



## **Legislative Agenda for 2022**

### *Executive Summary*

The South Carolina Education Association (SCEA) believes that a free, high quality public education is a right of every child. Public education serves as the backbone of our state in ensuring the health of our democracy, development of our economy, and strength of our communities. To ensure that all children in South Carolina receive the highest quality education, the SCEA recommends that the General Assembly abide by Article XI of the SC Constitution and pursue the following actions:

### **Ensure Equitable & Effective Education Funding**

#### *1. Fully Fund Public Schools*

The Base Student Cost, per the Education Finance Act, should be fully funded. The Base Student Cost has not been fully funded since the 2007-08 school year. A commitment to fully fund public education should be made per the law. Any attempt to redistribute state education funds in order to address inequities across the state should be done so only after a commitment to fully fund the Base Student Cost has been achieved. No public money should be used to expand private charter schools by way of a voucher program.

#### *2. Fund the Outcome*

The Profile of a South Carolina Graduate includes three outcomes: world-class knowledge, world-class skills, and life & career characteristics. Current education funding prioritizes achieving world-class knowledge at the expense of the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and characteristics. The direction of state funds should be balanced to target each profile outcome equally.

#### *3. Prioritize the Classroom*

A high quality, effective classroom teacher is the most important factor contributing to student achievement. To maximize teacher effectiveness, state funding should be prioritized to:

- a) Reduce class size in order to promote individualized instruction;
- b) Provide teachers unencumbered time from interruption;
- c) Provide all students and teachers in South Carolina with equal and reliable access to support services such as school/career counselors, mental healthcare professionals, social workers, nurses, student resource officers, and teacher aides.

### **Respect Educators as Professionals**

#### *1. Provide Competitive Compensation*

The average teacher salary in South Carolina continues to fall behind the national average of \$65,090. The ESP salary does not meet the standards for a living wage. For the state to stay competitive and attract the most talented educators and ESP's, an investment in professional teacher and support staff pay must be made. The state should identify a source of sustainable funding that would raise average teacher pay in South Carolina to the national average while requiring school districts to pay support staff a living wage based on a living wage calculator for their city or town.

#### *2. Increase Teacher Preparation Time*

In South Carolina, teachers' contract to work 190 days; students are required to attend 180 days of school. Teachers must be provided unencumbered planning time each day. While some districts provide unencumbered planning period to teachers each day, many do not. Therefore, teachers spend many hours beyond what they are contracted for planning lessons, evaluating students, and completing administrative duties. Teacher preparation time should be protected from interruption during the school day and time spent in preparation outside of the 190-day contract should be respected with further compensation.

### *3. Reduce Burdensome Paperwork*

South Carolina requires a rigorous certification and licensure process for state educators that includes a renewal requirements every five years. Once properly licensed, educators should be respected as professionals without the need for burdensome certification filings, redundant annual trainings, and additional coursework paid at the expense of the teacher. The state should streamline certification accountability requirements so that they are only required for the initial licensure process and each five-year renewal year.

### *4. Produce a Fair and Equitable Contract*

- a) The maintenance of the current defined-benefit retirement plan for all educators;
- a) A health benefit that includes affordable enhanced dental, vision, and prescription drug coverage;
- b) Reinstatement of the National Board for Teaching Standards certification stipend.

### *5. Incentivize Careers in Hard-to-Staff Regions*

The statewide teacher shortage disproportionately affects rural areas of our state. The state should incentivize teacher commitments to hard-to-staff regions by:

- a) Forgiving teacher student loan debt to encourage teacher relocation;
- b) Providing home payment assistance and/or instituting teacher residency programs so that teachers can better integrate into their teaching communities;
- c) Rewarding teachers with service bonuses for consecutive years of work in those school districts.

### *6. Improve Teacher Recruitment & Retention Programs*

Training and mentoring South Carolina educators should be a priority of the state. Expanding the Teacher Fellows and Call Me Mister programs will help increase the pool of new teacher recruits in our state. Revisiting the rules governing the employment of veteran, retired teachers would help schools maintain an experienced educator workforce who could also help serve as much needed mentors for teachers new to the profession.

## **Provide an Education of Excellence**

### *1. Reduce Standardized Testing*

Standardized tests fail to properly evaluate student learning and yet a significant portion of the school calendar is dedicated to this manner of testing, nonetheless. Meaningful lessons that are culturally relevant and engage students in authentic learning experiences are being sacrificed to prepare students for these tests. The state should eliminate all non-mandatory testing and explore applying for an ESSA flexibility waiver to further reduce those tests that are required by federal law.

### *2. Measure Student Growth*

Student learning is best measured when growth over time is considered. Testing data, rather than evaluate student mastery and teacher effectiveness, should be used to identify areas of student deficiency, and inform teachers of best practices to assist students in their growth as learners. The state should re-purpose standardized testing to this end and explore the ESSA portfolio option of student evaluation.

### *3. Invest in Social & Emotional Learning*

Teachers and students deserve school environments that are free from bullying and disruption. The Profile of a South Carolina Graduate recognizes the need for students to become both self-aware and socially aware. Responsible decision-making skills and the ability to self-regulate as well as cooperate with others is necessary for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. School districts should support the discipline decisions made by classroom teachers. The state should make serious investments in programs and curriculum that encourage the development of social and emotional learning.