

SOUTH CAROLINA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL DISTRICT

# 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

EXCELLENCE | INNOVATION | RESULTS

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# THANK YOU

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Reflecting on the past school year, I am now more excited than ever about the progress of our charter schools, the hard work of our school leaders and educators, and the increasing demand from families for the diverse offerings in our district.

We are undergoing a period of great change and improvement. One of my favorite quotes is from James Baldwin: “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” Over the last couple of years, in an effort to get better, we’ve chosen to face a few things. While our enrollment and number of schools might have been skyrocketing, and we had a number of schools getting stellar results, as a district of charter schools, we weren’t getting the outcomes that our students deserve, our charter law demands, and our state’s economy desperately needs. And our district had persistent equity and access challenges, too often looking less diverse than our great state of South Carolina.

We’ve chosen to face these challenges head-on and address them. We know that the students served by our charter schools are capable of anything we put before them; that the freedom and power granted to charter educators and leaders is the key to unlocking students’ potential and transforming education in our state; and that every adult in our system is accountable to the students and taxpayers of South Carolina. And now we’re seeing the results of this focus on accountability and quality. Our graduation rate is the highest it has ever been. The vast majority of our schools have higher growth rates today than they did just two years ago. And we have had double-digit gains in the percentage of students attending college—now surpassing the state average for the first time in three years. On top of this, our schools are more diverse and representative of the communities they serve.

We have much to celebrate. Our students are improving. Our schools are chartering a better South Carolina. And we will not relent in our pursuit of excellence and equity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "ESmalley". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Elliot Smalley  
SCPCSD Superintendent

# HISTORY

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The law makes clear why we exist. South Carolina's charter school law was passed in 1996, and defined seven key purposes for charter schools, each of which connect to our strategic pillars and ground us in our principles to serve the students of South Carolina not just well – but to the highest possible level:

- (1) improve student learning;*
- (2) increase learning opportunities for students;*
- (3) encourage the use of a variety of productive teaching methods;*
- (4) establish new forms of accountability for schools;*
- (5) create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site;*
- (6) assist South Carolina in reaching academic excellence; and*
- (7) create new, innovative, and more flexible ways of educating children within the public school system, with the goal of closing achievement gaps between low performing student groups and high performing student groups.*

The legislature created the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD) in 2006 as a state-wide authorizer of new charter schools, schools transferring from local districts, and virtual charter schools. The SCPCSD is unique in that it is state funded and—unlike charters authorized by local districts—its schools can serve students from anywhere in the state. The SCPCSD is governed by an appointed board of volunteer leaders from various regions and cities from around South Carolina. Driven by parent demand, the SCPCSD has grown rapidly over the years. In the 2017-2018 school year, the district oversaw 39 charter schools, mixed with virtual and brick and mortar options, serving nearly 27,000 students statewide, making it among the top ten in size in the state of South Carolina.





## 2017 - 2018 BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Don McLaurin, Chairman  
*Governor's Appointment*

Laban Chappell, Vice Chairman  
*Governor's Appointment*

Kathleen Bounds, Secretary  
*Governor's Appointment*

Anne Bull,  
*Governor's Appointment*

John Payne  
*Speaker of the House Appointment*

Linzie Staley  
*Governor's Appointment*

Beth Purcell  
*Senate Pro Tempore Appointment*

Keith Callicutt  
*Governor's Appointment*

Cyndi Mosteller  
*Governor's Appointment*

# HOW OUR SCHOOLS ARE FUNDED

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## STATE EFA FUNDING

Distributed to schools via a per pupil formula. Consists of a base student funding amount + weighted student funding based on individual student characteristics.

*2017-2018 base student cost funding amount:*

\$2,425 per pupil

Student funding weights: 1 - 2.57

Add on student funding weights: 0.15-0.20

## STATE EIA FUNDING

Distributed to schools based on categorical funding rules for certain programs. Examples include: teacher salary fringe benefits, nationally board certified teachers, students at risk of academic failure.

## PROVISO FUNDING

As a special statewide district, the SCPCSD does not have taxing authority to raise the equivalent of its local revenue. Annually, the SCPCSD requests a proviso funding amount from the SC Legislature.

*2017-18 Proviso funding amount:*

\$3,600 per pupil - brick and mortar charter

\$1,900 per pupil - virtual charter

## FEDERAL FUNDS

SCPCSD schools receive federal funds. The main sources include Title 1 funding for high poverty students and IDEA funds for special education students.

# CURRENT SCHOOLS AND NEWLY APPROVED SCHOOLS

## ● CURRENT SCHOOLS

Brashier Middle College  
Bridges Preparatory School  
Cape Romain Education Charter School  
East Point Academy  
Felton Lab  
Fox Creek High School  
Green Charter School  
Greenville Technical Charter  
Greer Middle College  
High Point Academy  
Lead Academy  
Legacy Early College  
Lowcountry Leadership Academy  
Lowcountry Montessori School  
Meyer Center for Special Children  
Midlands Middle College  
NEXT High School  
Palmetto Scholars Academy  
Pee Dee Math, Science, and Technology Academy  
Quest Leadership Academy  
Riverwalk Academy  
SC Connections Academy  
SC Whitmore School  
Spartanburg Preparatory School  
Tall Pines STEM Academy  
York Preparatory Academy  
Youth Leadership Academy

## ● TRANSFER SCHOOLS

Calhoun Falls Charter School  
Coastal Leadership Academy  
Cyber Academy of South Carolina  
Gray Collegiate Academy  
Meyers School of Excellence  
Midlands STEM Institute  
Oceanside Collegiate Academy  
Odyssey Online Learning  
Royal Live Oaks Academy  
SC Virtual Charter School

## ● OPENED IN FALL 2018

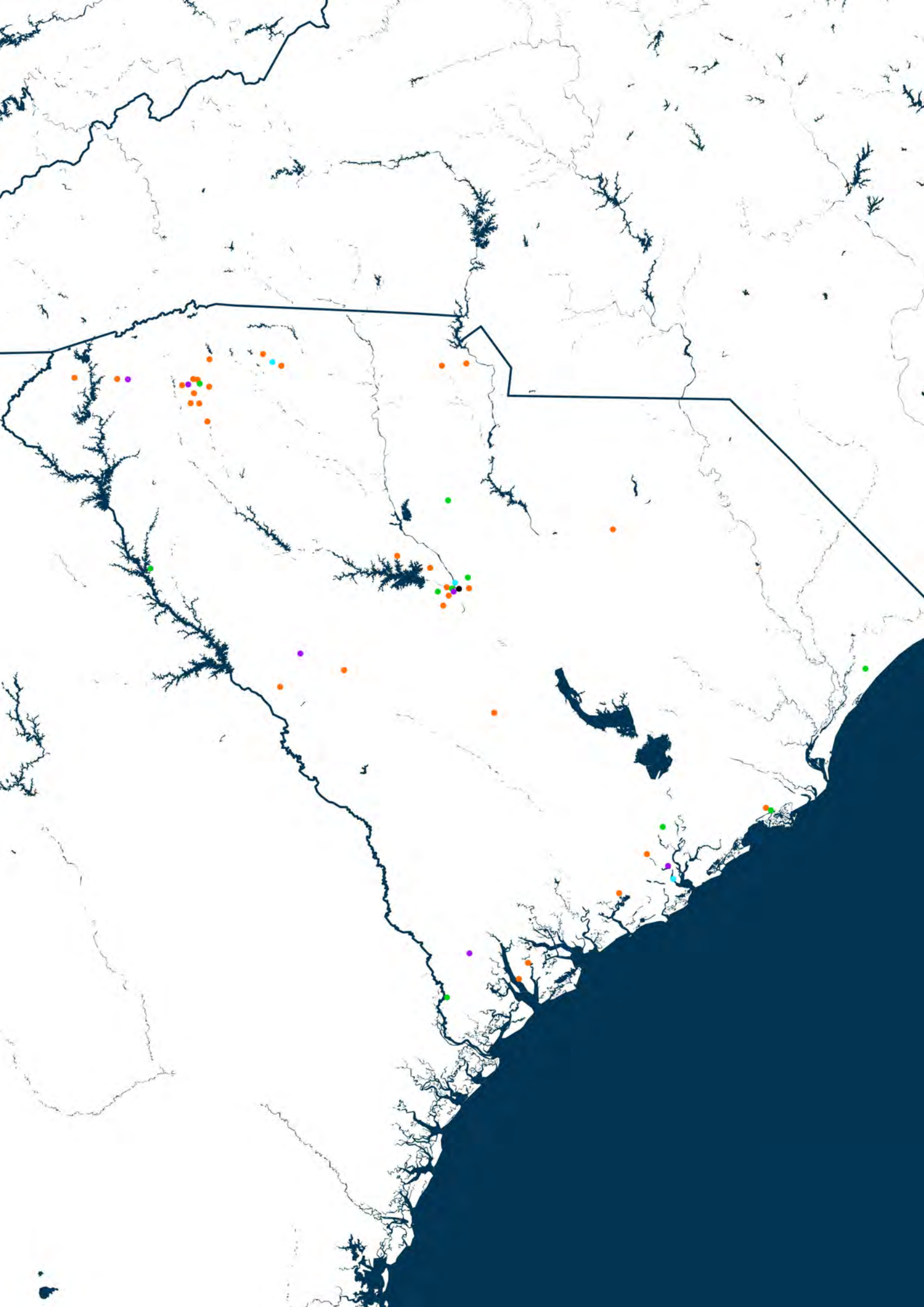
Bettis Preparatory Leadership Academy  
Charleston Acceleration Academy  
East Light Academy  
East Link Academy  
Lakes and Bridges Charter School  
Midlands Arts Conservatory  
Polaris Tech Charter School

## ● NEWLY APPROVED SCHOOLS

*Scheduled to open in Fall 2019*  
Green Charter School of the Lowcountry  
Green Charter School of Spartanburg  
Renaissance Collegiate Academy

## ● CLOSED SCHOOL IN 2018

South Carolina Science Academy

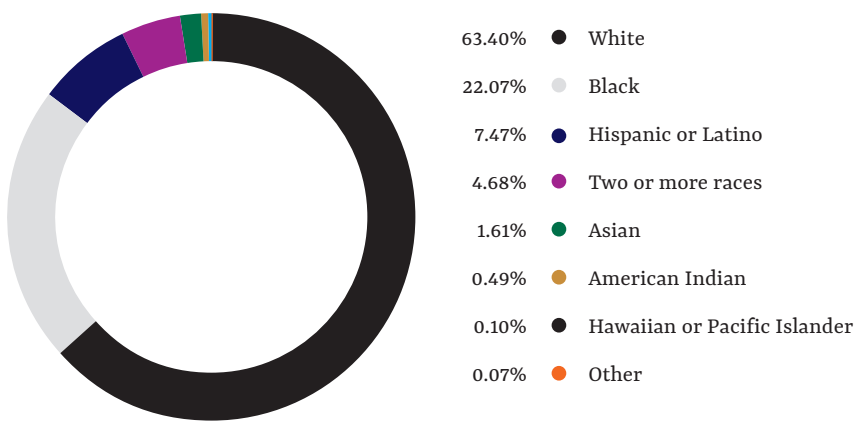




# OUR SCHOOLS BY THE NUMBERS

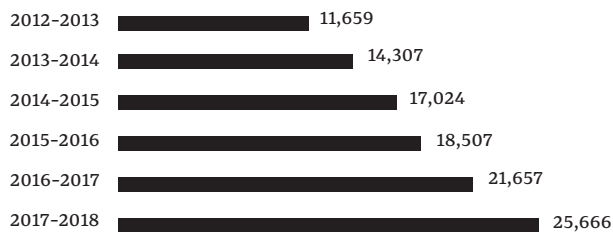
## 2017 - 2018 DEMOGRAPHICS

Source: SCPCSD Student Information System, 2018



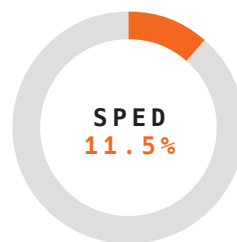
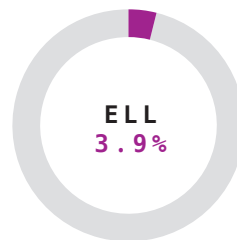
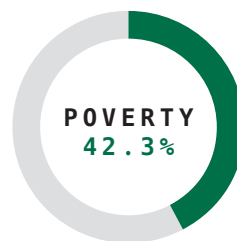
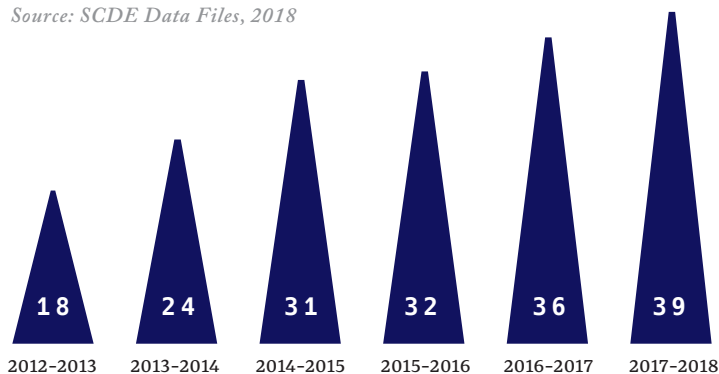
## ACTIVE STUDENT HEAD COUNTS

Source: SCPCSD Student Information System, 2018



## NUMBER OF SCPCSD SCHOOLS BY YEAR

Source: SCDE Data Files, 2018





*Revolutionizing education in  
South Carolina*

# OUR FOUR STRATEGIC PILLARS

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## *Authorization*

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Open high quality schools  
with great plans and huge  
potential for success



## *Accountability*

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Set clear expectations and  
hold schools accountable  
for results



## *Access and equity*

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Ensure all families have  
access and students get what  
they need to succeed



## *Policy*

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Create the conditions  
necessary for school  
operators to thrive

# AUTHORIZATION

Although the organization bears the name District, and the SCPCSD has several responsibilities mirroring local education agencies, the term itself can be a bit misleading when it comes to charter authorizing. Unlike a traditional school district, a charter authorizer retains only 1-2% of funding for its required concentrated role in oversight, evaluation, and reporting. The autonomy and funding given to charter schools comes with significant responsibility to not only implement the proposed educational program, but also to manage the responsibilities and staffing in the areas of testing, technology, state data collections, exceptional student services, and federal programming. As a result, our staffing model is not built on the provision of direct services or training; this would create a conflict in our primary role to evaluate and monitor. This is also a reason you'll see many charter schools throughout the country hiring management companies, working with consortiums or incubators, and even participating in and attending statewide groups and meetings designed for district officials.

Therefore, by design, one of our primary levers for directly impacting student success is in deciding who receives a charter and—in turn—the privilege of serving the students of South Carolina. The SCPCSD authorizes and renews 10-year charters for applicants who show the capacity to operate high-performing, innovative, community-driven schools. We work closely with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) and national and local leaders to bring the highest possible standards and practices to our application and review processes, including SCPCSD enhancements to the state application, the use of external expert reviewers, in-person capacity



interviews, and data dashboard summaries of our recommendations that identify content-specific areas of potential risk.

Once a charter is approved, charter school boards are given the autonomy to make decisions they deem the best fit for their plan and community—anything from selecting the teachers and school administrators who will implement the school's mission to determining the precise location and features of their facility. Charter school leaders and boards select their own paths and create what will work best for the students they will serve. The SCPCSD works alongside them to ensure their readiness for opening on-time and with a high likelihood of success. This process of onboarding is another method through which we pursue unique ways to provide support to our charter schools in a way that preserves and promotes the autonomy they've pursued. Monitoring checklists, support resources, on-site assistance, in-person trainings, and even readiness reviews are all tools used by the SCPCSD in a differentiated way to assist new schools in their start-up and pre-opening efforts.

## *Noteworthy numbers*

### *2015 - 2016:*

32 total letters of intent received  
15 applications received  
2 applications approved

### *2016 - 2017:*

47 total letters of intent received  
18 applications received  
6 applications approved

### *2017 - 2018:*

25 total letters of intent received  
7 applications received  
3 applications approved



# ACCOUNTABILITY

The charter bargain involves striking a balance between autonomy and accountability. You can't have one without the other. Under South Carolina law, charters should create new forms of accountability, and our system—which shines a light on student growth and makes expectations, rewards and consequences clear— has the potential to serve as a national model.

As a charter authorizer, the SCPSD does not operate in a traditional sense like other school districts. In fact, we send 98 cents on the dollar to our schools and operate a very lean central office relative to districts our size. We are not in the practice of making school-level decisions about programs and people like many traditional school districts — instead, we monitor the performance of schools and take appropriate action if schools do not meet standards. Our Core Performance System (CPS) outlines the district's oversight processes and tools. The School Performance Framework (SPF) is one tool that is used to monitor school performance. The SPF is designed to answer three essential questions:

*Academic: Is the educational program a success?*

- Annual SPF rating on academic indicators that balance growth and achievement
- Performance on charter school goals (unique to each school)

*Financial: Is the school financially viable and sustainable?*

- Annual SPF rating on financial indicators
- Monthly review of financial statements, especially for schools with financial concerns

*Student and family rights: Is the school fulfilling its obligations to students and families?*

- Annual SPF rating on student and family rights indicators
- Regular monitoring and oversight of LEA and charter statute compliance obligations



# SPOTLIGHT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Student achievement remains a leading priority of charter schools, as outlined in the SC Charter Schools Act of 1996. The academic component of the SCPCSD's accountability system is built upon high expectations for all kids and eyes student achievement from multiple angles and data sources.

Unfortunately, there are times when a school's performance mandates revocation or non-renewal of its Charter. A determination by the SCPCSD Board of Trustees that a school demonstrated any of the following behaviors mandates revocation or non-renewal:

1. Committed a material violation of the conditions, standards, performance expectations, or procedures outlined in the charter application or charter school contract, or both;

2. Failed to meet the academic performance standards and expectations as defined in the charter application or charter school contract, or both;

3. Failed to maintain books and records according to generally accepted accounting principles or failed to create an appropriate system of internal control, or both;

4. Violated any provision of law from which the charter school was not specifically exempted; or

5. Is operating in a racially discriminatory manner.

## *Noteworthy numbers: closed schools*

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Young Entrepreneurial Vocational (2009): Financial reasons due to low enrollment

Mary L. Dinkins Academy (2013): Low academic achievement

Lake City College Preparatory Academy (2014): Special education chronic non-compliance and low academic achievement

Palmetto State E-Cademy (2014): Non-renewal due to low academic achievement

Garden City Preparatory Academy for Boys (2016): Low academic achievement

Imagine Columbia Leadership Academy (2017): Low academic achievement

South Carolina Calvert Academy (2017): Low academic achievement

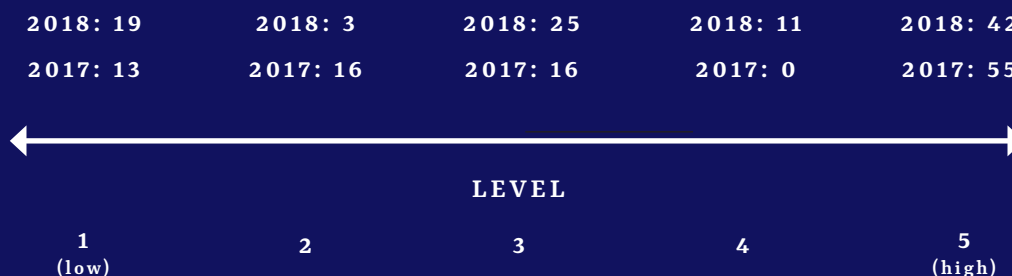
South Carolina Science Academy (2018): Financial sustainability and low academic achievement

# SCHOOL PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK INDICATORS

		EXCEEDS		MEETS		APPROACHING		DOES NOT MEET	
		2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018
<b>Elementary school</b>	Are students achieving proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA)?	21%	29%	21%	24%	29%	33%	29%	14%
	Are students achieving proficiency in Mathematics?	18%	29%	24%	10%	29%	24%	29%	38%
<b>Middle school</b>	Are students achieving proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA)?	43%	39%	13%	30%	22%	17%	22%	13%
	Are students achieving proficiency in Mathematics?	30%	22%	20%	22%	25%	35%	25%	22%
<b>High school</b>	Are students achieving proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA)?	30%	59%	30%	23%	20%	9%	20%	9%
	Are students achieving proficiency in Mathematics?	20%	36%	27%	18%	27%	23%	27%	23%
	Are students graduating on time from high school?	43%	47%	29%	16%	14%	11%	14%	26%
	Are students graduating within five years from high school?	80%	44%	20%	17%	0%	0%	0%	39%
	Does student performance on the ACT reflect college readiness?	22%	43%	11%	19%	33%	29%	33%	10%

*Notes: Between last year and the current year, the high school EOC scale changed (pass rate is now D or better). WorkKeys was not included due to variation in our SPF from the State (Silver or higher vs. Bronze or higher); this did not allow for quartile cuts in the same way as other measures; therefore, these are reported on the SPF, but not included in calculations.*

## SCHOOL PERFORMANCE BY OVERALL EVAAS COMPOSITE LEVEL



# ACCESS AND EQUITY

The SCPCSD is committed to ensuring that the schools it authorizes are accessible to every student eligible to attend public school in South Carolina regardless of race, income or background, and that every student receives an excellent, equitable education once enrolled. We know that without educational equity, we are faced with not just an “achievement gap” but an “opportunity gap”. Because of this, the SCPCSD has put initiatives in place to track enrollment, mobility, discipline, course offerings and achievement trends across multiple subgroups, including low-income students, students of color and students with disabilities.

How do we track access and equity in our schools? We start by asking these key questions:

1. Does the current student body reflect the community in which the school is located?
2. Do school enrollment practices create barriers to entrance for prospective applicants?
3. Once a student has accepted a seat, does the school have a fair enrollment process that meets the statutory mandate that requires it to serve all students?

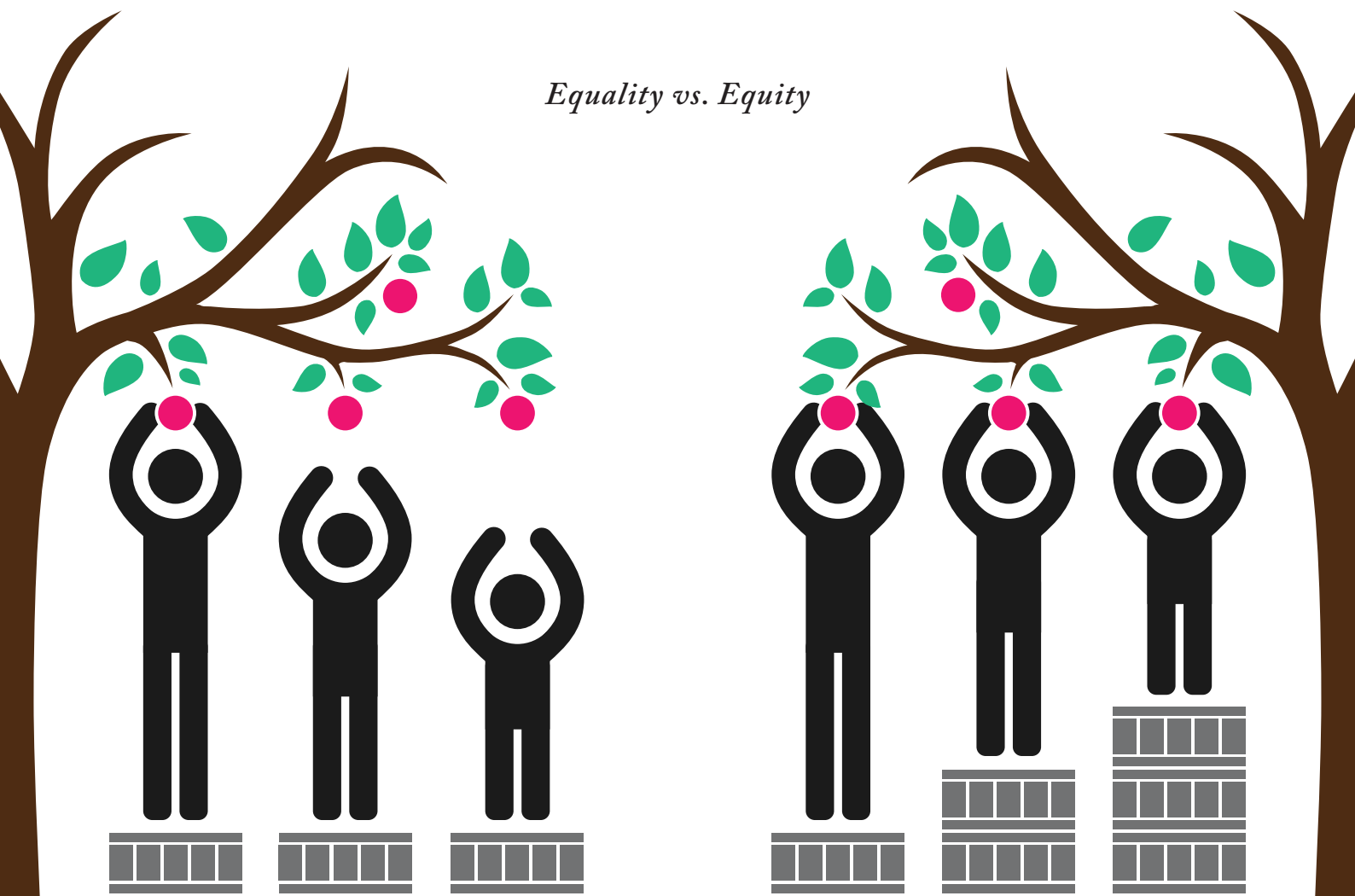
4. Are students exiting in an egregious manner based on subgroups, race, time of school year, student achievement or ability?

5. Are students being disproportionately disciplined and/or penalized due to race, economic status and ability?

6. Are all students achieving at the same level of academic excellence in spite of race, economic status, or ability?

We know that by prioritizing access and equity as one of our core strategic pillars we are working to remove any systemic barriers and pioneering solutions to closing gaps in our South Carolina educational system.

## *Equality vs. Equity*





# POLICY

*Creating the conditions for school operators to thrive*

As an authorizer committed to national best practices and protecting the rights of all students, the SCPCSD engages in policy and advocacy work to ensure that the conditions which enable students to thrive are present.

With leadership from its Board, the SCPCSD has identified a set of legislative challenges and opportunities which face SCPCSD charter schools and the state's charter school sector as a whole. The SCPCSD is committed to addressing these issues with relevant stakeholders to improve transparency and ensure sound accountability practices for South Carolina charter schools. These priorities include:

## TRANSPORTATION

One of the largest barriers faced by students and their families in accessing the state's charter schools is the lack of transportation funding and infrastructure. To ensure educational freedom for all South Carolina families, providing transportation for charter school students reduces a key barrier to access and enables true school choice. Funding for transportation will enable students to attend higher- quality schools that might have been previously inaccessible. As the state faces the challenge of how to serve its highest need student populations, providing transportation aid to SCPCSD charter schools that are already doing more

with less will help public charter schools better serve the families of South Carolina.

## PROVISO 1A.50.

In order to operate its portfolio of charter schools, the SCPCSD staff appears before the Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee to request funding every legislative session. During the 2017-2018 legislative session, SCPCSD staff secured the Proviso funding for the 2018-2019 school year.

*According to an analysis conducted by the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, local funding for South Carolina public schools has increased by an estimated \$581 to \$5,869 per pupil (an 11% increase from 2014-15). Over the same period, charter school proviso funding has remained unchanged at \$3,600 and \$1,900.*

*During the 2017-2018 legislative session, SCPCSD staff advocated for Proviso 1.93. This funding request focuses resources on SCPCSD schools serving high percentages of students living in poverty and schools serving high percentages of special education students by providing transportation to and from school.*



# THE SCPCSD WAY: OUR STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

## SCHOOLS OF DISTINCTION

The SCPCSD Schools of Distinction program was formed in 2017 to recognize schools that exhibited excellence in overall academic achievement or overall growth measures. In the 2017-2018 school year, eight schools were recognized.

### YORK PREP

Rock Hill, SC      K-12th grade      Executive Director: Brian Myrup

### SPARTANBURG PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Spartanburg, SC      K-8th grade      Head of School: Tomikia Whitmire

### GREEN CHARTER SCHOOL

Greenville, SC      K-12th grade      Executive Director: Adem Dokmeci

### YOUTH LEADERSHIP ACADEMY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Pickens, SC      6th-8th grade      Principal: Sandee Blankenship

### EAST POINT ACADEMY

Columbia, SC      Pre-K-8th grade      Principal: Mark Bounds

### ROYAL LIVE OAKS ACADEMY OF THE ARTS & SCIENCES

Hardeeville, SC      K-12th grade      Executive Director: Dr. Karen Wicks

### PALMETTO SCHOLARS ACADEMY

North Charleston, SC      6th-12th grade      Executive Director: Dr. Tim Gott

### BRIDGES PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Beaufort, SC      K-11th grade      Principal: Chris Wilson

*"I believe that all schools are capable of becoming Schools of Distinction. In these schools, we see strong leadership, a commitment to joyful and rigorous education, and an unwavering belief in all kids".*

*– Elliot Smalley,  
SCPCSD  
Superintendent*

*"With our 1% reduction in District fees, we were able to make investments that will last much longer than the current fiscal year by putting new floors and fresh paint in two classrooms, staining our porch decks and sponsoring an awesome field trip for the house who won our year-long challenge (for 37 students)!"*

*– Sandee Blankenship,  
Youth Leadership Academy  
School Leader*



### **1% AUTHORIZING FEE**

The Charter School Act allows the SCPCSD to withhold up to 2% of total state appropriations for each charter school it authorizes to cover the costs of overseeing its charter schools. However, for 2017-2018, the SCPCSD Board voted to approve a staff recommendation to apply a reduced authorizing fee of 1% to schools in good standing which earned the “School of Distinction” designation for that school year. We slashed this authorizing fee in half because we firmly believe that this work is all about students, and we are excited to be putting more resources into the hands of operators who get results. This program allowed our Schools of Distinction to retain approximately \$350,000 in the current fiscal year to hire additional teachers and provide increased support for our students.

### *Board Governance*

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A critical design of charter schools stems from the fact that school boards hold the charter for their schools. It is imperative that charter school boards understand their responsibility to families, students, and taxpayers. Interpreting data, balancing a budget and effectively managing the school leader are just a few things the governing board is responsible in ensuring the success of a charter school. In 2017, the SCPCSD contracted with national experts on effective charter board governance and provided this training free of charge to SCPCSD charter boards to help strengthen local governance.

## THE FELLOWSHIP

In 2017, the SCPCSD Board of Trustees approved the New Schools SC Fellowship, a charter school incubation program, designed to open high-quality schools in South Carolina's communities with the highest need. The fellowship chose one fellow, Hugh Harmon, following a rigorous selection process, who demonstrated capacity to design, found, lead, and sustain a game-changing public school that will close achievement gaps. Renaissance Collegiate Academy (RCA) intends to open its doors in Columbia in the fall of 2019, serving 100 students in grades kindergarten through first grade. At capacity, RCA intends on serving 540 students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade.



*“With the profoundly important support and coaching of the New Schools SC Fellowship staff, I was able to see a great idea transformed into a viable educational model that is focused on literacy and preparing scholars for competitive secondary schools and acceptance at the college of their choice. There’s still much work to be done, but the invaluable support through these funds, resources and coaching of the Fellowship have given us viable footing to step into the future that our communities have been demanding.”*

*- Hugh Harmon, New Schools SC Fellow, Renaissance Collegiate Academy Founder and School Leader*





*“We believe that by investing in educators and leaders with strong track records – who are committed to opening great schools where they’re needed the most – we’re going to accelerate the impact of charter schools on our state’s most underserved students. We’re not placing our bets on a specific program or intervention – we’re placing our bets on people.”*

*– Elliot Smalley, SCPCSD  
Superintendent*



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