

HOUSE COMMITTEE HEARING, DILLON, MARCH 23,
2015

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee on this most important topic. And welcome to the Pee Dee.

Educating all our children well, even the “least among us”, is not only the moral thing to do, but about the only way for that young person to succeed today. When all children in our rural, low-income communities succeed, all of us in SC will do better economically. It is not good for the state to leave any of her children behind... the cost will be too great..

Simply put, there are very few jobs for undereducated youth, as well as fro adults anymore. While is it not cheap to provide a quality education on the front end, it is far more expensive to pay later—in higher prison costs, greater health care costs and costs that will entail our government. And not only that, but career indecisiveness is very expensive... the old age saying, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

1. Educational research VERY CLEARLY shows that students from HIGH POVERY areas such as ours need

more services than other students, JUST TO KEEP UP with students from other areas of our state. Indeed our students are behind other students when they enter the educational system, but they should not stay there and we as a state should not want them to be behind.

The SC Supreme Court, in its decision stated that children living in poverty were not provided meaningful education opportunities not just due to a lack of EARLY CHILDHOOD programs, but also due to “troubling issues in transportation, teacher qualifications and effectiveness, small school district sizes, and the effects of local legislation on the state’s efforts to meet its constitutional duties throughout the state-wide school system”.

The Court further said that educational funding in SC was “fractured” and was based on “outmoded and outdated” policies. How can we as a state move forward when so many of her people are being left behind?

2. We do not seek to take away any current funding that non plaintiff school districts receive. Rather, the research is clear that it costs SUBSTANTIALLY MORE to educate students of poverty. Therefore, we as members of the General Assembly needs to completely overhaul the funding formula while realizing that “poverty districts do

not have the means to raise the necessary funding” (with substantial increases to plaintiff districts so that they can provide successful and proven programs of instruction to students), improve transportation, improve facilities, provide substantial salary improvements to teachers and administrators who have proven to be successful in plaintiff districts, attract more and a higher quality of secondary education students into the teaching profession, and making it easier to remove educators from the profession who are not adequately meeting the needs of pupils.

3. The state/we need to determine exactly what type of educational/learning system SC needs and then go backwards to cost out what that type of system will cost. For example, what incentives are needed to attract excellent teachers to poverty districts? What incentives are needed to attract the best and brightest into teacher education programs? How much more time and cost are necessary to provide instruction and either summer or after school programming to meet the students’ needs? What programs, based on sound research really meet the needs of students from poverty? What does it cost to build and equip schools to meet the needs of students from poverty areas? The same is true of transportation and technology infrastructure.

Once these costs over the long haul are determined, the state needs to determine how it will pay for these costs and

SUSTAIN the payment even in tough economic times, and then, over time, implement the increases. The state has been remiss in not adhering even to the long established educational funding that presently exists. It cannot do this in the future if we are to be successful, if we are going to move South Carolina forward in preparing our students

4. Far too long SC has provided piecemeal “educational reforms” that sound good on paper, but it needs to develop and implement a solution for this that is LONG TERM, SUSTAINABLE, and with the realization that one size does not fit all. For example, every district does not need a reading coach. Some may need several, others may need some other type of support. Also understand that when you take a reading coach out of the classroom, you are probably removing an excellent teacher from working with students.
5. Too many current teachers, administrators, and superintendents are simply unable to provide adequate education to students of poverty. To provide “training” to them to make them productive is not going to succeed. That is why they need to be removed and a new and better prepared teacher corp developed. Rigid and inflexible state certification standards need to be removed so that persons who might not have majored in Education but who are excellent in a particular subject area, can be quickly moved into classrooms and provide them with on-going training.

6. We are not looking at a quick fix here. This will take years and years to implement and be aware that it will cost appreciably more to educate these students while still providing the same and inflation cost increases to other districts. To be truly comprehensive, the state must look at improving the quality and opportunity for earlier pre-school programs, better access to health care, improved elementary, middle, and high school programs and provide a seamless transition for graduates into higher education or to the work force. The quality of life, our economic well being in SC is dependent upon our being able to provide an educated and trained workforce for businesses and industry to be successful.

7. The plaintiff districts have been working on a comprehensive plan, that if funded and implemented will fulfill these goals. I urge you to carefully consider that plan that is rigorous, based on proven research, thorough, and designed to take a child from birth through the 12th grade and then make them successful in higher education, the work force, or the military.

In closing, yes, we need to dramatically improve the conditions in our rural, high poverty schools to attract and retain quality teachers and school leaders. And yes, we must offer more and better courses from elementary through high school. But also when students fall behind,

we need to provide them with additional opportunities in school, after school, and in summers to give them the chance to catch up and keep up.

Thank you again for this opportunity and I wish you well as you work through this most difficult yet important challenge facing our state.