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# Legislative Agenda for 2025

*Executive Summary*

The South Carolina Education Association (The 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

## Full Fund Public Schools

The General Assembly should ensure equitable opportunities for students of all abilities and

post-secondary education pathways. Furthermore, no public money should be used to fund private school vouchers in any form.

1. **Tax Abatement Reduction**

Tax abatements have taken $534 million from South Carolina public schools in fiscal year 2021 and $2.2 billion over the past 5 years according to the “Good Jobs First Report”. South Carolina schools lost more funding to tax abatements than any other state in the nation.

Legislation to exempt schools and school operations from tax abatements must be adopted. The SCEA suggests the following to alleviate the loss of revenue to our schools.

* 1. School districts should receive 20 percent of the tax abatement profits from the businesses to whom they are provided.
  2. School districts/educators should have a “seat at the table” when the tax abatement agreements are made with prospective businesses.
  3. Accountability to the tax abatement and the stipulations should be required to ensure

the businesses are complying with the agreement.

* 1. There should be a time limit for tax abatements that are reasonable, allowing less revenue loss for public schools.

## Fund the Outcome

To foster life and career characteristics, the General Assembly must fully fund opportunities for students to pursue vocational learning and dual credit coursework to ensure they graduate ready for post-secondary education pathways.

## Prioritize the Classroom

To maximize teacher effectiveness, state funding should be prioritized to:

* 1. Reduce class sizes to national averages.
  2. Provide all South Carolina educators both daily duty-free lunch and uninterrupted daily instructional planning time.
  3. Provide all students, educators, and school staff in South Carolina with equal and reliable access to support services.
  4. Increase the classroom supply fund at a rate that maintains pace with inflation.

# Respect Educators as Professionals

## Provide Competitive Compensation

The charge of the General Assembly is clear. Ensure that South Carolina’s students get the best educators in their classrooms. To do this, the General Assembly must recognize they are competing for workers in the overall job market. A fully funded investment in raises to a minimum of $50,000 for all teachers and a minimum of $36,000 for all support staff must be made. To remain competitive in this overall job market and retain and attract educators in South Carolina public education the General Assembly needs to increase pay yearly at a rate that accomplishes the following:

Raise pay for all educators that target the cost of living in the areas that live and work as a function of their take home pay beginning with $50,000 for first year teachers.

1. Raise pay for all educators that target teaching vacancies with special attention to districts that are hard to staff.
2. Ensure that state benefits are competitive against other industries in the state.
3. Additionally, the state must ensure that districts fairly compensate all educators for administrative paperwork, training, meetings, and extracurricular activities that could risk breaching the agreed 190 days of work.
4. Raise pay of all ESP staff to research market levels for their position in the area to ensure lower vacancies and ensure retention of staff.

## Increase Unencumbered Time

## Education Support Professionals should receive sufficient unencumbered time without being given more hours in the day or overall, longer workday. Teachers must be provided with unencumbered time during the school day. Unencumbered time should not be scheduled at the beginning of the day prior to teachers “report in” time or after school “clock out” time.

## Reduce Burdensome Paperwork

The state should streamline the certification accountability requirements so that after the initial licensure process is met, continuing education credits will suffice in keeping the certification current. The state should compel and audit districts to ensure that teachers are being provided with opportunities to receive credit for professional development. The teacher contract sets aside 10 days of professional development yearly.

1. The professional development of 120 hours should be disconnected from the credentialing process. Districts should be able to provide 3 days of the 10 contracted to PD. This would be equivalent to 120 hours over 5 years. By doing this, teachers would no longer have to create file(s) to be cleared with the district and the state DOE to see if what PD they have tried to get on their own qualifies and covers the 120 hours for recertification.
2. Districts should audit, review, and report the estimated or known work time for teachers of any new system and/or program to ensure that it does not breach the 190-day contract for any teacher without compensation for that extra time defined prior to roll out.

## Produce a Fair and Equitable Contract

Teacher contracts must become more equitable for educators. While many issues in teacher contracts need to be addressed, the following must be included:

1. A later contract acceptance date when educators are offered reemployment by their district, they must accept that offer before May 10th often before the district determines staffing assignments for the coming year and certainly ahead of any updated information regarding pay for the upcoming year. Educators should be given a grace period to be released from their contract to make the right decision for themselves and their families without fear of reprisal.
2. Educators need to understand the compensation and benefits they are accepting and who maintains and adjusts their benefits. Contracts must be required to clearly outline all benefits and compensation provided, clearly delineating which benefits are provided by the district and which are provided by the state and how the educator accepting the contract may find more detailed information about each benefit.
3. The number of days worked per year, the daily hours, the years’ experience, the worksite and subject taught should be listed on the contract.
4. The right to break a contract without penalty in a ten-day window when informed of pay, worksite, and/or teaching subject change. When educators are offered reemployment by their district, they must accept that offer before the district determines staffing assignments for the coming year and certainly ahead of any updated information regarding pay for the upcoming year. Educators should be given a grace period to be released from their contract to make the right decision for themselves and their families without fear of reprisal.
5. Educators need to understand the compensation and benefits they are accepting and who maintains and adjusts their benefits. Contracts must be required to clearly outline all benefits and compensation provided, clearly delineating which benefits are provided by the district and which are provided by the state and how the educator accepting the contract may find more detailed information about each benefit.
6. The number of days worked per year, the daily hours (number of hours), the years’ experience, the worksite and subject taught.
7. Right to refuse. Teachers need to be given the opportunity to refuse in writing when administration or district give “other duties assigned” that are arguably unreasonable due to issues including but not limited to breaching the agreed 190 days of work, personal responsibilities (such as lack of childcare), and having to purchase goods out of pocket (bake sales). Districts need penalties for retaliation against teachers that provide documentation of refusal.

## Improve Teacher Recruitment & Retention Programs

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The state should incentivize teacher commitments to hard-to-staff regions by:

* 1. Pay off teacher student loan debt to encourage teacher relocation to hard to staff worksites or subject areas.
  2. Providing home payment assistance and/or home purchasing programs for educators.
  3. Rewarding teachers with state-funded longevity payfor consecutive years of work in those school

districts.

* 1. Identify mentorship programs that are successful and implement them in our state by the year

August, 2026.

* 1. The General Assembly must find more ways to increase and retain the pool of highly trained

educators in South Carolina. For recruitment, this must include:

-Paying student-teachers for their student teaching experience

-Expanding and funding a “grow your own” educator pathway

* 1. Increase support of early career educators through a well-funded and respected mentorship program.

* 1. Expand teacher residency and apprenticeship programs.
  2. Advocate for pay raises for all school staff across all cells.

## Trust Educators as Education Experts

The General Assembly should seek to protect the relationship and community between parents, educators, and schools and to respect the frontline expertise of educators by refraining from passing any legislation that limits what history our children can learn and what books they can read. In addition, educators should have the freedom to teach the honest, complete facts about historical events without political censorship, undue scrutiny, or top down bureaucratic policies and processes that impede timely, natural communication between educators and parents**.** The control of the implementation of the state standards should be trusted in the hands of the state department of education and the local school system.

## Provide Comprehensive Benefits

* 1. The legislation shall provide the same “state-funded” benefit of six weeks of paid leave after giving birth and up to two weeks of paid time off for co-parents for all State of South Carolina employees.
  2. Additionally, the legislation shall provide school staff who adopt a child or who are licensed by the Department of Social Services and have a foster child placed in their care if the child is less than 6 months old, shall be eligible for 6 weeks of state paid leave.
  3. The legislature should maintain the benefits for all educators by funding the current defined-benefit retirement plan and extending a health benefit that includes affordable enhanced dental, vision, and prescription drug coverage.
  4. Additionally, the state should require districts to offer a sick leave bank to all public-school employees and should pay employees their daily rate for any unused sick leave beyond 90 days while actively employed.

# Provide an Education of Excellence

## Increase Learning Time

The state should eliminate all non-mandatory testing and explore applying for a flexibility waiver to further reduce those tests that are required by federal law. Educators should be given the highest possible degree of autonomy to select the best way to authentically measure student growth.

## Invest in Student and Educator Wellness

The legislature must fund and take action to get mental health resources to families and caregivers.

Fund training for educators and school staff to talk to students about awareness of their feelings and signals of mental health problems. The state should make serious investments in programs and curricula that encourage the development of holistic wellness and that encourage the de- stigmatizing of mental health issues and partner with local mental health professionals to provide on-site mental health care services for students, educators, and school staff.

The legislature must provide funding for public schools for counselors and social workers at a ratio of 250:1, the ratio most recently recommended by the American School Counselor Association and the National Association of Social Workers.

## Invest in School Safety

Ensure the submitted safety plans are followed. They should be monitored and updated as needed. The General Assembly must support common sense gun reforms and implement research-based policies to proactively prevent gun violence in our communities and schools.

The General Assembly should support the respectful treatment of all students in creating a safe learning environment free from any bias.

## Invest in Early Childhood Literacy

The General Assembly must provide state funded universal 4K to all students to ensure their opportunity to enter kindergarten and elementary school with the skills and background needed to be successful readers and learners.