



The School District of Greenville County

Board of Trustees

December 14, 2010

The Honorable Dr. Mick Zais
South Carolina Superintendent of Education –Elect
Post Office Box 54
Newberry, South Carolina 29108

Dear Dr. Zais:

On behalf of Greenville County Schools, please accept our congratulations on your recent election as South Carolina Superintendent of Education. As we continue to face some of the most challenging times in our State's history, we welcome your leadership and stand ready to assist you at any time.

As a Board of Trustees, we are committed to serving as advocates for public education and improving academic achievement for every child. Several years ago, we established an advocacy committee to examine public policy issues impacting our schools and to work with elected officials to enact positive changes in governance and administration. As a result of our advocacy committee's review, we believe that the State Department of Education (SDE) has made decisions regarding the calculation of high school graduation rates which are labor intensive for districts, generate inaccurate data, hinder clear accountability, and unnecessarily penalize our high schools.

As you know, high school graduation rates are used extensively to measure global competitiveness, evaluate school and student performance, and establish ratings for state and federal accountability programs. Unfortunately, the South Carolina Department of Education has operated under a system that lacks clear and consistent procedures for gathering data, includes some students in multiple years and at multiple sites, and fails to utilize flexibility options made available to States for the purpose of calculating graduation rates for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and our State Report Cards.

As a result, by 2011, South Carolina's graduation rate methodology will have seen nine major changes since 2005. This lack of consistency results in published ratings that have little or no value in measuring our schools' graduation rate performance from year-to-year and offers limited meaningful information to our parents and public related to our schools' and students' progress. We believe that this situation demands your immediate attention. Specifically, we urge your administration to act on the following:

- Establish clear and consistent procedures for gathering data and calculating the graduation rate which can be easily understood by school districts and the public we serve.

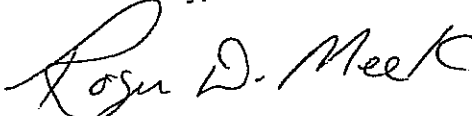
- Include in the graduation pool only those students who are in attendance on the 45th day of their ninth grade year or who have transferred in and attended at least one day.
- Develop the technology necessary to automate student tracking to streamline processes and prevent student record duplications.
- Change procedures so that non-graduates only count once in any graduation pool.
- Collaborate with the Department of Juvenile Justice, Palmetto Unified and other programs to create a request-for-records or proof of enrollment form to ensure that schools are not penalized for an agency's failure to identify candidates for graduation.
- Include Occupational Diploma recipients as graduates as determined by their federally mandated Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- Seek federal authorization to include Graduate Equivalent Diploma (GED) recipients as graduates.

The adoption of these practices will provide much needed consistency to our graduation rate calculations and provide a useful and accurate tool to assess our progress in providing a quality academic opportunity for every student. We hope that you agree and that you will make this issue a priority in your administration.

Should you have any questions about this request, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Again, congratulations on your election. We wish you great success as our state's Superintendent of Education and appreciate your willingness to provide this important public service to our state. Please contact us if we can ever be of assistance to you. In the meantime, we look forward to working with you to provide our citizens with the high quality education system which they both deserve and demand.

Sincerely,



Roger D. Meek
Chair

Cc: Greenville County Legislative Delegation