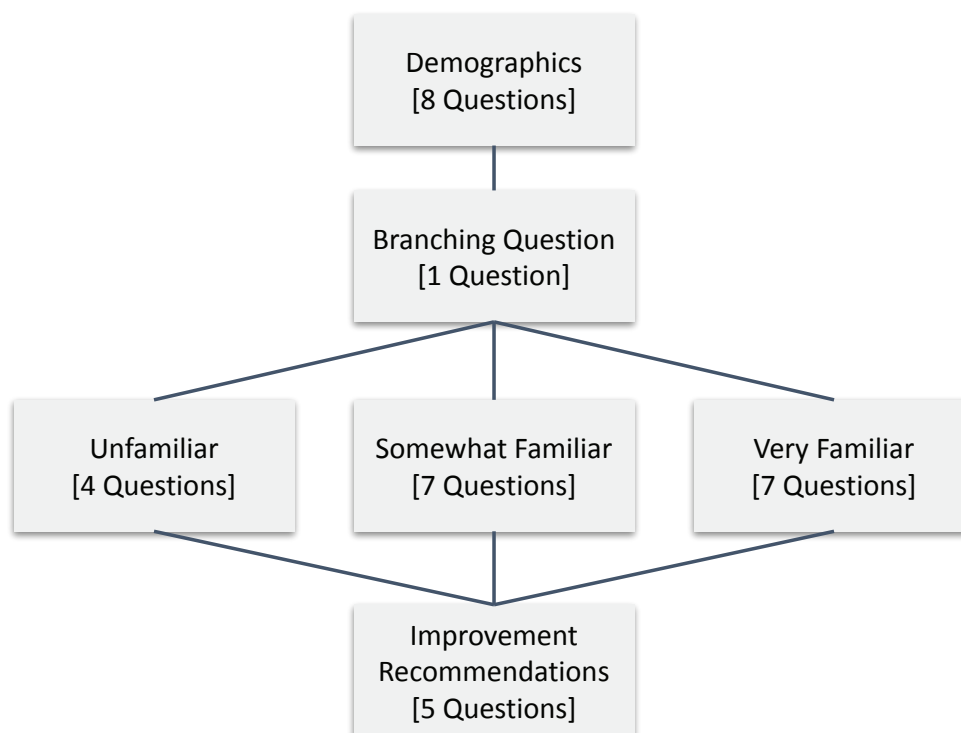
The key questions targeted by the survey and the associated outreach efforts included the following:

- How do stakeholders use accountability results?
- To what extent does the current system support priority uses for these stakeholders?
- Are the current rating categories clear and helpful?
- Are the performance expectations for schools appropriate?
- What information is more broadly important to measure school quality?
- To what extent is that information represented in the current system?

- What are priorities for potential new measures?
- How can reports and support be improved?

The SC AAC provided feedback at the April meeting. AAC members appreciated the overall design approach to the survey, including the idea of branching sets of questions based on report card familiarity, and recommended a few improvements. After this initial round of feedback was received, additional meetings with the EOC were held to fine tune the survey further. It was considered complete and ready for administration by mid-May. Figure 1.1 shows the overall structure of the survey in graphical form.

**Figure 1.1**



All respondents first received eight demographic-type questions that helped to characterize the respondent sample. Each respondent then received a branching question that allowed for funneling the respondents into one of three response branches based on their familiarity with the school report card.

Specifically, the question that was asked of respondents was:

**How familiar are you with the school report card?**  
 1 - I am not familiar with it / have never used it  
 2 - I have seen it or heard of it, but have not explored it much  
 3 - I have used it and understand the key sections / data it provides

The branching was done because it allowed for a more targeted phrasing of questions. For example, it did not make sense to ask questions about the accuracy of current school ratings or the degree to which respondents understood the computation of certain indicators when respondents were not even familiar with the school report card. Instead, broader questions about the system overall and its use could be asked of these respondents.

In the three response branches, respondents then received four, seven, or seven questions, respectively. After this respective question set, every respondent then received five additional questions asking about recommendations for reporting, other system improvements, and general comments. Table 1.1 shows the breakdown of the questions by format; this includes selected response and constructed-response / short-answer questions as well as the number of response options for selected-response questions.

**Table 1.1 Numbers and Types of Questions in Different Survey Sections**

| Section           | # Questions | # SR Questions | # Options | # CR Questions | Total # Questions |
|-------------------|-------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-------------------|
| Demographics      | 8           | 8              | 5 - 11    | 0              |                   |
| Unfamiliar        | 4           | 3              | 5 - 11    | 1              | 17                |
| Somewhat Familiar | 7           | 5              | 3 - 8     | 2              | 20                |
| Very Familiar     | 7           | 5              | 3 - 17    | 2              | 20                |
| Recommendations   | 5           | 2              | 15        | 3              |                   |

*Note.* SR = selected response, CR = constructed response.

Table 1.1 shows that several questions had more than three options, sometimes reaching up to 17 choices. The technology for SurveyMonkey made responding to these questions on different devices relatively easy, however, and the common scale used for all of these choices further helped with easing the response burden. In total, respondents across the three branches received 17, 20, and 20 questions respectively. The mean response time for the survey was 7.5 minutes.

## Survey Dissemination

As alluded to above, the survey was disseminated through SurveyMonkey appropriately ‘branded’ in order to emphasize it was distributed on behalf of the EOC. Specifically, a direct respondent link was provided to the EOC team that they were able to embed in different communication efforts. The survey remained open between May 19, 2025 and July 4, 2025. In total, five primary waves of outreach were done.

These included:

- One newsletter in May (1,433 people)
- Two press releases to school public information officers (102 people)
- One press release to news media, government officials, and Expect More SC subscribers (473 people)
- One request to the *School Improvement Council* to distribute the survey to parents

The Center team monitored the volume of incoming responses as well as the evolving composition of the respondent pool. This information was shared regularly with the EOC team via email, allowing them to initiate additional pushes for outreach focusing on underrepresented respondent groups.

These efforts were reflected in the waves of responses that came in during the open period, with larger volumes of response coming in directly after outreach efforts and, more generally, during weekdays rather than weekends.

## Survey Responses

A total of 1,621 responses were received through the various communication efforts by the EOC. One of these responses was provided via a PDF scan of the survey as the person had some unexplained issue with the response interface; however, this was an anomaly<sup>1</sup>. At a very high level, most respondents were White, English-speaking, had at least 10 – if not 15 or more than 20 – years of experience in the field, and were very familiar with the report card. The respondent characteristics are discussed in more detail in the next section.

## SECTION 2 - KEY FINDINGS

Key findings from the survey were compiled in a presentation that was given to the SC AAC on August 6, 2025, during a virtual meeting. In this section, response distributions for core selected-response questions are presented, taken directly from Survey Monkey.

All open-ended responses were analyzed in two ways. First, they were processed through ChatGPT Plus with iterative prompt engineering to extract initial themes with approximate relative frequencies and illustrative real-life quotes. This was done to support early presentation of themes during the August 6, 2025, virtual meeting and to investigate the defensibility of these themes and the overall AI-supported analysis approach in this context.

Second, the responses were entered into the freely available [Taguette](#) program and were manually hardcoded for key themes. This was done by the author of this report, who has formal training and experience in both quantitative and qualitative research methodology.

This section presents the results in the general order of the main sections on the survey. That is, it first discusses the demographic breakdown of the respondent sample followed by the responses within the three branches - unfamiliar, somewhat familiar, and very familiar in short - and concluding with the section on general recommendations.

## Respondent Characteristics

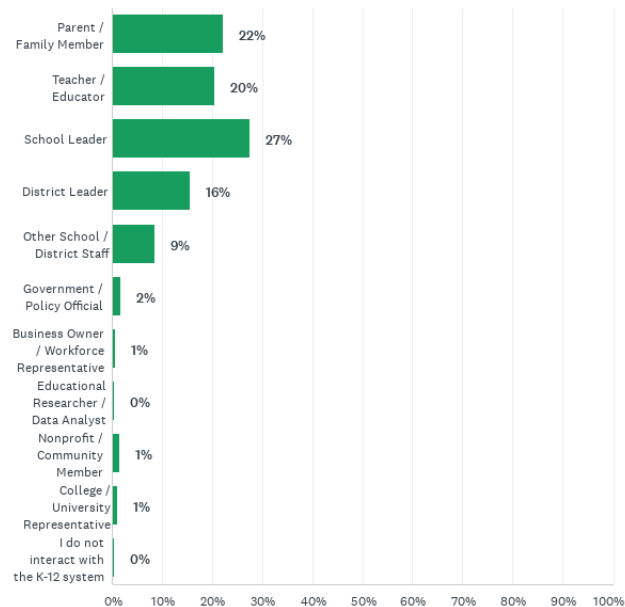
Two questions about the role that respondents have within the system were asked first. The first question asked about their current primary role in the education sector while the second question asked what roles they identified with when reflecting on their overall adult experiences; Figure 2.1 shows the resulting responses.

<sup>1</sup> This response was included in the downloaded data file that was used for some secondary analyses but excluded in the SurveyMonkey graphics for selected-response questions because it could not be manually added to the internal SurveyMonkey database.

**Figure 2.1 Primary Role and Overall Role Familiarity of Respondents**

**Q1 What is your primary role in interacting with the K-12 public education system right now?**  
Select one.

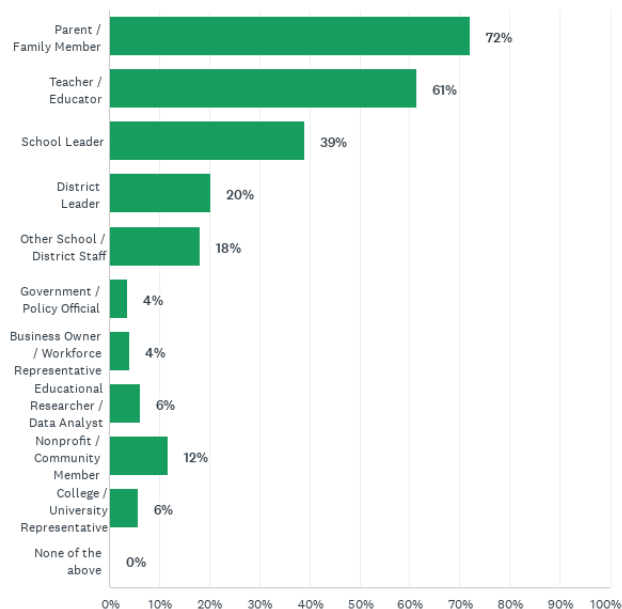
Answered: 1,620 Skipped: 0



**Primary Role**

**Q2 Considering your overall adult experiences, which of the following roles related to K-12 education do you identify with or have experience in? Select all that apply.**

Answered: 1,620 Skipped: 0



**All Roles**

Clearly, most respondents currently have a role that is directly related to the education sector with 27% identifying as school leaders, 20% identifying as teachers, 16% identifying as district leaders, and 9% identifying as other school or district staff. In addition, 22% of respondents identified as parents or family members with the remaining respondents falling into other groups.

Importantly, however, when respondents were asked about the roles that they could identify with more generally, 72% of respondents said that they could identify with parental roles followed by 61% who said that they could identify with the teacher role, 39% who said that they could identify with the school leader role, 20% who said that they could identify with the district leader role, and 18% who said that they could identify with another school or district staff role.

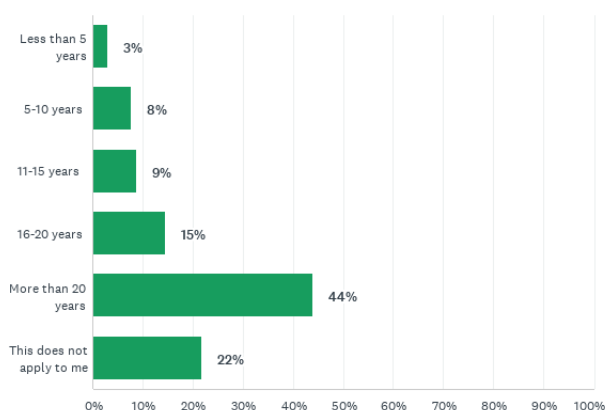
This shows that the key perspectives of interest were understood and reflected by a large proportion of the respondent pool and also underscores the importance of asking role-based questions in this dual manner.

Two questions in particular underscored that the respondent sample skewed towards older, more experienced users of the system. Figure 2.2 shows the responses to the questions that were asked about their current age and their years of experience in the system.

**Figure 2.2 Responses Characterizing the Experience of Respondents**

**Q3 If you are currently an educator or educational leader/administrator, approximately how many years have you worked in the field of education?**

Answered: 1,620 Skipped: 0



Teachers Only  
(NCES, 2021 Data)

< 3 years: ~12.7%  
4-9 years: ~25.6%  
10-14 years: ~15.9%  
15+ years: ~45.8%

Principals Only  
(NCES, 2021 Data)

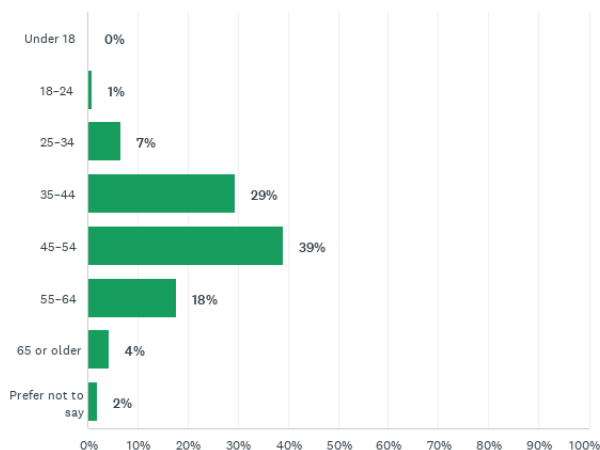
≤ 3 years: ~35%  
4-9 years: ~38%  
10-19 years: ~24%  
≥ 20 years: ~4%

Average teaching  
experience of principals  
was ~10 years  
(nationally)

<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cls/public-school-principals>  
[https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Career\\_Paths\\_of\\_Principals.pdf](https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Career_Paths_of_Principals.pdf)

**Q8 To which age group do you belong?**

Answered: 1,620 Skipped: 0



The first graph shows that 44% of respondents said that they had more than 20 years of experience in the field followed by another 15% who had at 15 but no more than 20 years of experience for a total of 59% of respondents who had at least 15 years of experience. This is reflected in the age distribution in the second graph, which shows that 39% of respondents were between 45 and 54 years old and a total of 90% of respondents were at least 35 years old.



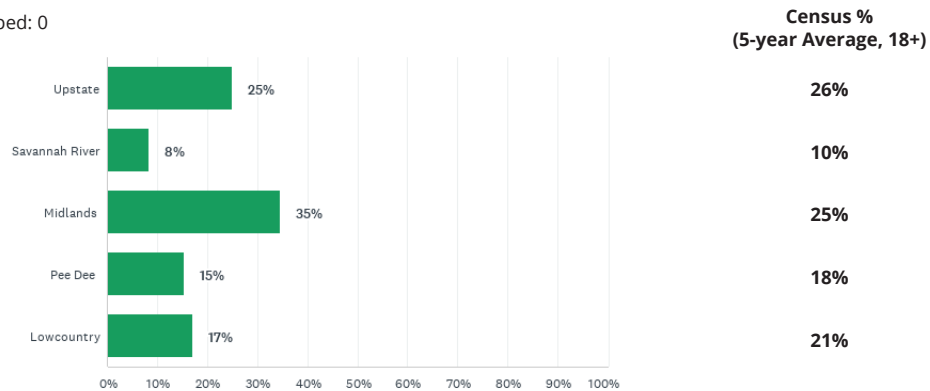
Figure 2.3 provides information on regional and ethnic composition. In particular, relative to 2025 census information regarding 18+ year-olds in SC, most regions are reasonably well represented in the respondent sample - which generally skews older anyway - while the Midlands region is a bit underrepresented. These are approximate comparisons.

In addition, while the overall proportions of ethnic groups reflect the relative prevalence of each in the state, White respondents were slightly underrepresented and Black or African American respondents were slightly overrepresented in comparison to the overall SC adult population.

### Figure 2.3 Regional and Ethnic Composition of Respondents

#### Q4 Which geographic region of the state do you live in?

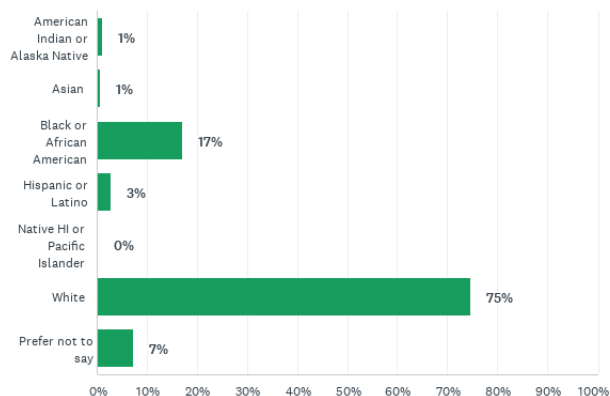
Answered: 1,620 Skipped: 0



Census data from: <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S0101?q=S0101&g=040XX00US45&y=2023>

#### Q5 How would you describe your race or ethnicity? Choose all that apply.

Answered: 1,620 Skipped: 0



**98%** of respondents said that **English is spoken at home.**

**99%** of respondents said that **English is their preferred language of communication.**

<https://www.neilsberg.com/insights/south-carolina-population-by-race/>

In sum, the goal of the survey was to capture diverse voices from various stakeholder groups with a natural focus on people currently working within - or having historical familiarity with - the SC education system. This was accomplished reasonably well, along with geographic and ethnic diversity to the degree possible.

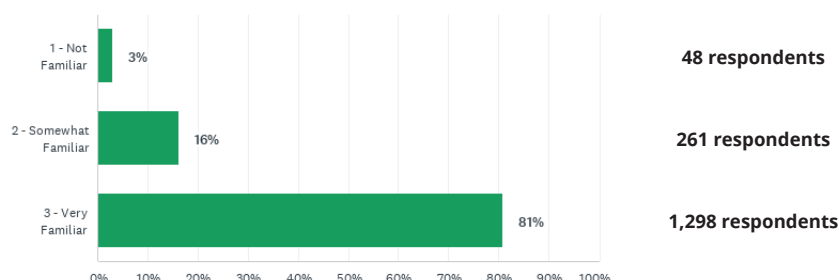
## Familiarity with Report Card

Given the importance of the branching question centered around familiarity, the responses to this question are reproduced below in Figure 2.4 and Table 2.1.

**Figure 2.4 Familiarity with School Report Card**

Q9 How familiar are you with the school report card?

Answered: 1,607 Skipped: 13



**Table 2.1 Distribution of Familiarity by Region**

|        |                | How familiar are you with the school report card? |                       |                   | Total  |
|--------|----------------|---|-----------------------|-------------------|--------|
|        |                | 1 - Not Familiar                                  | 2 - Somewhat Familiar | 3 - Very Familiar |        |
| Region | Lowcountry     | Count   | 2                     | 48                | 225    |
|        |                | % within Region                                   | 0.7%                  | 17.5%             | 81.8%  |
|        |                | % within Familiarity                              | 4.2%                  | 18.4%             | 17.3%  |
|        | Midlands       | Count   | 17                    | 89                | 447    |
|        |                | % within Region                                   | 3.1%                  | 16.1%             | 80.8%  |
|        |                | % within Familiarity                              | 35.4%                 | 34.1%             | 34.4%  |
|        | Pee Dee        | Count   | 22                    | 55                | 170    |
|        |                | % within Region                                   | 8.9%                  | 22.3%             | 68.8%  |
|        |                | % within Familiarity                              | 45.8%                 | 21.1%             | 13.1%  |
|        | Savannah River | Count   | 0                     | 12                | 121    |
|        |                | % within Region                                   | 0.0%                  | 9.0%              | 91.0%  |
|        |                | % within Familiarity                              | 0.0%                  | 4.6%              | 9.3%   |
|        | Upstate        | Count   | 7                     | 57                | 336    |
|        |                | % within Region                                   | 1.8%                  | 14.2%             | 84.0%  |
|        |                | % within Familiarity                              | 14.6%                 | 21.8%             | 25.9%  |
| Total  |                | Count   | 48                    | 261               | 1299   |
|        |                | % within Region                                   | 3.0%                  | 16.2%             | 80.8%  |
|        |                | % within Familiarity                              | 100.0%                | 100.0%            | 100.0% |

Note. Table created in SPSS using the 1 additional, manually-entered response. Distribution of PeeDee and Savannah River differ most notably from others. This aligns with  $\chi^2$  value but the test is highly sensitive for this sample size.

The age of the respondents and years of experience in the system is clearly reflected in their overall level of familiarity with the school report card with 81% of respondents saying that they are very familiar with it, 16% saying that they are somewhat familiar with it, and only 3% saying that they are not very familiar with it. These percentage differences - and, thus, the differences in absolute numbers of respondents - should be kept in mind when interpreting the response patterns in the three branches in the following subsections.

There are a few notable regional differences in familiarity. In general, Savannah River respondents are more familiar with the school report card while Pee Dee respondents are somewhat less familiar with it. This is likely explainable by the fact that a higher proportion of respondents in Savannah River were district leaders whereas a higher proportion of respondents in Pee Dee were parents, relative to one another and the other regions.

## Branch 1 - Respondents Unfamiliar with the School Report Card

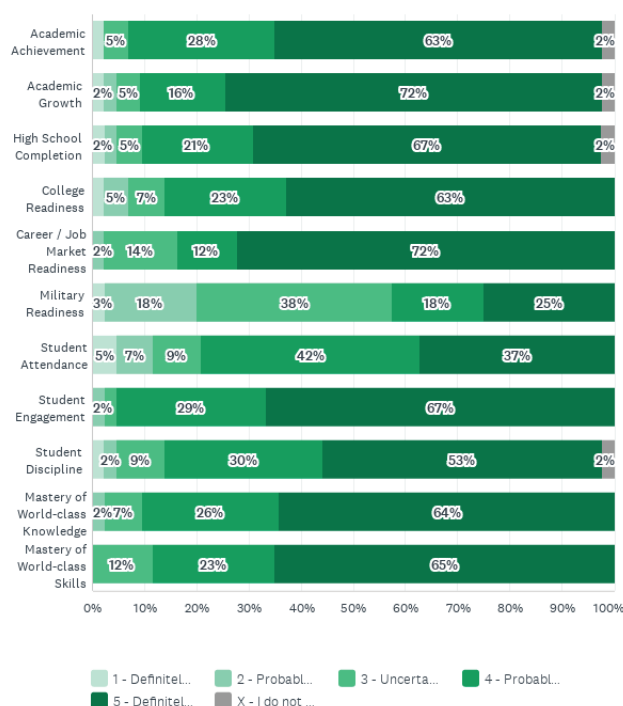
Given the relative lack of familiarity with the school report card, respondents in this branch were asked broader questions about the overall goals and potential design features of the accountability system. A total of 48 respondents were part of this branch.

First, respondents were asked for which aspects of student performance the state should hold schools accountable; Figure 2.5 shows the responses to this question. Questions about reporting on school offerings and other conditions of learning were asked of everyone in the final section.

**Figure 2.5 Aspects of Student Performance for which Schools Should be Held Accountable [Unfamiliar Respondents]**

Q10 For which of the following aspects of student performance should the state hold schools accountable? (We will have a question later about services that schools provide - this is about student performance.)

Answered: 43 Skipped: 1,577



1 - Definitely not  
 2 - Probably not  
 3 - Uncertain / not sure  
 4 - Probably yes  
 5 - Definitely yes  
 X - I do not understand what this means

Figure 2.5 shows that, overall, there is a desire to hold schools accountable for most of the aspects of performance that are currently part of the system. Arguably, there are slight differences across categories with some additional preference given to academically-oriented aspects along with student engagement and slightly less preference given to student discipline, student attendance, and, most clearly, military readiness. Interestingly, student discipline, bullying, and attendance were mentioned in several open-ended comments later in the survey.

However, 81% of respondents noted that it is very important that schools are held accountable for helping all students succeed, including those who may need extra help to catch up, and an additional 14% agreed that this is at least somewhat important. When they were being asked how helpful a global rating of school quality with an associated 0-100 rating scale would be for them - in other words, the kind of rating that is currently provided - 53% of respondents said that this would be very helpful while another 42% considered this to be somewhat helpful.

In addition, 22 respondents within this branch gave short descriptions of the kinds of additional information that they might find helpful on a school report card ranging from a more grade-type scale to clearer, more actionable explanations; see Figure 2.6.

### Figure 2.6 Useful Information in School Report Card [Unfamiliar Respondents]

What would make a school rating most helpful to you?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 1,598

- **Clearer, familiar formats**
  - Use A–F grades and 10-point scales (e.g., A = 90–100)
  - Avoid overly broad 0–100 ranges
- **More detailed breakdowns and explanations**
  - Show how the score was calculated
  - Include scores by category (achievement, growth, engagement)
  - Provide an overall rating *plus* explanatory context
- **Academic and non-academic indicators**
  - Include academic achievement and growth
  - Highlight student engagement and class offerings
  - Address support for disabilities and accommodations
- **School environment and safety**
  - Report on discipline incidents, criminal activity, and expulsions
  - Show teacher turnover, qualifications, and school climate
  - Include exit surveys or student perspectives on daily experience
- **Transparency and comparability**
  - Clearly explain the rating criteria
  - Compare to other local schools
- **Practical and personal relevance**
  - Help families choose where to live
  - Support decisions on where to work or enroll children
  - Recognize staff achievements and community involvement

## Branch 2 - Respondents Somewhat Familiar with the School Report Card

In this branch, respondents had some idea of what a school report card is, may have even used it a bit, but were generally not in-depth users of the information on it. Consequently, they were asked a few more targeted questions about the school report card, including questions about conceptual details, but without going into the specifics of particular indicators for instance. A total of 261 respondents were part of this branch.

Respondents were first asked two related questions about how they used the information on the school report card and the broader accountability system. The responses to the second question

revealed that many respondents equated the school report card with the accountability system and did not consider additional resources, data, or other supports much in this context.

Table 2.2 is based on a thematic analysis of the responses to both questions combined, reflecting in its layout an approximate relative rank-ordering of the categories shown. Essentially, this shows that the overall rating, academic performance, and academic growth are particularly important along with making comparisons of a particular school to other schools in the district or the state. Next up are aspects of the card that help users understand conditions of schooling such as climate and safety of teacher staffing information or information regarding demographic breakdowns of information to dig deeper.

**Table 2.2 Use of School Report Card Information [Somewhat Familiar Respondents]**

Please describe what information from the school report card you typically look at and what you do with it.

Answered: 142 Skipped: 1,478

Please describe what other information from the state accountability system you typically look at and what you do with it.

Answered: 92 Skipped: 1,528

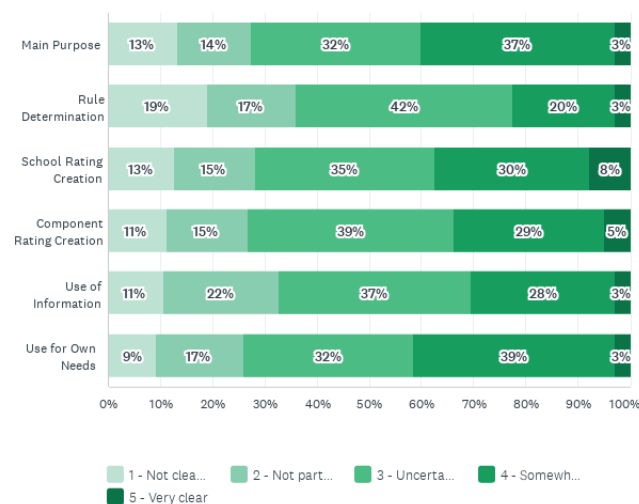
| Theme                        | Sample Response   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Overall Rating               | Overall rating [...]; How well the county is doing [...]                            |
| Academic Performance         | Academic achievement; Test scores compared to state and national averages           |
| Comparison to Others         | Comparing school districts; Compare it to other schools [for] school choice         |
| Student Growth / Improvement | Looking for growth within subgroups; [...] the growth of students and school        |
| School Climate / Safety      | School Climate - to look for ways to improve  |
| Teacher / Staff Info         | I look for [...] teachers' experience/stability; [...] student/teacher ratios       |
| College & Career Readiness   | I also factor career readiness; I look mainly at grad rates and state testing [...] |
| Demographic Breakdowns       | [...] Demographics, decide which schools are best for my children [...]             |

Figure 2.7 contains information about two related questions that pertain to clarity of information and ease of use. The first question is about clarity regarding different aspects of the overall system. Importantly, between 26% and 36% of respondents found each of the named aspects either not clear at all or not particularly clear with another 32% to 42% expressing uncertainty, indicating a need for more state and local support on that front.

**Figure 2.7 Clarity and Ease of Use of Different System Aspects [Somewhat Familiar Respondents]**

**Q16 How clear are the following aspects of the state accountability system to you? Please rate each one.**

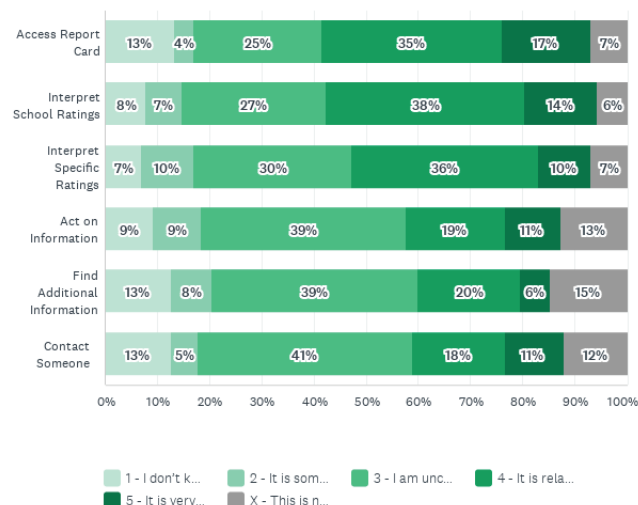
Answered: 142 Skipped: 1,478



1 - Not clear at all  
2 - Not particularly clear  
3 - Uncertain / not sure  
4 - Somewhat clear  
5 - Very clear

**Q17 How easy or difficult is it for you to complete the following activities? Please rate each one.**

Answered: 142 Skipped: 1,478



1 - I don't know how to do this  
2 - It is somewhat difficult  
3 - I am uncertain / not sure  
4 - It is relatively easy  
5 - It is very easy  
X - This is not something I typically do

In terms of ease of use, respondents felt rather comfortable with accessing the report card, interpreting the global rating, and interpreting component ratings. They expressed a bit more uncertainty when it comes to acting upon that information and, perhaps most strongly, finding additional information or contacting someone for help. This would suggest that the overall interpretational resources are working reasonably well but that more support could be provided for certain users when they want to dig deeper and, generally, in terms of helping them understand how different aspects of the system are designed or intended to be used.

Respondents in this branch also had questions about the accuracy of the current ratings, whether important information is currently missing, and what might help them to use the report cards better. Their responses are discussed in the next subsection together with the respondents in the third branch to bring out certain contrasts better.

### **Branch 3 - Respondents Very Familiar with the Report Card**

In this branch, respondents used the school report card frequently as part of their job or their overall engagement with the school (e.g., as parents) and, thus, were expected to be able to answer more specific, targeted questions about certain aspects of the report card. A total of 1,298 respondents were part of this branch.

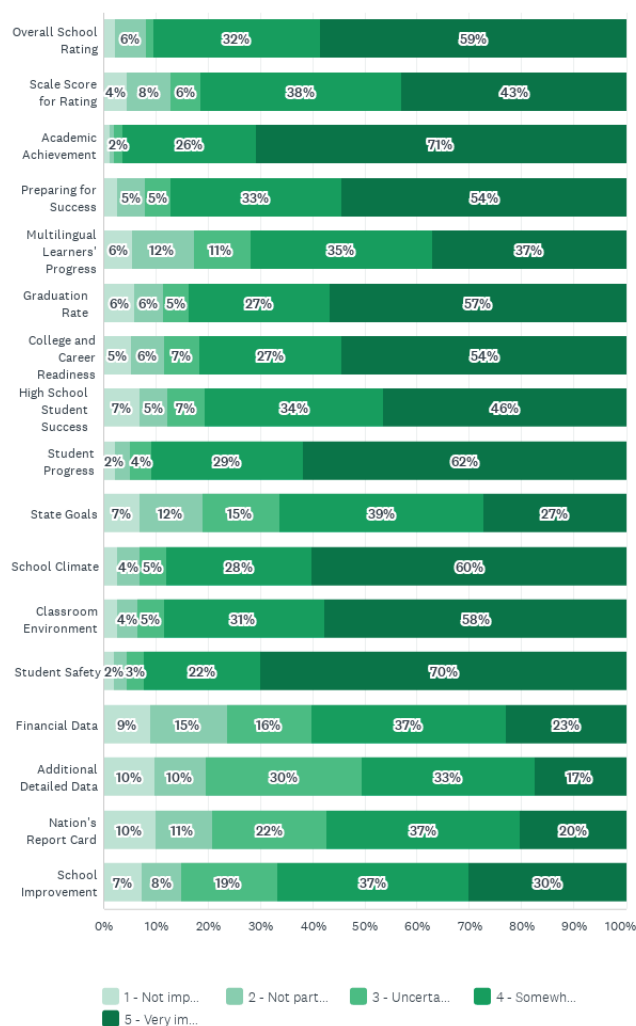
Respondents were first asked about the types of information that they look at on the report card and how they use it. Their responses were overall very similar to those of the respondents in branch 2 when it came to the aspects and general uses, although their comments reflected more targeted uses relative to their roles as one would expect.

Respondents were asked next about the relative importance of all of the different sections of the report card available to them - this is an example of a level of detail that other respondents were not asked about given their relative lack of familiarity with the report card. Figure 2.8 shows their responses to this question.

**Figure 2.8 Relative Importance of Each School Report Card Component [Very Familiar Respondents]**

Q23 Think of how you typically use the school report card. How important are each of the following types of information for your uses?

Answered: 862 Skipped: 758



1 - Not important at all  
2 - Not particularly important  
3 - Uncertain / not sure  
4 - Somewhat important  
5 - Very important

The responses about the relative importance of different report card components reflect the relative importance of the overall aspects that respondents looked at, as expressed through the open-ended questions. For example, academic achievement, academic progress, and the overall school rating were seen as very important. Interestingly, information about student safety was also viewed as critical. Information about school climate and the classroom environment had similar response patterns to information about graduation rate, preparing for success, college and career readiness, and, perhaps slightly less so, high school student success.

Again, these responses come from people working in different settings of the education system and it is helpful to keep in mind that some of these indicators are more relevant to some than others (e.g., elementary school teachers or principals have to worry less about high school success and postsecondary readiness than middle school or high school teachers).



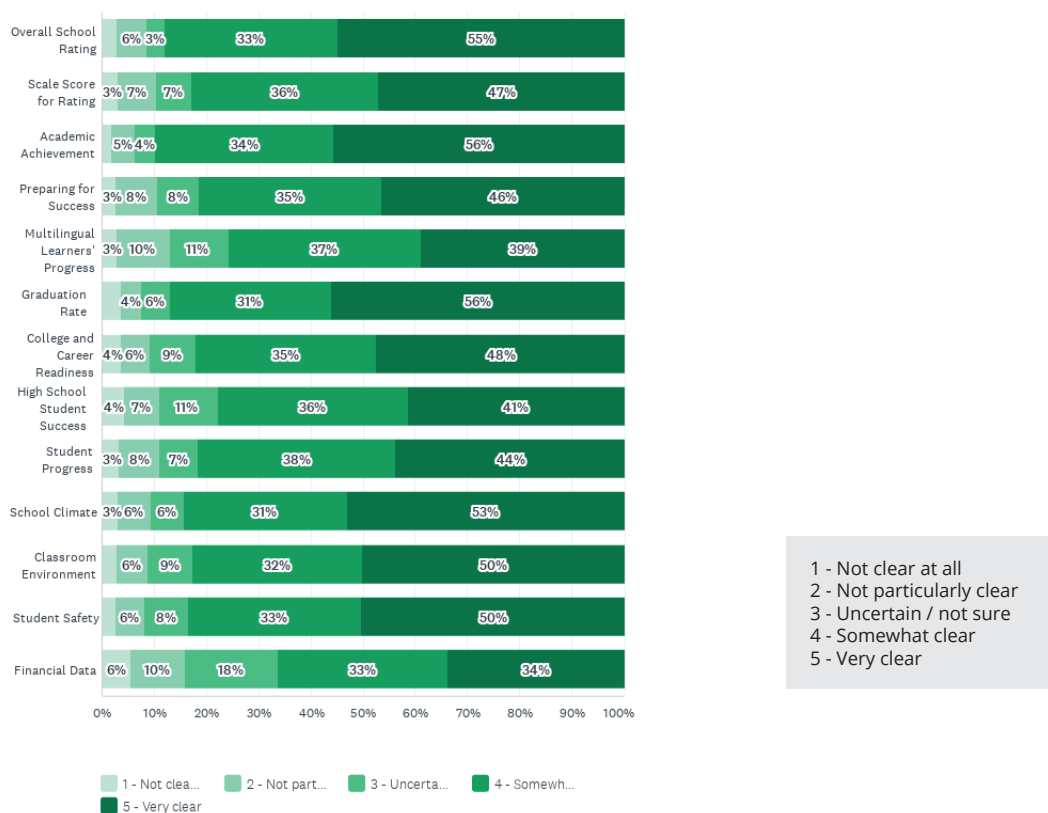
Respondents in this branch rated aspects such as the progress of multilingual learners as less important. This is perhaps explainable by the relatively low proportion of these learners in some schools or regions and the specific need of this information for particular roles. Similarly, less emphasis was placed on more secondary, contextual information about schools with specialized uses such as financial data, additional detailed data, or NAEP data.

Given that this branch contained respondents who are very familiar with the report card, it does not seem too surprising that they expressed a higher degree of clarity about how different ratings on the school report card are computed; Figure 2.9 shows the responses to the relevant question.

**Figure 2.9 Clarity about School Report Card Ratings [Very Familiar Respondents]**

Q24 How clear are you on how the ratings for each of the following types of information on the school report card are created?

Answered: 862 Skipped: 758



Specifically, between 77% and 90% of respondents found each of the ratings either somewhat clear or very clear with the exception of the financial data where that percentage dropped to 67%.

Some of the small differences might be explainable by at least one or two of the following factors. For example, it could be that indicators that have more intuitive interpretations such as graduation rate or academic achievement generally received higher clarity ratings than those who required a bit more interpretational effort such as multilingual learners' progress, the overall scale score,

preparing for success, and college and career readiness. However, to be fair, this may not necessarily be the result of a general interpretational difficulty but also the result of the lack of familiarity of respondents with certain indicators that are not of primary relevance to them.

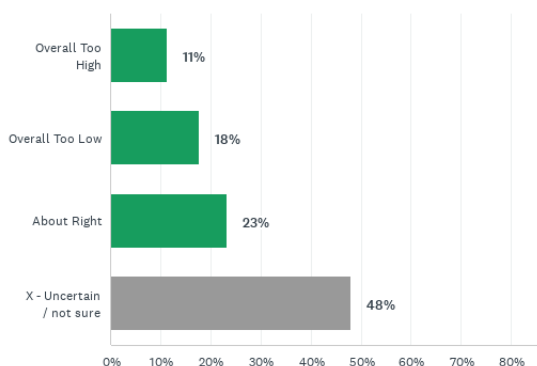
Respondents in this branch were then asked three questions that were identical to the ones for respondents in the second branch; all of these responses are discussed jointly now. The questions pertained to whether the respondents thought that the current school ratings were accurate, whether important information is missing, and what would help them make better use of the report card.

Figure 2.10 shows the responses to the first question about the accuracy of school ratings for respondents in the second and third branches. Importantly, rather than just using generic rating labels for the response categories for this question, specific labels were used to avoid misinterpretations. For example, rather than just saying “Too high” the label read “Overall too high – most schools are rated better than they actually are” and so on.

**Figure 2.10 Perceived Accuracy of Current School Ratings [Somewhat and Very Familiar Respondents]**

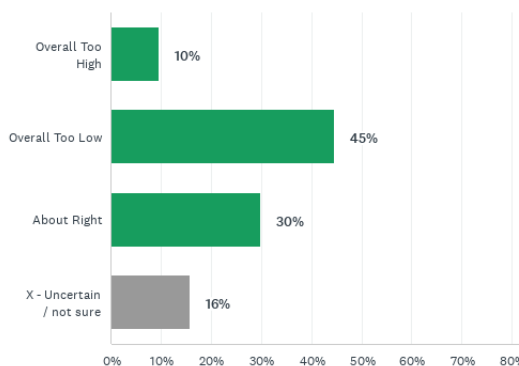
Q18 In your opinion, how accurate are current school ra

Answered: 142 Skipped: 1,478



**2 - Somewhat Familiar**  
**n = 142**

Answered: 862 Skipped: 758



**3 - Very Familiar**  
**n = 862**

*Note.* This question only got asked for branches 2 and 3.

Figure 2.10 shows that few respondents in either group thought that the ratings were overall too high – meaning that schools should receive lower ratings - yet there were important differences between the two groups. First of all, the percentage of respondents who said that they were uncertain about the ratings accuracy was much higher amongst the somewhat familiar respondents as one might expect.

Conditioning on respondents in each group who offered an opinion rather than expressing uncertainty, 54% of the very familiar respondents thought that schools are rated too low whereas only 35% of the somewhat familiar respondents thought so. Conversely, 12% of the very familiar

respondents said that school ratings are about right whereas 21% of the somewhat familiar respondents said so. Finally, only 36% of the very familiar respondents thought that school ratings are currently too high whereas 44% of the somewhat familiar respondents thought so.

This shows that, generally speaking, more familiar respondents do not generally think that school ratings are about right and find them overall too low whereas somewhat familiar respondents find them either about right or might consider them too high.

Table 2.3 shows a further breakdown of these ratings that uses a coarse grouping of respondents by both (1) familiarity ratings, as in Figure 2.10, and by (2) whether they have a current role in the school community (i.e., teacher, school leader, district leader, other staff) or are a member of the broader public (i.e., parent, business owner, educational researcher, and other roles). In addition, Table 2.4 shows the same breakdown but only for the subset of respondents who offered an opinion.

**Table 2.3 Breakdown of Accuracy Rating Perception by System Role [Somewhat and Very Familiar Respondents]**

Familiar Respondents]

|                                  |                          |               | Accuracy of Overall Ratings [Somewhat Familiar] |          |         |                          |        |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|---|----------|---------|--------------------------|--------|
|                                  |                          |               | About Right                                     | Too High | Too Low | X - Uncertain / not sure | Total  |
| Primary Role in Education System | School Community Members | Count         | 18  | 5        | 17      | 32                       | 72     |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 25.0%   | 6.9%     | 23.6%   | 44.4%                    | 100.0% |
|                                  | Broader Public           | Count         | 15  | 11       | 9       | 36                       | 71     |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 21.1%   | 15.5%    | 12.7%   | 50.7%                    | 100.0% |
| Total                            |                          | Count         | 33  | 16       | 26      | 68                       | 143    |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 23.1%   | 11.2%    | 18.2%   | 47.6%                    | 100.0% |

|                                  |                          |               | Accuracy of Overall School Ratings [Very Familiar] |          |         |                          |        |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|--|----------|---------|--------------------------|--------|
|                                  |                          |               | About Right  | Too High | Too Low | X - Uncertain / not sure | Total  |
| Primary Role in Education System | School Community Members | Count         | 199  | 48       | 345     | 99                       | 691    |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 28.8%  | 6.9%     | 49.9%   | 14.3%                    | 100.0% |
|                                  | Broader Public           | Count         | 59   | 35       | 41      | 37                       | 172    |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 34.3%  | 20.3%    | 23.8%   | 21.5%                    | 100.0% |
| Total                            |                          | Count         | 258  | 83       | 386     | 136                      | 863    |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 29.9%  | 9.6%     | 44.7%   | 15.8%                    | 100.0% |

**Table 2.4 Breakdown of Accuracy Rating Perception by System Role for Respondents with Opinions [Somewhat and Very Familiar Respondents]**

|                                  |                          |               | Accuracy of Overall Ratings [Somewhat Familiar] |          |         |        |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|---|----------|---------|--------|
|                                  |                          |               | About Right                                     | Too High | Too Low | Total  |
| Primary Role in Education System | School Community Members | Count         | 18  | 5        | 17      | 40     |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 45.0%   | 12.5%    | 42.5%   | 100.0% |
|                                  | Broader Public           | Count         | 15  | 11       | 9       | 35     |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 42.9%   | 31.4%    | 25.7%   | 100.0% |
| Total                            |                          | Count         | 33  | 16       | 26      | 75     |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 44.0%   | 21.3%    | 34.7%   | 100.0% |

|                                  |                          |               | Accuracy of Overall School Ratings [Very Familiar] |          |         |        |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|--|----------|---------|--------|
|                                  |                          |               | About Right  | Too High | Too Low | Total  |
| Primary Role in Education System | School Community Members | Count         | 199  | 48       | 345     | 592    |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 33.6%  | 8.1%     | 58.3%   | 100.0% |
|                                  | Broader Public           | Count         | 59   | 35       | 41      | 135    |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 43.7%  | 25.9%    | 30.4%   | 100.0% |
| Total                            |                          | Count         | 258  | 83       | 386     | 727    |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 35.5%  | 11.4%    | 53.1%   | 100.0% |

The two components of Table 2.4 show the following. Among somewhat familiar respondents, the proportion of respondents in either role group who think that ratings are about right is almost exactly the same (45% vs. 43%) whereas a much higher percentage of school community members thinks that ratings are too low (43% vs. 26%) and a much higher percentage of the broader public thinks that ratings are too high (13% vs. 31%).

Looking at the very familiar respondents, the percentage of school community members who think that schools are rated too low is also much higher than in the broader public (58% vs. 30%). The percentage of members of the broader public who think that schools are rated too high is again much higher than among the school community members (26% vs. 8%).

As a result of these stark differences, the percentages of respondents who think that ratings are about right for most schools differ among the two subgroups of very familiar respondents with a larger proportion of the broader public thinking that they are about right (44% vs. 34%).

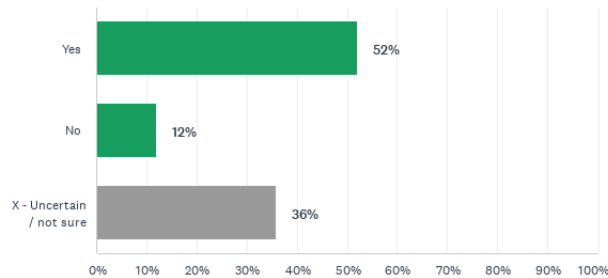
In short, school community members were more likely to indicate that schools are rated generally too low while members of the broader public were more likely to indicate that schools are generally rated too high. While percentages are used in these descriptions, the total numbers are different with the largest number of respondents being very familiar respondents that are members of the school community as noted at the outset in the demographics breakdown.

The next question in both the second and third branch was about whether important aspects are missing in the school report card; this is shown in Figure 2.11.

**Figure 2.11 Opinion about Missing Information [Somewhat and Very Familiar Respondents]**

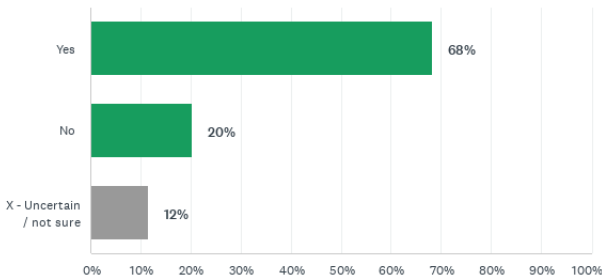
Q19 Do you believe school ratings leave out important information?

Answered: 142 Skipped: 1,478



**2 - Somewhat Familiar**  
**n = 142**

Answered: 862 Skipped: 758



**3 - Very Familiar**  
**n = 862**

A majority of both respondent groups think that important information is missing. This percentage is 81% of the somewhat familiar respondents with an opinion and 77% of the very familiar respondents with an opinion, with the percentage of respondents who have an opinion being higher in the very familiar group.

Similar to the previous analysis, Table 2.5 shows a breakdown of these responses by both familiarity level and by group membership overall while Table 2.6 shows this breakdown only for respondents with an opinion.

**Table 2.5 Breakdown of Missing Information Perception by System Role [Somewhat and Very Familiar Respondents]**

|                                  |                          |               | Important Information Missing [Somewhat Familiar] |               |       | Total  |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|---|---------------|-------|--------|
|                                  |                          |               | No  | X - Uncertain | Yes   |        |
| Primary Role in Education System | School Community Members | Count         | 4   | 21            | 47    | 72     |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 5.6%  | 29.2%         | 65.3% | 100.0% |
|                                  | Broader Public           | Count         | 13  | 30            | 28    | 71     |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 18.3%   | 42.3%         | 39.4% | 100.0% |
| Total                            | Count                    |               | 17  | 51            | 75    | 143    |
|                                  | % within Role            |               | 11.9%   | 35.7%         | 52.4% | 100.0% |

|                                  |                          |               | Important Information Missing [Very Familiar] |               |       |        |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|---|---------------|-------|--------|
|                                  |                          |               | No  | X - Uncertain | Yes   | Total  |
| Primary Role in Education System | School Community Members | Count         | 137   | 68            | 486   | 691    |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 19.8%   | 9.8%          | 70.3% | 100.0% |
|                                  | Broader Public           | Count         | 37  | 32            | 103   | 172    |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 21.5%   | 18.6%         | 59.9% | 100.0% |
| Total                            |                          | Count         | 174   | 100           | 589   | 863    |
|                                  |                          | % within Role | 20.2%   | 11.6%         | 68.3% | 100.0% |

**Table 2.6 Breakdown of Missing Information Perception by System Role for Respondents with Opinions [Somewhat and Very Familiar Respondents]**

|                                     |                             |               | Important Information Missing<br>[Somewhat Familiar] |       |        |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|--|-------|--------|
|                                     |                             |               | No   | Yes   | Total  |
| Primary Role in<br>Education System | School Community<br>Members | Count         | 4  | 47    | 51     |
|                                     |                             | % within Role | 7.8%   | 92.2% | 100.0% |
|                                     | Broader Public              | Count         | 13   | 28    | 41     |
|                                     |                             | % within Role | 31.7%  | 68.3% | 100.0% |
| Total                               |                             | Count         | 17   | 75    | 92     |
|                                     |                             | % within Role | 18.5%  | 81.5% | 100.0% |

|                                     |                             |               | Important Information Missing<br>[Very Familiar] |       | Total  |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|--|-------|--------|
|                                     |                             |               | No   | Yes   |        |
| Primary Role in<br>Education System | School Community<br>Members | Count         | 137  | 486   | 623    |
|                                     |                             | % within Role | 22.0%  | 78.0% | 100.0% |
|                                     | Broader Public              | Count         | 37   | 103   | 140    |
|                                     |                             | % within Role | 26.4%  | 73.6% | 100.0% |
| Total                               | Count                       |               | 174  | 589   | 763    |
|                                     | % within Role               |               | 22.8%  | 77.2% | 100.0% |

In simple terms, the majority of respondents in either branch and in either subgroup find that important information is missing from the school report card. The highest degree of uncertainty about having an opinion on this issue is expressed by the broader public that is somewhat familiar with the report card followed by the school community who is somewhat familiar followed by the

broader public who is very familiar. School community members who are very familiar with the school report card express the least degree of uncertainty about having an opinion on this issue, again as one would expect.

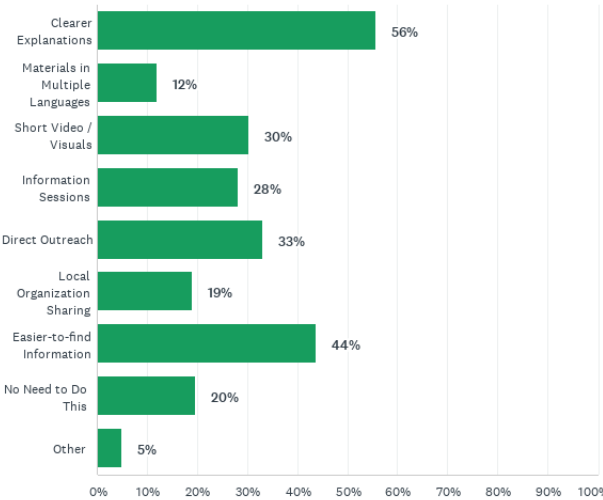
That being noted, the relative percentage of respondents who think that information is missing amongst those who have an opinion is notably different. Interestingly, 92% of school community members who are somewhat familiar with the report card think so compared to between 68% and 78% of the members in the other groups and branches.

The final question that was asked in both the second and third branch pertained to what additional information might be helpful to respondents to make better use of the school report card. The resulting responses are shown in Figure 2.12.

**Figure 2.12 Other Helpful Information for Supporting Report Card Use [Somewhat and Very Familiar Respondents]**

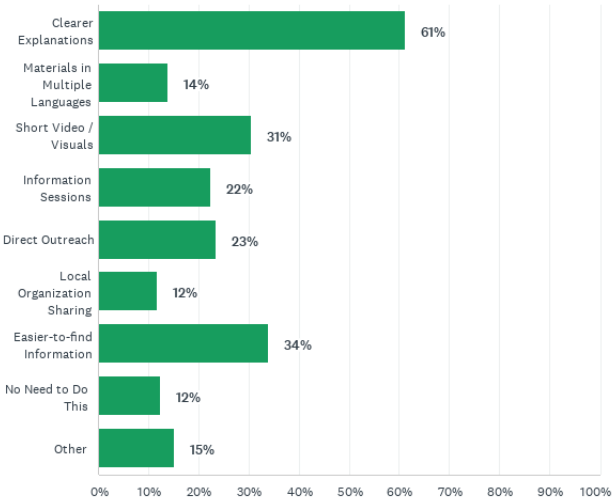
Q20 What would help you to better use school report cards? Select all that apply.

Answered: 142    Skipped: 1,478



**2 - Somewhat Familiar**  
**n = 142**

Answered: 862    Skipped: 758



**3 - Very Familiar**  
**n = 862**

In simple terms, clearer explanations were requested by most respondents in both groups, followed by easier search functionalities, videos or visuals, and either public information sessions or direct outreach.

Materials in multiple languages and direct outreach from local organizations were less of a priority with some respondents also noting that they actually did not need to use the report card better than they already do. Overall, what was requested was more similar amongst the respondent groups than not.

## Additional Reporting Recommendations

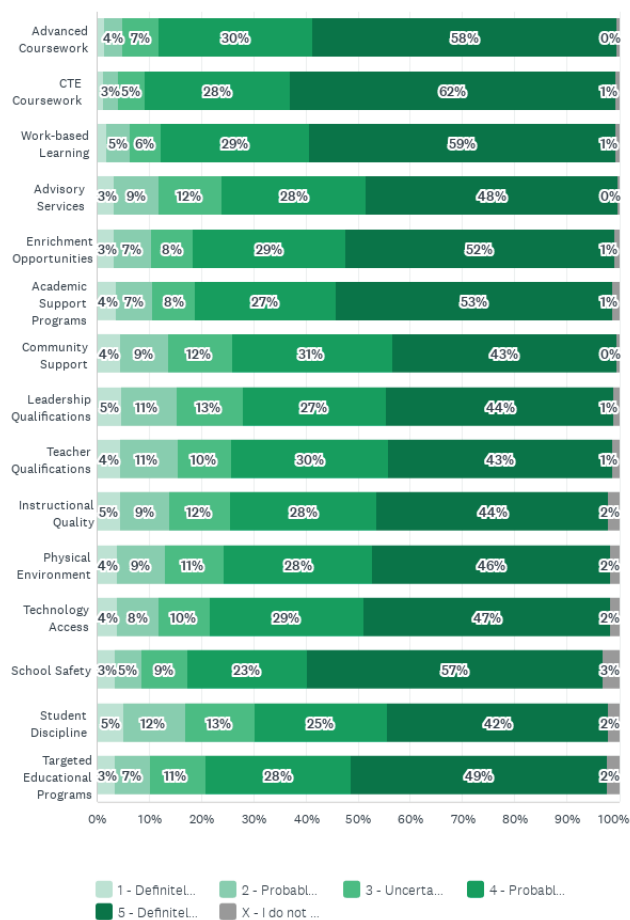
The final set of questions pertained to broader system reporting and improvement recommendations. These were questions that all respondents received, regardless of how familiar they said they were with the school report card. The reporting recommendation questions are discussed in this section while the improvement recommendation questions are discussed in the third section.

The first question was about whether the state should report on a range of services that schools provide. Importantly, this question was not about whether schools should be held accountable for how students perform in different areas, which was a separate question. Figure 2.13 shows the responses to the question about services; on the survey form, the actual question choices had a few examples listed for each category to clarify what was meant by each.

**Figure 2.13 Reporting on Services that Schools Provide**

Q28 Schools provide a range of services to help students succeed. Should the state publicly report information on the following?

Answered: 964 Skipped: 656



1 - Definitely not  
2 - Probably not  
3 - Uncertain / not sure  
4 - Probably yes  
5 - Definitely yes  
X - I do not understand what this means

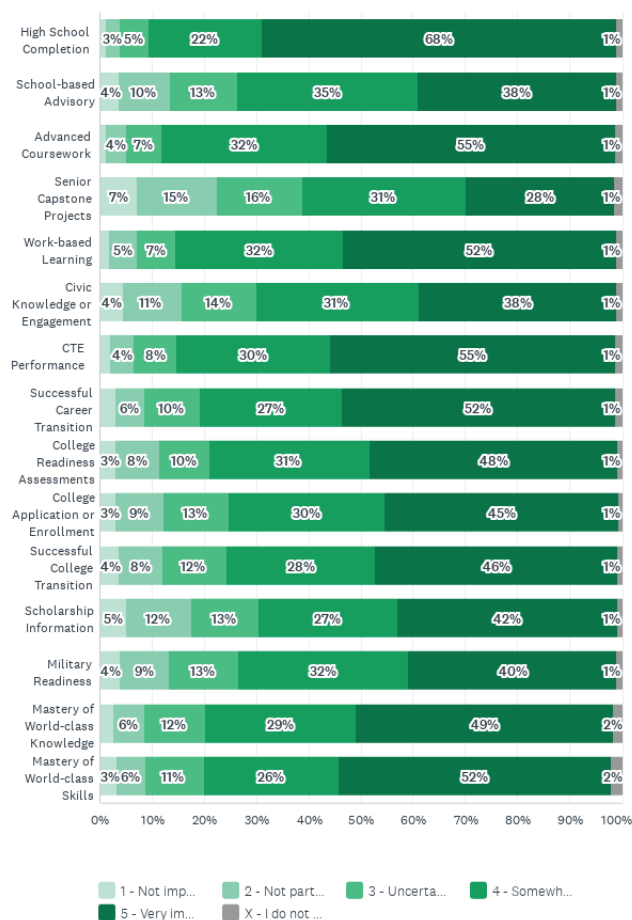
Advanced coursework, CTE coursework, work-based learning, and school safety received the strongest support but several other areas focused on academics such as enrichment opportunities and academic support received strong support as well. High school advisory and community-based program support were not quite as strongly supported and neither were areas related to qualifications of staff, physical conditions or technology access, or even targeted educational programs.

The next question was somewhat complementary to this one, with options phrased specifically in ways that reflected how students performed in certain areas rather than what was offered. For example, even though this is not shown in the figure for ease of reading, while the previous question asked about the advisory services offered by schools, this question asked about whether students participated in advisory services when offered. Figure 2.14 shows the resulting responses.

**Figure 2.14 Indicators of Student Readiness Success**

Q29 High schools use many strategies to prepare students for life after graduation. How important is each of the following types of information / indicator for understanding whether students are ready?

Answered: 964 Skipped: 656



1 - Not important at all  
2 - Not particularly important  
3 - Uncertain / not sure  
4 - Somewhat important  
5 - Very important  
X - I do not know what this means



The strongest support was for reporting on high school completion with 90% of respondents saying that this was either somewhat or very important to report. This was followed by student performance in advanced coursework, work-based learning, as well as career and technical education participation or performance.

Next up were data on successful career transitions as well as different indicators on successful college preparation or transition, as well as mastery of world-class knowledge and skills as reflected in the SC [profile of a graduate](#). Areas that received somewhat less support included scholarship applications and attainment, military readiness, civic knowledge or engagement, and completion of senior capstone projects.

Respondents were then asked about the kind of information that the state might report with respect to world class knowledge and skills in the SC profile of a graduate, which are aspects that are notoriously challenging to measure or represent even though developing them is critical. Table 2.7 includes common thematic suggestions, approximately ordered from higher to lower prevalence in the open-ended responses.

**Table 2.7 Thematic Recommendations for Reporting around the Portrait of a Graduate**

South Carolina has a Portrait of a Graduate. The portrait calls out world-class skills such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. What information do you recommend that the state report about these as part of the school report card?

Answered: 516 Skipped: 1,104

| Theme                             | Sample Quotes   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Uncertain / No Opinion            | Honestly, I don't think it matters; Nobody pays attention to the portrait         |
| Assessment / Rubrics              | There should be a way to measure these skills, and be represented in the card     |
| Real-world Connections            | Strategies the school, community and parents can use to help develop the skills   |
| Demonstrations of Learning        | All of these involve research which leads to project presentations                |
| Classroom / Teacher Practices     | These should be happening in classrooms each day                                  |
| Perceptions / Feedback-based Data | Information could be reported in the form of survey data                          |
| Opportunities                     | I believe the state needs to consider a system that is equitable across districts |
| Growth over Time                  | Should be required for graduation and also include growth rates                   |

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many people expressed some uncertainty about what could be reported or whether information should even be reported. Many of the remaining thematic suggestions reflected a focus on the development of these skills and capturing non-traditional evidence that reflects the richness of the instruction and the associated work products. Several of the comments on this question were also broader comments about the underlying values or strategic implementation considerations around the portrait rather than specific assessment or reporting considerations.

## SECTION 3 - IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

This stakeholder survey was a relatively comprehensive and detailed survey tailored to different groups of respondents who had different roles in the system and who had different levels of familiarity with the school report card and the accountability system overall. As a result, it is not possible to condense all of the valuable information into a few simple bullets. There is value in reviewing detailed response patterns for more complete understanding.

However, the final two questions on the survey can be used as a basis for summarizing a few meaningful strategies that connect to the choices that the respondents made in the survey prior. The two questions asked about specific actions that SC Department of Education could take to better support local school improvement work and any other general recommendations that respondents wanted to share through the survey. Some of these recommendations relate directly to the state accountability system while others are a bit broader, reflecting sociopolitical considerations that take into account broader educational policies and related systems.

As noted in Section 1, the Center team entered all of the responses into the program [Taguette](#) and tagged each one according to one or multiple themes.<sup>2</sup> The following themes were notable from these responses and align overall with the themes listed in the presentation that this report builds on.

### Theme 1: Clear, Simple, Timely, and Actionable Communication

Respondents generally requested clear, simple, timely, and actionable communication regarding the overall system. This included things like the following:

- Clear and simple explanation of scoring rules, formulas, and other technical components - including the data sources underlying them - especially for parents and teachers
- Clear and actionable directions for interpreting strengths and weaknesses and ways to improve ratings/scores for leaders, including ways to simulate future ratings/scores
- Timely reporting of assessment, survey, and accountability results in real-time, using user-friendly dashboards whenever possible
- Creation of interpretational guides for teachers, parents, and students that help them to act upon both assessment and accountability information
- Keeping standards, benchmarks, and computational rules consistent to facilitate stakeholders adapting to the system and meaningfully understanding trends over time

### Theme 2: State as Partner to Districts, not Enforcer

Several respondents noted that the current system puts a variety of burdens and pressures onto the stakeholders of the system and advocated for less state oversight, instead changing the role of the state to that of a supporter of improvement. For example, they asked for:

- Reducing the local administrative burden regarding data collection and management within the accountability system through consolidating all computational details in a single place and creating an integrated, state-wide database

<sup>2</sup> All tagged responses are available as a shared project file in Taguette that can be imported as well as a PDF.

- Changing the culture of school quality work to reduce undue pressures on teachers and students that currently exist through practices that are perceived to be unfair because they do not sufficiently consider the contextual differences of schools or rely on factors that are largely outside of the control of teachers and administrators
- Providing technical and strategic support to local districts to help them improve based on the report card and contextual insight, including coaching for local support teams

These state-level efforts were often mentioned alongside comments in which community and parental outreach were lifted up as important success strategies for improving school quality even though these efforts would be predominantly executed at the district level. This also included calls for holding parents more strongly accountable for their children's attendance and supporting their learning.

### **Theme 3: Systemic Fairness and Equity Issues**

Respondents mentioned issues of fairness and equity in a variety of ways, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly based on how responses were framed. They noted issues such as:

- Inequities of funding for schools that affect services they can offer
- Financial incentives offered for gains in achievement and growth
- Different criteria for or general treatments of charter and virtual schools
- Grade and graduation rate inflations
- Implicit penalization of high-performing schools
- Penalization for special education students, multilingual learners (MLLs), and high-mobility students
- Unreliable survey ratings, especially from younger children
- Broad-based pay raises rather than merit-based pay raises

Several respondents also suggested that state leaders visit schools to develop more grounded perspectives and use those to create a stronger system.

### **Theme 4: Improving Conditions for and Outreach to Teachers**

Many respondents advocated for better conditions of teachers that included the following:

- Better base pay and benefits for teachers, especially more senior teachers and special education teachers for instance, which would also help with teacher retention
- More financial incentives for teachers to participate in professional communities, conferences, and other development activities
- Broader support for teachers through resources, mentoring, and other professional development support to translate assessment and accountability results into actionable steps coupled with less micromanagement of the teaching process
- Deeper involvement of local teachers in processes for assessment and accountability redesign
- Additional contributions of teachers being requested only if the underlying initiatives have adequate funding so that they can be executed properly

## Theme 5: Other System Improvements

Various specific improvements of the assessment and accountability systems were mentioned repeatedly and are worth highlighting even though they do not form a singular coherent theme:

- Graduation rate computations were viewed as being subject to manipulation; for example, schools were perceived to be penalized for non-graduation-track students and special education students / students with a disability, employability credentials seem to be omitted, and evidence on important postsecondary readiness skills seems lacking
- Student progress / growth computations were seen as being too technically complex to be understandable, subject to too many computational changes, and reflecting unrealistic expectations despite growth being perceived as valuable conceptually
- MLLs were seen as requiring more detailed attention; for example, some respondents noted that the progress indicator did not reflect appropriate expectations, that there is an issue of double-counting MLLs in the accountability system, and requested more support services for MLLs and support for teachers to address their unique needs
- Broader mental and behavioral health services were listed as desirable along with better support to deal with disciplinary issues - including bullying - as well as changes to how students with these issues are counted in the system
- One group of respondents underscored the importance of physical and health resources and the asked for measures in this area to be reported on
- Some respondents advocated for a stronger support of arts, civics, and foreign languages, possibly reporting on these areas

Several other issues were mentioned occasionally (e.g., looking at best practices in other states and countries, political comments, or words of praise) that are not repeated here due to them being more of an exception than the norm.

## Limitations

Despite the carefulness in design, administration, and analysis there were a few limitations of this survey. For example, while the number of respondents is quite large, the lack of representativeness impedes generalization.

Moreover, while the survey grouped respondents by their level of familiarity of the system, it did not include questions to ascertain or confirm with more detail whether respondents had actually reviewed the dashboard or the accompanying materials in the past or whether they knew how the state currently supports identified schools. As such, any recommendations they provided could be based on a lack of awareness or understanding and should be triangulated with additional qualitative insight from the listening sessions.

## EDITORIAL NOTES

Special thanks to the members of the EOC for providing thoughtful, detailed feedback on various drafts of the survey during both virtual meetings and offline. Members of the EOC included, in alphabetical order, Wyatt Cothran, Tenell Fields, Vann Holden, Matthew Lavery, Jenny May, Dan Ralyea, Ellen Weaver, and Dana Yow.

Special thanks also to Laura Pinsonneault and Chris Domaleski at the Center for Assessment for providing strategic guidance and feedback through the process.

This report was created by a team at the Center for Assessment for the EOC. The suggested citation for this report is:

Rupp, A. A. (2025). *South Carolina Stakeholder Survey: Design, Implementation, and Outcomes*. Dover, NH: National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment.



National Center for the Improvement  
of Educational Assessment  
Dover, New Hampshire

[www.nciea.org](http://www.nciea.org)