

# The State of Education in South Carolina

## The Need for Improvements is Critical and Urgent

The state of education in South Carolina is in dire need of 21st century modernization. In our Palmetto State, Child Development and K-12 programs, out of control public college costs and low enrollment in two-year colleges, and prevalent adult literacy issues all are critical problems that must be addressed immediately.

These are complicated, complex issues of vast importance that require local, state and federal leaders to work together to recognize, analyze, and take the steps necessary for the good of the state -- not just some of its citizens, but all South Carolinians.

## Education Problems Overall

We should be reminded of the words of the Greek philosopher Plato, "If a man neglects education, he walks lame to the end of his life."

When only half of the three-and four-year old boys and girls in the United States are enrolled in pre-school programs, and only one-half of those are enrolled in publicly funded preschools, they are



beginning life steps behind their peers and indeed, may walk lame to the end of their lives.

When over one-fifth of all children in America are sent to school hungry and undernourished, this should send a signal to all caring parents and adults.

When our national and state leaders focus on providing bullets and firearm training to teachers and schools instead of nourishment and books, this is a dire warning for all caring parents and adults.

When the costs for attaining a college degree is prohibitive and student loan borrowing is a crushing burden, this, too, is a dire warning for caring parents and adults.

Too often, state and localities facing budget issues view education needs as discretionary, making educational programs the last to be funded and the first to be cut.

Lastly, teachers are not looked upon as “professionals” in the same way as are doctors, lawyers, scientists, and even athletes, and they are certainly not adequately compensated -- even though we assign to them for the greater part of each day our most precious resource--our children

## Low Rankings in Education

The Quick Facts report published by the South Carolina Department of Education in March 2017 put a spotlight on problems specific to South Carolina. (<https://ed.sc.gov/data/other/quick-facts-about-south-carolina-education/>) Quick Facts reported that enrollment in Child Development and Kindergarten programs were 3.4 percent and 7.3 percent, low when compared with other states’ enrollments. The report highlighted issues with teacher levels of training, certification, and compensation. Low teacher salary is (South Carolina politicians take note) driving teachers in other states to strike for better compensation.

The 2018 U.S. News and World Report (<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/south-carolina>) ranked South Carolina 48th overall in Education, pre-school enrollment at 43rd), reading and math scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress exams at 40th, the costs of South Carolina’s public colleges at 45th, its two-year college graduation rate at 49th. Thus, all were considerably worse than almost every other states’ rankings.



## Steps to Address the Education Needs

Recognition is needed at all levels of leadership and in the community of the relationship of education to other critical issues, such as jobs, poverty, and self-respect.

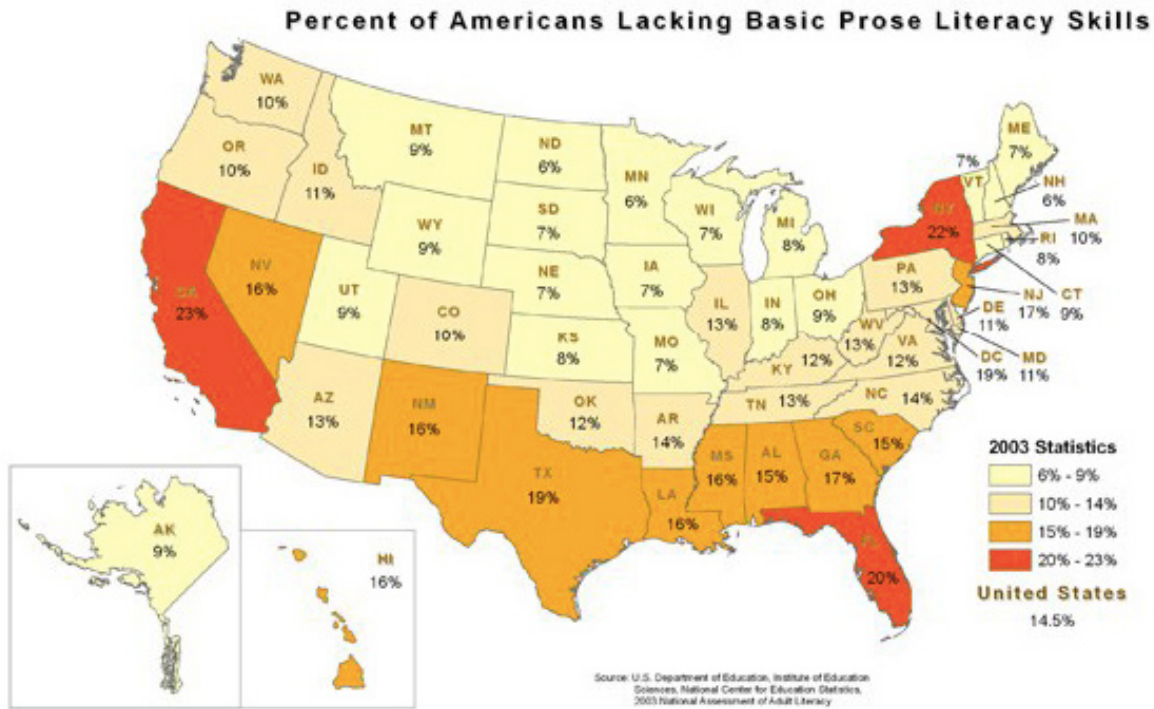
When 75 percent of state prison inmates do not possess a high school education and proficient English

language skills, when one in four South Carolina children go to school hungry every day, when children of parents with low literacy rates experience low reading levels and

are likely to get poor grades and experience behavioral problems, then human dignity suffers immeasurably. This is not the level to which South Carolina aspires.

There needs to be a deeper understanding of the issues affecting education. Listening to parents,

**A person with a higher level of education, in either technical or professional fields, is much more likely to obtain a job and earn higher wages.**



students, administrators, and those closest to the issues--the teachers, can offer new insights into effective and efficient solutions. Less top down driven solutions, and more grass roots discussion can lead to the implementation of best practices.

Education must be addressed at multiple levels, i.e., child development, K-12, and adult literacy.

**The South Carolina State legislature and local communities must increase funding for adult literacy programs and public schools, and provide adequate teacher compensation.**

As discussion centers on child development and K-12, adult literacy sometimes gets lost in the shuffle.

But out-of-school teenagers seeking GEDs and adults who cannot read are problems especially prevalent in South Carolina. The non-profit Horry County Literacy Council (HCLC), which began operating in 1976, trains volunteers to work one-on-one with those reading below a fifth-grade level, and assists anyone trying to acquire a GED.

But it, too, only serves a fraction of the adults in need. The HCLC says that "A decline in federal and state funding in the past 10 years has resulted in programs serving only a fraction of the adults in need....At the present levels of public funding, less than 10 percent of adults in need are receiving services." (<http://horrycountyliteracy.org/who-we-are/did-you-know/>)

Finally, the rising costs of public universities and low enrollment in two-year colleges requires attention. The cost of public university education in South Carolina is prohibitive, and in spite of this, there continues to be low enrollment in two-year colleges, which offer more reasonable tuition.

## The Bottom Line

The HCDP is actively seeking solutions and leadership to strip off the worn out and harmful veneer that is South Carolina's state of education, and apply a fresh coat of 21st century solutions

Education in South Carolina is like an old run-down historical house that was painted with lead based paint. The owners must remove that old paint and apply a new coat. Old lead paint, like a

poor education, is lethal to our children's' health and future welfare.

An under-educated citizenship does unmitigated harm to our local and state economies. Education is historically a major Democratic party issue of great importance--an organic family value espoused by Democrats at federal, state and local levels.

## What Can You Do?

If you consider yourself to be a responsible citizen, whether you choose to call yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or simply "other", the education of our citizenship is of such importance that it requires your interest and participation.

- First, educate yourself on the dire state of education in South Carolina and how it impacts you, your family, your neighbors, and our children and their children.
- Encourage others to do the same. Too often our silence on matters is interpreted as acquiescence or even approval of the state of affairs.
- Take the next step by becoming involved in your local education matters. Volunteer your time and energy to your neighborhood school to assist, tutor or mentor.
- Contact the Horry County Literacy Council in South Carolina to assist those in need of a GED or reading proficiency. Georgetown County has a similar program focused on adult literacy.
- Contact your local School Board representative with your concerns. Attend a School Board meeting.
- Listen to local politicians who are running for school board, county council, or state legislative positions, and question whether they truly understand the gravity of the issues pertaining to education, and are proposing realistic solutions to the problems.
- Finally, let us agree that education needs in South Carolina transcend political party. Vote into office those who understand and are willing to take actions to address the needs of education in South Carolina.

Please contact us at [issues@horrydemocrats.org](mailto:issues@horrydemocrats.org) for more information.

Contributed by Tony Pressley