



Position statements and comments on education legislation

May 13, 2015

Name / Title _____

School District _____

Contact information _____

K12 education funding

Position: The General Assembly must meet its commitment to fully fund state-mandated educational programs and work to reform the state’s education funding system.

I appreciate the General Assembly’s efforts this year:

- To increase the base student cost in the Education Finance Act (EFA) to \$2,220 per student; however, it is still below the statutorily required amount of \$2,801 per pupil for 2015-2016.
- To protect K12 education from drastic cuts.
- To maintain weightings in the EFA that recognize differing student needs; however, the transition funding to hold districts “harmless” because of the changes is not guaranteed going forward.

I am concerned about:

- Annual funding increases to pay for charter schools when funding for traditional public schools is not at the level required by law due to limited resources. Over time, the state will struggle with having to fund three systems of K12 education: traditional public schools, charter schools and now private schools through the tuition tax credit program.
- The need to address comprehensive tax and education funding reform - the SC Jobs, Education and Tax Act (SCJET) is a good start.

Tuition tax credit program expansion

Position: Opposed to any state or federally mandated efforts to directly or indirectly subsidize elementary or secondary private, religious or home schools with public funds.

I appreciate the General Assembly’s efforts this year:

- To increase accountability requirements for Scholarship Funding Organizations – these requirements and more are necessary in light of the allegations that have surfaced this past year.

I am concerned about:

- Any efforts to expand the program’s funding cap or criteria for eligible students when there is no evidence to confirm the existing program is resulting in higher student achievement.
- The lack of reporting requirements of participating private schools including the number of students receiving grants who transferred from public schools (most of the preliminary information shows most of the students were already attending the private school), achievement results, admissions requirements, tuition costs and other expenses, etc.
- In a state with limited resources, expansion of the tuition tax credit program will indirectly drain funding in the state’s general fund and create two systems of education to fund – a public one and a private one.

Teacher employment and dismissal

Position: Supportive of the passage this year of the Teacher Employment and Dismissal Act of 2015 (S.533 or H.3560, which was amended and passed by the House to mirror language in the Senate bill).

- Both the Senate and House bills, which sailed through subcommittees and committees and supported by every education organization, are stalled in the Senate.

- The bills would give school boards and districts needed flexibility in the teacher employment and dismissal process.
- Flexibility is needed, so please urge for passage of either bill to become law this year.

FOIA meeting notices and agenda revisions

Position: Dedicated to transparency and open government. Prefer language in Senate bill 11 over House bill 3192 related to notice of public meetings and amending meeting agendas. Believe the FOIA requirements should apply to all levels of government, including the legislature.

I am concerned about:

- The lack of definition of the “an emergency exists” provision in the House bill (H.3192).
- The lack of definition of “only if it is practicable to do so” language related to notice of meetings of legislative subcommittees.

FOIA revisions

Position: Dedicated to transparency and open government and believe that FOIA requirements should apply to all levels of government, including the legislature.

I am concerned about:

- Decreasing response time for documents less than two years old and setting a hard deadline of 30 days to fill the request and the impact this will have on districts that do not have a full-time communications officer or few staff.
- The need to protect student and individual staff information protected by federal law.
- There is no provision requiring public bodies at all levels of government, including the legislature, to adhere to the bill’s provisions. A separate bill in the House would make the law apply to the legislature, and it has not moved.

School start date

Position: The state law regarding when public schools may start the school year in South Carolina should be changed to give districts the flexibility to begin classes as soon as the second Monday in August.

I am concerned about:

- Depending on when the third Monday is positioned, it is increasingly difficult to complete the first semester before the winter holiday break, which many parents, teachers and students request.
- Districts have very few options for scheduling the statutorily required make-up days during the winter months due to required holidays, spring break, state testing, local benchmark testing, professional development and teacher workdays. Moving the start date back no less than one week would help to give more options for completing the first semester before the winter holiday break.