

SANTEE-LYNCHES EDUCATIONAL SERIES

Regional Rural Education and Employment Opportunities

This trend analysis study examines the three small (fewer than 3,000 students enrolled) school districts in the Santee-Lynches Region of South Carolina. These three School Districts are Clarendon County School District #1, Clarendon County School District #3, and the Lee County School District. Clarendon and Lee Counties are both predominately rural counties located in the Midlands of South Carolina, but the counties have very different concepts for structuring their education system. Lee County, with an estimated population of 20,500 IN 2004 has a single consolidated school system, while Clarendon County with an estimated population of 33,157 has three separate School Districts.

Both Lee and Clarendon Counties have a similar agricultural economic history based on a large African-American population who raised large families to work on the farms. Beginning in the 1960s, the economy of both these counties began to change in two distinct ways. First, the late 1950s through 1970 saw a mass exodus of African-American families from these rural Southern counties. This out-migration was the result of the atmosphere of racial tension associated with the Civil Rights movement and the lure of a higher standard of living in Northern cities. Also, during this same time period, both counties experienced the beginnings of a shift in their economic base from agriculture to manufacturing. This new manufacturing base was primarily composed of basic industries and remained overwhelmingly labor intensive. During both the agricultural and manufacturing economic periods, education was largely undervalued in the counties. The historical precedent of an early failure to properly place an emphasis on education continues to have a detrimental effect on the economic development efforts of these counties.

Clarendon and Lee are two of fifteen (15) rural counties in South Carolina identified by the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture as African American High Poverty Counties. This designation is borne out when student demographic characteristics for all three School Districts are considered. Students in Clarendon #1 and Lee School Districts are overwhelmingly minority. Clarendon #3 School District has a majority of non-Hispanic white students, but it still has a larger percentage of African-American students than the State average.

Student Demographic Characteristics (Percentages*)

	Clarendon # 1	Clarendon #3	Lee
Racial Composition			
African-American	96.0%	33.2%	94.5%
Hispanic	1.5%	3.9%	1.3%
White	2.5%	60.2%	4.0%

Source: S.C. Department of Education

* Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to other races being enrolled.

In addition to a large minority population, all three Districts have exceedingly high levels of poverty in the public school student population. According to the School Lunch

SANTEE-LYNCHES EDUCATIONAL SERIES

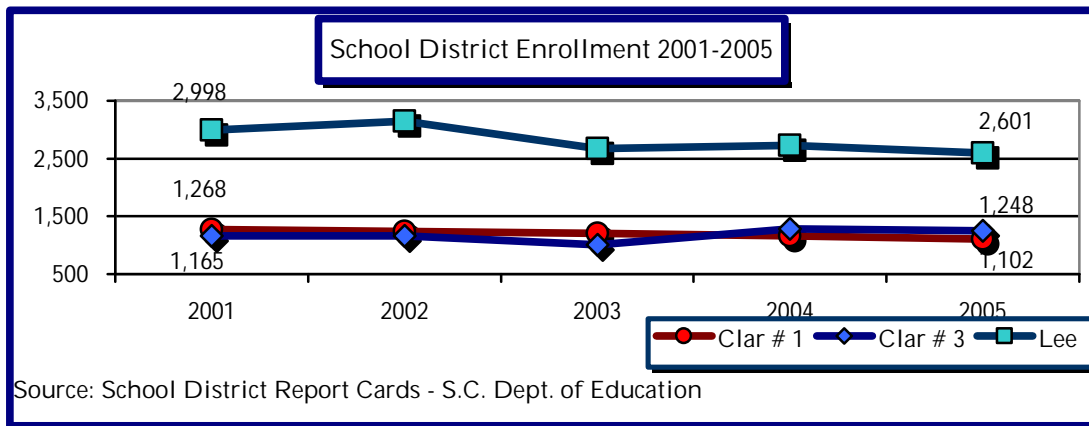
Poverty Index, an index based on the percentage of students who qualify for partially or fully subsidized public school lunches, the three Districts have well over two-thirds of their student population in poverty. In addition, the 2003 U.S. Census Bureau School District Poverty Estimate identifies high levels of student poverty in these Districts.

School District	School Lunch Poverty Index	Estimated Number of 5 to 17 Year Olds	Estimated Age 5-17 in Poverty Families	Percent of Age 5-17 at Poverty Level
Clarendon #1	96.5%	1,459	483	33%
Clarendon #3	67.8%	965	208	22%
Lee	94.5%	3,571	960	27%

Sources: S.C. Department of Education - School Lunch Poverty Index 2003-2004
U.S. Census Bureau – Poverty Estimate of S.C. School Districts 2003

This large number of minority and economically deprived students reflects the student characteristics of many rural school districts, especially in the Midlands and Low Country of South Carolina. The high percentage of poor families and households in these counties places financial limits on local governments and School Boards as they attempt to meet the education standards of larger, more affluent counties.

A significant number of rural counties across the nation are losing population. A major contributing factor in this out-migration is the counties' stagnant or decreasing tax base which limits their ability to raise sufficient revenue to meet their public education needs. While neither Clarendon nor Lee County was one of the sixteen rural counties in South Carolina that lost population from 2000 to 2004, Clarendon #1 and Lee School Districts have seen a decrease in enrollment during this period.

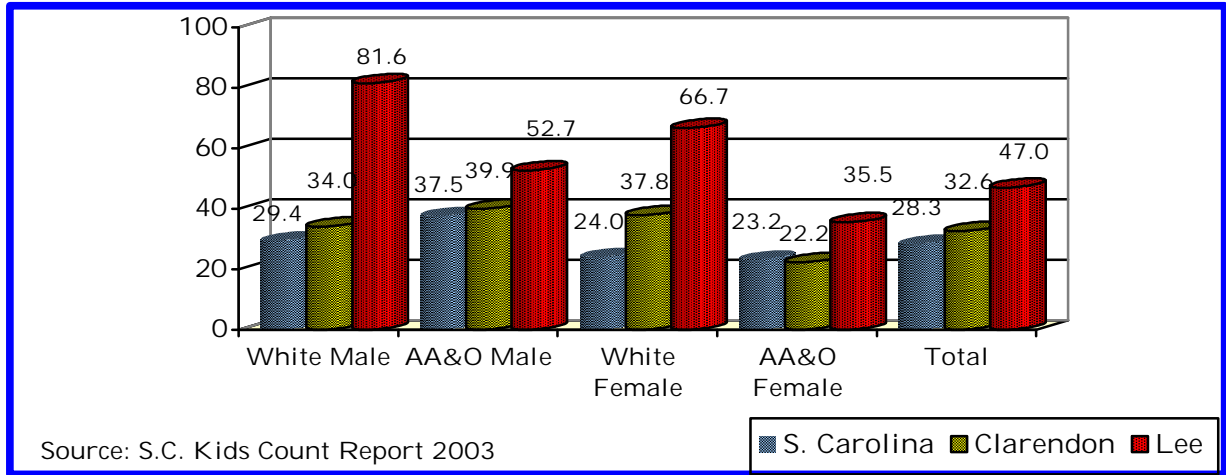


Over this five-year period the aggregate decrease in student enrollment in the three Districts was 480 students. This is approximately a nine percent (9%) loss of enrollment in five years. In the two School Districts with a predominately minority student population and a high poverty index, the decrease in student enrollment is even more dramatic. The total enrollment in the Clarendon #1 and Lee School Districts in 2001 was 4,266. Five years later there were 563 fewer students or over a 13% enrollment loss.

SANTEE-LYNCHES EDUCATIONAL SERIES

While the counties' decreasing birth rates, parents opting for private education, and the growing trend in home schooling contributed to the loss of public school enrollment, a major factor in enrollment decline is the failure of students to graduate from high school. For the purpose of this study, dropout rate is defined as: eighth grade students no longer enrolled in grade twelve. This dropout rate is based on an average of students over three years (2000-2003). Using this definition, South Carolina ranks fiftieth in dropout rates nation-wide and, as small rural and persistently poor counties; Clarendon and Lee Counties exceed this already high State-wide dropout rate.

Dropout Percentages for South Carolina, Clarendon County, and Lee County



AA&O = African-American and Others

Although these dropout rates apply to counties and not school districts, they either are true representations of the Districts (Lee Consolidated School District) or a realistic approximation of each Clarendon County School District. Since the majority of white children attend private schools in these two Counties, the low percentage of white students in the Counties' public schools (see Table on Page 1) distorts the dropout rates for both white males and females. Dropout rates for African-American females, both Statewide and in these two rural counties are the lowest of any of the gender/racial categories. However, the percentage of African-American males who drop out of high school in these two counties is of major concern. In this new economic era, wide-spread economic growth within minority-majority counties is severely constrained when 4 or 5 out of every 10 African-American males fail to complete high school.

Recognizing that a quality education system is essential to economic success in the 21st Century, South Carolina established challenging, but necessary goals for the State's education system in 1998. The overall goal was that South Carolina will be ranked in the top half of states nationally by 2010. This goal was predicated on proper funding, management, teacher quality, early childhood education, and other essential components of a high quality education system. Evaluation points were established by the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee to track and measure the State's achievements in both student and school performance. This report has selected the evaluation points associated with standardized testing to examine how these three small rural county School Districts are progressing in relation to State-wide results.

SANTEE-LYNCHES EDUCATIONAL SERIES

The first evaluation point considered is that concerning the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test: Nine out of ten South Carolina students will score at or above grade level (proficient or advanced) on the South Carolina Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT).

The PACT is given to students in the third to eighth grades and covers four distinct academic areas – English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. There are four performance standards established for the PACT:

1. Below Basic – Student fails to meet minimum expectations and is not prepared for work at next grade level.
2. Basic – Student has met minimum expectations and is minimally prepared for work at next grade level.
3. Proficient – Student has met expectations and is well prepared for work at next grade level.
4. Advanced – Student exceeds expectations and is well prepared for work a next grade level.

The following Table compares South Carolina's average with the three School Districts.

Percent of Proficient and Above PACT Performance Levels for 2005

Year	Grade	English – Language Arts				Grade	Mathematics			
		S.C.	Clar 1	Clar 3	Lee		S.C.	Clar 1	Clar 3	Lee
2005	3	56.8	48.5	59.7	32.7	3	56.8	16.9	26.3	8.2
2005	4	36.4	9.6	37.2	18.4	4	36.4	13.9	37.5	17.9
2005	5	29.8	11.1	27.4	8.4	5	29.8	11.1	28.9	10.0
2005	6	27.3	6.5	26.1	7.7	6	27.3	10.2	37.0	25.5
2005	7	24.2	3.8	15.7	5.9	7	24.2	9.1	44.0	11.3
2005	8	29.7	10.1	23.5	15.0	8	29.7	1.6	19.0	9.4
Year	Grade	Science				Grade	Social Studies			
		S.C.	Clar 1	Clar 3	Lee		S.C.	Clar 1	Clar 3	Lee
2005	3	32.8	8.6	19.5	3.4	3	25.2	30.4	15.6	6.7
2005	4	29.9	9.3	26.3	8.0	4	28.1	11.8	41.3	7.5
2005	5	24.5	9.5	26.8	3.5	5	26.9	8.0	23.7	4.6
2005	6	29.2	8.9	24.2	5.2	6	27.0	8.9	19.8	4.2
2005	7	21.7	7.8	28.3	6.1	7	25.9	7.8	22.7	5.8
2005	8	24.4	3.2	14.2	5.0	8	23.7	3.3	36.7	2.3

Source: S.C. Department of Education – 2005 PACT Test Scores

With the exception of the achievements of third and some fourth grade students, about one-quarter of State students in all other grades currently meet the Proficient and Advanced levels. Overall, Clarendon School District #3 students are at or near the State PACT averages for each grade. Although the two School Districts with a minority student population exceeding ninety percent (90%) improved their scores in several grades between 2004 and 2005, their students remained well below the State average in every grade and every academic test subject. With very few exceptions, both Clarendon School District #1 and the Lee Consolidated School District's percent of students at the Proficient and above performance levels are well under one-half the State average. Regardless of the ultimate percentage of South Carolina's students achieving the

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Proficient and Advanced performance level by 2010, students in Clarendon #1 and Lee School Districts continue to lag well behind the State trend.

While the percent of students at the Proficient level or above is important to meeting the South Carolina goal, of even more significance is the student percentage in the Below Basic performance level. Since those scoring in the Below Basic level are considered "not ready for the next grade level", the higher the percentage in this performance level the greater the risk for students to lose interest and eventually opt out of high school.

Percent of Below Basic PACT Performance Levels (2005)

Year	Grade	English – Language Arts				Grade	Mathematics			
		S.C.	Clar 1	Clar 3	Lee		S.C.	Clar 1	Clar 3	Lee
2005	3	12.9	14.1	9.1	21.1	3	16.6	23.1	15.8	35.0
2005	4	20.4	37.0	15.4	48.7	4	21.4	43.1	27.5	48.0
2005	5	23.2	34.9	20.0	46.6	5	22.8	38.1	19.6	51.3
2005	6	36.5	68.8	36.4	62.6	6	21.3	45.6	20.7	29.9
2005	7	28.5	38.5	32.4	47.8	7	28.5	47.7	27.0	54.7
2005	8	25.3	37.0	28.6	45.0	8	33.7	63.1	36.2	51.7
Year	Grade	Science				Grade	Social Studies			
		S.C.	Clar 1	Clar 3	Lee		S.C.	Clar 1	Clar 3	Lee
2005	3	35.6	42.0	33.8	59.9	3	20.6	15.9	22.1	50.6
2005	4	38.2	57.3	42.5	64.8	4	22.8	38.2	17.5	47.2
2005	5	43.3	65.1	38.1	76.3	5	36.1	52.4	26.8	64.3
2005	6	43.8	64.6	40.7	72.6	6	35.1	60.8	35.2	56.8
2005	7	38.3	58.9	37.6	65.4	7	41.3	63.3	39.1	66.7
2005	8	40.0	61.0	39.0	59.1	8	33.5	64.2	21.7	69.4

Source: S.C. Department of Education – 2005 PACT Test Scores

The above Table illustrates the education difficulties facing the most rural of the Santee-Lynches Region's School Districts. In both Clarendon #1 and Lee County School Districts, over fifty percent (50%) of all fifth through eighth grade students perform at the Below Basic level in both Science and Social Studies. These same School Districts have high percentages of students failing to meet minimum standards in both English and Mathematics. Of special concern is the high percentage of seventh and eighth grade students scoring Below Basic, because these are the students who will be the high school classes of 2006 and 2007.

The next South Carolina evaluation criterion we will examine is: South Carolina will rank in the top half of States on the SAT and ACT. These are distinct college entrance exams, they will be evaluated separately.

South Carolina is one of twenty-three states, plus the District of Columbia, using the SAT as the primary college admission test. The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is composed of two parts, a verbal test and a mathematics test. Each test has a maximum score of 800 points with the first 200 points of each test awarded for taking the test. A perfect composite (the combined total of both verbal and math scores) SAT score is 1600.

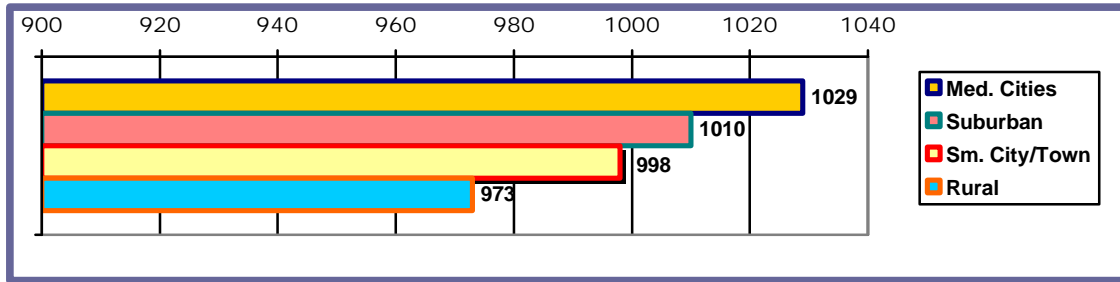
Each of the three rural School Districts covered in this report has a single high school. Of the 276 seniors in these high schools in 2005, a total of 80 or twenty-nine percent (29%) took the SAT. This percentage is significantly below the South Carolina average

SANTEE-LYNCHES EDUCATIONAL SERIES

of 66%. The low percentage of local seniors taking this college entrance exam limits the number of students eligible to go on to any four-year and some two-year colleges.

The College Board is the not-for-profit membership association that manages this test. This association has tracked the SAT scores by level of population. In South Carolina, rural high schools do not compete well with the other three population categories.

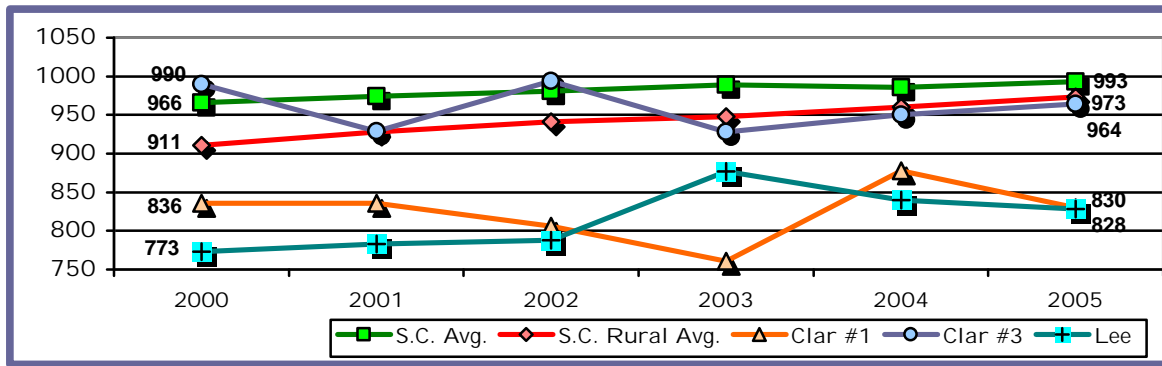
South Carolina's Average SAT Composite Scores by Population Category (2005)



Source: College Board – South Carolina Reports 1999 to 2005

Rural South Carolina high schools' average composite scores have steadily increased since 2000, but they still trail medium-size cities by 56 points, suburban areas by 37 points, and small cities and towns by 25 points. Two of the Region's three small rural School Districts have been able to match the State average or the rural South Carolina trend. While Clarendon District #3 has basically tracked with this trend, the minority majority School Districts of Clarendon #1 and Lee have consistently fallen well below the State-wide average and rural State trend.

SAT Composite Trend for S.C., Rural S.C., and Three School Districts 2000 -2005



S.C. Department of Education 2000 -2005 and College Board 2000 -2005

The State's average rural composite scores have consistently trended upward, beginning with a score of 911 in 2000. Neither Clarendon #1 nor Lee School Districts have attained an average score of 900 in that or any of the following years. In 2005, the average SAT composite scores for these two School Districts were 145 below the South Carolina average rural composite score and 165 below the State overall composite average. The low average SAT composite scores in these small poor predominately minority School Districts limit the number of graduates who can attend college and eventually gain higher income employment.

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The other nationwide test used by twenty-six states for college admission is the ACT. Although the SAT is a higher stakes measure of high school quality, the ACT continues to gain popularity among students in the State's public high schools. The SAT and the ACT differ in their focus. The SAT is based more on logic and analysis, while the ACT is more curriculum-oriented. The ACT consists of four (4) tests – English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning. The ACT uses an adjusted average of the 4 tests to arrive at the composite score used for college entry.

A total of 53 students in all three of the School Districts covered by this report took the ACT in 2005. The following Table enumerates each School District's average score and a comparison of these scores to the National average, State average, State African American student average, and State White student average in individual test and composite score.

ACT Average Test Scores for Nation, State, and School Districts. (2005)

Group	English	Mathematics	Reading	Science Reasoning	Composite
US Overall Avg.	20.4	20.7	21.3	20.9	20.9
SC Overall Avg.	18.8	19.3	19.6	19.3	19.4
SC White	21.0	20.7	21.5	20.8	21.1
SC African Am.	15.4	16.7	16.3	16.9	16.5
Clarendon #1	17.4	17.2	16.8	17.3	17.3
Clarendon #3	20.5	19.5	20.4	19.8	20.3
Lee County	13.7	14.8	14.0	15.7	14.6

Source: S.C. Department of Education

According to ACT, Inc.'s "National Score Report for 2004", the South Carolina overall average scores are below those that indicate adequate preparation for typical entry-level college courses. The Report states that the typical cut-off score needed for a student to have at least a fifty percent (50%) chance of receiving a "B" in entry level English Composition = 18, College Algebra = 22, and entry level Biology = 24. Students who do not meet the college ready benchmark scores shown above "are less likely to stay in school and earn their degrees" according to the ACT's "National Score Report".

Again, the ACT scores for the predominately minority, economically challenged, students of Lee and Clarendon #1 School District limit the likelihood of these seniors to meet college admission standards.

The last South Carolina evaluation criterion we will examine is: South Carolina Advanced Placement (AP) Program passage rates will be at or above the national average.

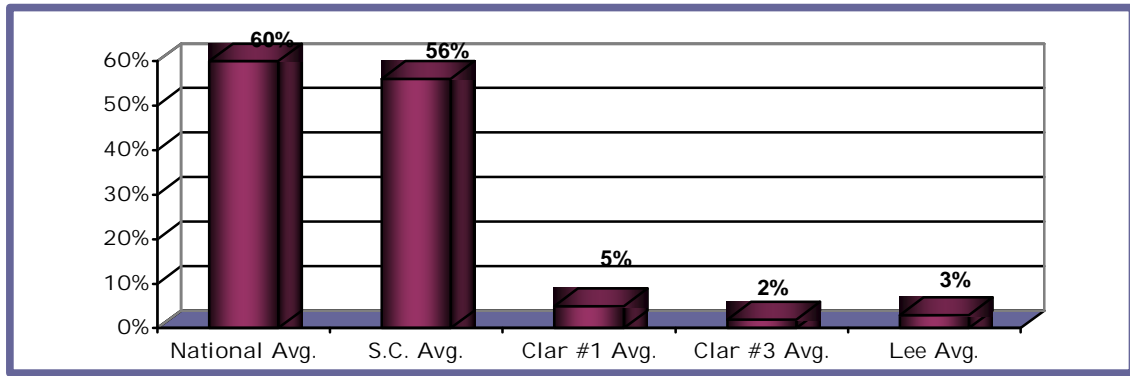
Only students who take Advanced Placement courses are eligible to take AP examinations. South Carolina School Districts have been required to provide a two-year program of Advanced Placement courses in all high schools since 1984. By 2005 there were a total of thirty-four (34) examination areas for the AP. Students who score 3, 4, or 5 on one or more of these exams are generally considered qualified to receive credit

SANTEE-LYNCHES EDUCATIONAL SERIES

for the equivalent course(s) at colleges and universities that give credit for AP Examinations.

A total of 53 students from the three School Districts took the Advanced Placement examinations in 2005. Each student took one test, but no student scored 3 or above. To examine these high school Advanced Placement programs we must take a longer view at the AP test results of the School Districts.

Percent of the Total AP Tests with a Score of 3 or Above (2000 – 2005)



Source: S.C. Department of Education

The low percentage of tests with a score of three or above in these three School Districts is due primarily to the limited scope of their Advanced Placement programs. The relatively small number of students in these School District's AP Programs and the lack of sufficient fiscal resources to build an expanded college level course curriculum severely limits the ability of these small rural School Districts to provide a competitive Advanced Placement program. With an increased allocation of funds and the development of programs based on local models in the region that attract a larger number of students, these rural high schools can establish an expanded college level course curriculum. This investment will expand the opportunities of rural students to attend and compete in post-secondary education.

Finally, the Education Accountability Act of 1998 mandated that every School District and school in the State receive a Report Card for use in decision-making and program evaluation. There were two ratings for these Report Cards:

1. Absolute Rating – The academic achievement of the students in the year of the Report Card measured against the State's 2010 goal.
2. Improvement Rating – The progress of student's achievement scores from one year to the next.

Both of these ratings are important. The Absolute Rating determines how well the District did in the Report Card year. The Improvement Rating tracks how the District is progressing to meet the South Carolina goal for 2010. The rating system is designed to increase in difficulty over time until the goal date of 2010 is reached. There are five scores for each of the two rating categories: Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average, and Unsatisfactory. The ratings were begun in 2001.

SANTEE-LYNCHES EDUCATIONAL SERIES

School Districts' Absolute and Improvement Ratings 2002 - 2005

District	Rating	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Clarendon #1	Absolute	B. Avg.	B. Avg.	B. Avg.	B. Avg.	B. Avg.
	Improvement	Avg.	B. Avg.	Good	B. Avg.	B. Avg.
Clarendon #3	Absolute	Avg.	Avg.	Avg.	Avg.	Avg.
	Improvement	Avg.	Unsat.	Unsat.	Avg.	B. Avg.
Lee Consolidated	Absolute	Unsat.	B. Avg.	Unsat.	B. Avg.	Unsat.
	Improvement	B. Avg.	Avg.	Unsat.	Avg.	Unsat.

Source: S.C. Department of Education, Report Cards 2001-2005

While none of the three School Districts did well on the Improvement Rating in 2005, neither of the two predominately minority and poorer School Districts ever reached an Average yearly rating over the history of the Report Card system. The inability of these two School Districts to meet an Average level of yearly performance reflects the current limitations faced by these types of small rural School Districts.

In several education areas, South Carolina is rated below and sometimes well below the national standard. Since the enactment of the Education Accountability Act of 1998, the State has made significant strides in addressing several of these Below Average areas. While the State still faces formidable barriers in reaching its education goal by 2010, there has been sustained improvement in many of the evaluation points tracked by the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee. The vast majority of these improved education results are based on the achievements of the more urbanized and suburban School Districts. The rural School Districts, especially the small, poorer, and minority dominated Districts are still struggling with their historic economic and cultural barriers.

Throughout this report, both Lee and Clarendon #1 School Districts' educational results have trailed the more diverse and less poverty-stricken Clarendon #3. These two aspects of the student population have a definitive effect on educational outcomes of these two small rural School Districts. However, poverty and lack of diverse student population are not factors that can not be overcome, as can be attested to by several small rural districts in South Carolina. There is no "silver bullet" solution to the problems facing these two Districts and perhaps what worked for other Districts may not be the answer for Clarendon #1 and Lee School Districts. What is needed is an "attitudinal redirection" of the District's population. This "attitudinal redirection" must include students, their parents, teachers, school administrators, School Board members, business leaders, and taxpayers. This redirection is dependent on the shedding of old adversarial relationships and a unified district-wide demand for student excellence starting in pre-school and continuing through the K-12 education structure.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT

Business and industry require more educated (trainable) workers to operate in their more technological environment.

If rural counties are not able to provide this trainable workforce, their citizens can not compete for the higher paying jobs in the technologically innovative industries.

Without new industry, local governments will continue to face a decreasing tax base, thereby being unable to meet the needs of their citizens.