

## **KIDS COUNT REFLECTS ON JUDGE COOPER'S RULING**

The 2005 South Carolina Kids Count Report release is dedicated to Judge Cooper and to the lawyers, those who testified in the court hearings, our elected officials, and the public who are scratching their heads saying: “now what?”

The Kids Count data provides some important factual perspectives on the major challenges of both early childhood and the remaining school years. The facts regarding the major challenges also suggest the broad outlines of solutions that policy must address. So let's begin with an overview.

- 1) **South Carolina can't go wrong if we effectively address our education challenges by beginning during early childhood.** Most of the specific children, income and ethnic groups, counties, and school districts that have the most trouble mastering state academic standards and graduating also experience more harmful risk factors and demonstrate lower performance during early childhood. Judge Cooper is right. It would be foolish to wait until later to make a major effort to address the risks (like poverty and low family literacy) and the low performance of our less successful students. But early childhood services will not make much difference unless they are done well, starting early enough and lasting long enough for the kids most at risk.
- 2) **Doing a great job during early childhood is only half the answer.** Getting children through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade achieving academic standards would be a huge accomplishment, but historically the percentage of students below standards or not graduating doubles from grade 3 to grade 8 and even more do not graduate with a state high school diploma. If the constitutionally unprotected “other half” of the students unsuccessful in grades 4-12 need not be addressed because of Judge Cooper's ruling, South Carolina still must deal with their problems and unacceptable outcomes if we want our state to progress socially and be competitive economically.
- 3) **The problems of the rural areas are profound and must be addressed.** Their schools are overwhelmed by the cumulative burdens of poverty, low literacy, large racial disparities, little property wealth, small size, and limited amenities. South Carolina can afford the cost of addressing these challenges because the numbers of pupils in the rural schools are not great. The biggest challenges facing the rural school districts are: districts too small to provide standards-focused academic support to their schools, noncompetitive pay and few attractions to hire and retain excellent teachers and administrators, and the lack of property wealth to support the schools. Even if these problems are not found to violate constitutional standards, they certainly qualify as major social, economic, and public policy priorities.

### **Why Early Childhood is the Right Time To Begin Our Work**

Kids Count is loaded with data regarding the problems of families and their children during the early years. The challenges can be divided into: a) pre-conception through birth, b) the early years of ages 0-3 (before children begin school), c) pre-kindergarten at age 4, and d) kindergarten through third grade.

Fortunately, South Carolina data from the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health has been released recently (see Appendix A for a complete presentation of NSCH findings). This data, as reported by parents of the children, shows significant percentages of children and their families with problems or concerns but also reveals that a majority of children receives good support from their families, health providers, and neighbors. Unfortunately, the disparities by income and race are substantial and troubling. The data shown below for children under age 6 suggest that well before entry into kindergarten some parents have become very concerned about the health, development, behavior, and readiness of their children. Those concerns occur before readiness assessment, PACT data, and other problems in school

and the neighborhood bring many additional children into other parents' worried attention. The number of concerned parents of children ages 6-17 is presented for a few of the many problems that escalate after early childhood. It is noteworthy how the concerned parents of school-age poor and minority children have increased in numbers and remain highly disproportionate to the non-poor.

<b>PARENTAL CONCERNS</b> (about children ages 18-71 months, concerned "a lot")	<b>Total</b>	<b>African-American</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Under 200%</b>	<b>Over 200%</b>
how child talks or makes speech sounds	8	16	4	11%	5%
how child understands what you say	7	15	3	10%	3%
how child behaves	7	16	2	11%	3%
how child gets along with others	6	13	2	8%	4%
how child is learning to do things for self	4	8	2	6%	3%
how child is learning pre-school and school skills	7	12	4	8%	5%
(about children ages 6-17 years old)	<b>Total</b>	<b>African-American</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Under 200%</b>	<b>Over 200%</b>
child's achievements	48%	67%	36%	58%	39%
how child copes with stressful things	36%	53%	27%	44%	28%
learning difficulties	28%	44%	18%	36%	19%
depression or anxiety	21%	33%	12%	28%	14%

Data from the 2005 Kids Count Report also show substantial early childhood challenges reflecting Judge Cooper's decision. The data indicators are presented for three groups: 1) the three one-district plaintiff counties (Allendale, Jasper, and Lee), 2) all eight counties with a plaintiff district (Allendale, Jasper, Lee, Dillon, Florence, Hampton, Marion, and Orangeburg), and 3) all South Carolina.

	<b>Allendale/ Jasper/ Lee</b>	<b>All Plaintiff Counties</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>Allendale/ Jasper/ Lee</b>	<b>All Plaintiff Counties</b>
	<b>(%) Rate</b>	<b>(%) Rate</b>	<b>(%) Rate</b>	<b>Ratio*</b>	<b>Ratio*</b>
<b>Teen Pregnancy (14-17 year olds)</b>	6.1	4.5	3.0	2.04	1.50
<b>Births:</b>					
Teens under 18	10.0	7.6	4.6	2.17	1.64
Teens under 20	23.5	19.9	13.3	1.76	1.50
Moms Less than High School Education	28.7	26.1	20.9	1.37	1.25
Single Moms (incl. Paternity Acknowledged)	63.3	60.3	41.1	1.54	1.47
<b>Low Birthweight</b>	12.5	12.8	10.1	1.24	1.27
<b>Children in Single-Parent Families</b>	44.9	41.5	31.3	1.43	1.33
<b>Poverty:</b>					
in 1999	33.5	30.7	18.8	1.78	1.63
in 2002	30.0	28.7	19.4	1.54	1.48
<b>200% Poverty</b>	63.1	58.7	42.9	1.47	1.37
<b>SCRA (Less than Consistently Ready):</b>					
WM	NA	36.5	27.3	NA	1.34
WF	NA	27.5	18.1	NA	1.52
AA&OM	61.1	53.0	43.2	1.42	1.23
AA&OF	46.8	37.0	30.5	1.54	1.21
Total	54.7	43.0	29.4	1.86	1.46
<b>Overage for Grade 3</b>	22.0	22.9	18.0	1.22	1.27
<b>Special Education:</b>					
Ages 6 & 7	15.4	16.6	15.6	0.99	1.06
Ages 8 & 9	17.3	16.8	16.1	1.07	1.05
<b>Below Basic PACT ELA:</b>					

<b>3rd Grade</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>23.8</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>2.05</b>	<b>1.85</b>
<b>5th Grade</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>40.5</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>1.88</b>	<b>1.74</b>
<b>8th Grade</b>	<b>45.0</b>	<b>40.5</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>1.78</b>	<b>1.60</b>
<b>Below Basic PACT Math:</b>					
<b>3rd Grade</b>	<b>35.9</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>2.16</b>	<b>1.83</b>
<b>5th Grade</b>	<b>45.3</b>	<b>40.4</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>1.99</b>	<b>1.77</b>
<b>8th Grade</b>	<b>55.7</b>	<b>51.5</b>	<b>33.7</b>	<b>1.65</b>	<b>1.53</b>
<b>Not Proficient PACT ELA:</b>					
<b>3rd Grade</b>	<b>70.5</b>	<b>63.2</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>1.63</b>	<b>1.46</b>
<b>5th Grade</b>	<b>92.1</b>	<b>85.9</b>	<b>70.2</b>	<b>1.31</b>	<b>1.22</b>
<b>8th Grade</b>	<b>83.5</b>	<b>82.7</b>	<b>70.2</b>	<b>1.19</b>	<b>1.18</b>
<b>Not Proficient PACT Math:</b>					
<b>3rd Grade</b>	<b>88.2</b>	<b>83.1</b>	<b>69.1</b>	<b>1.28</b>	<b>1.20</b>
<b>5th Grade</b>	<b>90.1</b>	<b>83.9</b>	<b>67.6</b>	<b>1.33</b>	<b>1.24</b>
<b>8th Grade</b>	<b>92.2</b>	<b>90.1</b>	<b>76.8</b>	<b>1.20</b>	<b>1.17</b>
<b>Non-graduation (8th Grade - Graduation) :</b>					
<b>Certificates Counted as Graduation</b>	<b>48.2</b>	<b>44.0</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>1.35</b>	<b>1.24</b>
<b>Certificates Not Counted as Graduation</b>	<b>56.7</b>	<b>50.6</b>	<b>38.3</b>	<b>1.41</b>	<b>1.26</b>

\*The ratio columns are for the group rate divided by the state rate.

How many children experience serious risks during early childhood? One in five is born to mothers with less than a full high school education and two in five to single mothers. One in five is below 100% of poverty, while over two in five are below 200% of poverty. But this does not tell how ready these young children are to succeed in school. On the South Carolina Readiness Assessment, kindergarten teachers found roughly 29% of students statewide not “consistently ready” but 55% in Allendale, Jasper and Lee counties. During early childhood it is especially difficult to assess the wellbeing and performance of young children. They change rapidly, behave differently around strangers, cannot take paper and pencil tests, and may or may not be motivated to perform for an assessment. However, data available from both the old CSAB 1<sup>st</sup> grade readiness test and the new SC Readiness Assessment done by teachers in kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade report similar significant numbers of children not adequately ready for the expectations of school, especially males and minority students. The disparities ranging from white females, the highest performing group, to minority males is found throughout PK-12 and into higher education. Starting with CSAB in 1980 (WF 21% & AA&OM 54% not ready) to SCRA math/ELA in 2004 (WF 19% & AA&OM 44% less than consistently ready) and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade math/ELA on PACT (WF 7% & AA&OM 27%) below basic, the assessments define a huge challenge justifying Judge Cooper’s mandate for South Carolina to address the early years.

<b>South Carolina Students Not Meeting Standards (Readiness, PACT, Dropouts)</b>						
	<b>1980 CSAB 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Entry</b>	<b>1990 CSAB 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Entry</b>	<b>2004 SCRA 5K Year ELA/Math Average</b>	<b>2005 PACT Grade 3 ELA/Math Average</b>	<b>2005 PACT Grade 5 ELA/Math Average</b>	<b>2003 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Dropouts</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>36.3 %</b>	<b>25.6%</b>	<b>29.8%</b>	<b>14.8%</b>	<b>23.0%</b>	<b>31.2%</b>
<b>WM</b>	<b>29.4%</b>	<b>19.4%</b>	<b>26.6%</b>	<b>9.9%</b>	<b>15.3%</b>	<b>31.8%</b>
<b>WF</b>	<b>20.7%</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>18.7 %</b>	<b>7.0%</b>	<b>11.5%</b>	<b>24.5%</b>
<b>AA&amp;OM</b>	<b>54.2%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>43.8%</b>	<b>27.1%</b>	<b>41.1%</b>	<b>42.0%</b>
<b>AA&amp;OF</b>	<b>45.9%</b>	<b>33.1%</b>	<b>30.1 %</b>	<b>19.1%</b>	<b>31.1%</b>	<b>28.0%</b>

So how many children are not ready, despite district and Head Start pre-school programs serving 42% of 4 year olds and despite full day kindergarten? Certainly at least the 15% below basic on PACT in third grade and as many as the 30% not consistently ready in kindergarten or the 23%

below basic in fifth grade seem inadequately ready. The data shows that many young children, before age 4, need attention because of health and family problems. Also males, especially minority males and children from impoverished rural areas, are more in need of early childhood services. Therefore, if the percentage of all children still needing more and better early childhood services is 15-25%, for poor, minority, and rural children the percentage would be much higher, at least 25-50%. Moreover, some of these have much greater needs that require earlier, longer, more intensive and comprehensive services.

**Why Early Childhood is  
Not The Complete Answer**

Even if all students were to perform at standards in third grade, it is unlikely that the current increase in students failing to meet standards after third grade could be avoided. Between third and eighth grades, the percentage of students performing below basic on PACT almost doubles. The Math/ELA average increases from 15% to 30%. Moreover, the percentage not graduating with a high school diploma is even greater: 33% if state and local certificates are counted as graduation and 38% if only state high school diplomas are counted. The increase after third grade in students performing below standards and dropping out is even higher in the plaintiff districts. Their Math/ELA average increases from 27% to 50%, with 52.5% not eventually graduating with a state diploma. Even if a superb job is done during the early childhood years enabling young children to achieve third grade standards, the complexity of the curriculum grows steadily through middle and high school. Moreover there is no inoculation against the social, emotional, and academic ailments of adolescence.

<b><u>District:</u></b>	<b>% Below Basic - ELA</b>			<b>% Below Basic - Math</b>			<b>% Not Graduating</b>	
	<b>3rd Grade</b>	<b>5th Grade</b>	<b>8th Grade</b>	<b>3rd Grade</b>	<b>5th Grade</b>	<b>8th Grade</b>	<b>With Certificate</b>	<b>Without Certificate</b>
<b>Allendale</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>38.0</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>40.0</b>	<b>31.3</b>	<b>55.9</b>	<b>62.6</b>	<b>69.6</b>
<b>Jasper</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>40.5</b>	<b>32.7</b>	<b>53.2</b>	<b>59.4</b>	<b>37.4</b>	<b>48.1</b>
<b>Lee</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>46.6</b>	<b>45.0</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>51.3</b>	<b>51.7</b>	<b>43.5</b>	<b>49.6</b>
<b>Hampton 2</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>39.5</b>	<b>64.3</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>49.4</b>	<b>69.1</b>	<b>41.8</b>	<b>48.2</b>
<b>Florence 4</b>	<b>32.8</b>	<b>55.8</b>	<b>47.1</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>55.9</b>	<b>16.9</b>	<b>29.9</b>
<b>Marion 7</b>	<b>28.9</b>	<b>61.1</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>41.3</b>	<b>62.5</b>	<b>50.0</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>54.3</b>
<b>Orangeburg 3</b>	<b>23.0</b>	<b>30.3</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>35.7</b>	<b>49.4</b>	<b>38.5</b>	<b>46.2</b>
<b>Dillon 2</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>39.6</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>36.4</b>	<b>51.6</b>	<b>55.3</b>	<b>60.3</b>
<b>% Average</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>45.0</b>	<b>47.4</b>	<b>31.8</b>	<b>46.8</b>	<b>55.4</b>	<b>47.1</b>	<b>55.6</b>
<b>Weighted Average (%)</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>42.9</b>	<b>44.8</b>	<b>29.1</b>	<b>44.8</b>	<b>54.4</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>52.5</b>
<b>South Carolina</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>33.7</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>38.3</b>

**The Profound Challenges of Rural Schools  
Must be Addressed**

Rural school districts are severely stressed by 1) the enormous social and economic disadvantages of their students (already reviewed above), 2) the extremely large numbers of students not achieving academic standards, and 3) educational capacity weakness of districts caused by small size, serious non-competitiveness in attracting and retaining teachers, and lack of district office support for standards-based instruction.

Motivating and instructing the large numbers of students performing below standards in rural districts is currently an overwhelming task. Admittedly, the task would be reduced significantly if all students completed third grade performing at state standards. However, 2005 PACT data shows that the net increase between third and eighth grade in the percentage of students below basic in the plaintiff districts

is even larger than for the state as a whole. The plaintiff districts reflect the problems of rural districts in terms of their small size, limited tax base, non-competitiveness in attracting teachers, and lack of academic support capacity in the district office.

**Small size:** the plaintiff districts average only 2,300 students. This compares with a state average of over 7,300. The poorest one-third of districts in terms of wealth per pupil averages just over 3,100 students. Since the Education Finance Act was designed for a district of 6,000, plaintiff districts receive less than 40% of the fixed costs of running a district, while the poorest third of districts receive just over half the funding required for district offices and other overhead costs. Moreover, the EFA base student cost generates much less than an adequate amount for any and all district offices since it was calculated for the limited academic support and administrative services provided in the early 1970s.

**Limited tax base:** Plaintiff districts have property wealth per pupil under 60% of the state average, while the bottom third districts have only 51%. Therefore, these poor rural districts must impose approximately twice the millage to support their schools. Because districts receive almost no state funds for capital costs and because they do not receive enough funding through the EFA to cover district overhead costs, the needed money is diverted from academic support and teacher pay. This shortchanges the critical capacity of their schools to enable disproportionately large numbers of students from families with low income and literacy to achieve state academic standards. Accommodating the problem of the rural districts through the EFA is affordable to the state because the poorest one-third of all districts have only 13% of all students in South Carolina and the plaintiffs only 3%.

**Non-competitiveness for teachers:** By far the greatest weakness in the academic capacity of rural districts lies in their low pay and high turnover. Both the plaintiff and bottom-third districts have average teacher salaries about 5% below the state average. Because commercial amenities are limited in the rural areas and because low academic performance harms the reputation of the schools, rural districts have a hard time recruiting and retaining the more capable teachers. The result is turnover even higher than the statewide average. The 20% annual turnover of the plaintiff districts effectively eliminates the benefit of professional development and applied academic support in these and other rural districts.

**Lack of academic support in the district offices:** Because of the small size of the district offices in rural areas and because of their inability to finance central office expenses from their low tax base, the rural districts do not have specialized coordinators for the core academic subjects. Whereas the largest and wealthiest urban districts have full-time coordinators for each of the core subjects (math, ELA, science, and social studies), the rural areas and many middle size districts have only an academic director for curriculum and instruction and in some cases directors for elementary and secondary schools. To meet Education Accountability Act performance standards, classroom teachers must have permanent, reliable, and effective academic support. Such support is needed to plan the curriculum, select textbooks and other instructional materials, translate assessment results into improved academic programming, organize professional development, and recruit capable teachers to fill vacancies. For example, during 2004 in the challenging area of science, only 2 of the 41 smaller districts with under 4,000 pupils had anyone who might plausibly be termed a science coordinator. This compared with 10 of 28 middle-sized districts of 4,000-9,999 pupils, whereas 13 of the 17 largest districts over 10,000 pupils did have specialist science coordinators. The rural areas must look to the charitable assistance of the SDE content consultants who are few in number (e.g. two math consultants to serve 1,100 schools) or of the state networks for reading and for math and science. The Educational Accountability Act has provided teacher specialists, but these master teachers are outsiders whose short-term presence is at great disadvantage in developing academic competence and integrated instruction within high-turnover faculties of rural schools.

The problems of non-competitiveness for teachers, limited academic support, lower community literacy, and pervasive socio-economic problems of the students and their families assure that an early childhood remedy will not sufficiently resolve the problems of rural education. While absolutely necessary, early childhood readiness will not by itself enable students in rural and other high poverty districts to succeed in meeting minimum expectations of our 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Success entails mastering our higher

academic standards, graduating with a full high school diploma, going on to higher education, and eventually becoming competitive workers in the world labor market.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

A complete analysis of policy and social renewal recommendations would require another lengthy document, so only an outline of serious possibilities is offered here. In parentheses, percentages of children are offered to initiate debate about numbers requiring expanded early childhood services.

#### **Early Childhood and Early Elementary Services:**

1. Intensive and continuing health and early intervention services for children with serious disabilities and chronic conditions: (5-10%);
2. Parenting education, family literacy, and family support starting near birth for those families least able to parent effectively: (5-10%);
3. Child development services for the three year olds at greatest risk: (5-10%);
4. Child development services full day for the four year olds at greatest risk: (20-30%);
5. Child development services half day for the four year olds at moderate risk: (20-30%);
6. Quality enhancement and financial support to childcare providers, especially those serving many at risk children;
7. Strengthened K-3 education for reading, math, and science, especially in schools serving large numbers of at risk students;
8. Upgraded training, both pre-service and continuing professional development, for all early childhood workers.

#### **Grades 4-12:**

1. Strengthened instruction in reading, math, and science during grades 4 & 5, especially in schools serving large numbers of at risk students;
2. Support for effective academic programming in middle schools, especially those serving large numbers of at risk students;
3. Creation of high quality teacher training programs to address academics and student development, especially for new middle grades certification programs.

#### **Rural Schools:**

1. Reallocation of funding to assure salary competitiveness of districts with the largest percentages of students at risk;
2. Regional academic support organizations to serve small districts;
3. State and regional teacher recruitment and professional support organizations to serve small districts;
4. Restructuring of and support for small, poor districts (merger, multi-district organizations, support from statewide organizations, etc).

#### **Economic, Social, and Cultural Renewal:**

1. Stronger families;
2. More committed parenting of children and youth;
3. Community support for families and education;
4. Reallocation of time from electronic entertainment to reading;
5. Popular culture truly committed to learning and achievement;
6. Jobs in the communities with limited income and opportunity.