



## Proposed 2014 SCPTA Legislative Platform

### 1. Support State Funding of K-12 Education at the Levels required by State Law

#### **Rationale:**

SCPTA asks our state legislature to fully fund state laws that support public education: The Education Finance Act of 1977 and the 2007 law enacting a 15-year school bus replacement cycle.

#### Education Finance Act

The state Education Finance Act (EFA) passed by the legislature in 1977 established a per pupil amount of state funding for school districts. The amount, called the “base student cost” (BSC), was based on a 1975 model of what it would cost to provide an adequate education for a student. Under EFA for each subsequent year the base student cost amount increases based on the rate of inflation.

For most of the last decade the state has funded the base student cost far below the amount required under the Education Finance Act:

- The state has not fully funded the base student cost for the last six years (including this year).
- For the last five years it has been funded at less than 80%.
- This year’s funded base student cost of \$2,101 is 76% of what is required under the EFA and equals the amount required in 2002-03.
- Prior to 2002-03, the state never funded the base student cost at less than 90%. Since then the state has done so nine out of twelve years.

Source: Mike Shealy, Senate Finance Committee

The BSC is the primary source of funding to pay teachers. Recent funding levels have led to larger class sizes and 2 years of state waivers for “step” (additional year of experience) salary increases for teachers. Salaries are important for attracting, developing, and keeping a top-notch teaching force in place in each zip code. However, over the years from 2001-02 through 2011-12, the national buying power of teacher salaries has declined 2.8%\*

- S.C. teacher salaries are 86.5% of the national average (\$55,489).\*
- The average K-12 teacher salary in South Carolina is \$47,050\*
- S.C. ranks 38<sup>th</sup> in the nation for teacher salaries, or 12<sup>th</sup> from the bottom\*

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1826 Henderson Street  
Columbia, SC 29201

#### EDUCATING

Website: [www.scpta.org](http://www.scpta.org)  
Email: [office@scpta.org](mailto:office@scpta.org)

#### TRAINING

Office: (800)743-3PTA  
Fax: (803)765-0399



## 15-Year Bus Replacement Cycle

South Carolina is the only state that provides the buses for their school districts. A law passed by the state legislature in 2007 calls for a 15-year bus replacement cycle: Approximately one-fifteenth of the school bus fleet is to be replaced each year with new school buses resulting in a complete replacement of the fleet every fifteen years

(South Carolina Code of Laws, Section 59-67-580(A)).

The state is not meeting the requirements of this law:

- The last year the state appropriated funding to meet the 15-year replacement cycle was in 2008.
- In 2010 the state purchased 130 used school buses averaging 18 years old from Kentucky and other states. Money to purchase these buses came from the sale of junked buses for scrap metal.
- For 2012-13, the state provided \$12.7 million for the purchase of new school buses. This is about one-third of the annual amount needed to meet the requirements of the 2007 law.
- In December 2012, the state used funding from two fiscal years and scrap metal sales to replace 7% of school buses in the state—enough to replace those buses over 25 years old.

In 2012-13 Greenville County Schools is operating 341 school buses transporting 24,800 students (35% of all students) on a daily basis. Even with the upcoming arrival of 39 buses from the state, nearly 50% of the buses on the road will be over 15 years old including a large number over 20 years old. During the 2011-12 school year, there was an average of 4 bus breakdowns or failures to start per school day.

Source: “Historical Analyses, S.C. Budget and Control Board.

## 2. Oppose Tuition Tax Credit Legislation

### **Rationale:**

SCPTA opposes any legislation that provides government subsidies for attending K-12 private schools or home schooling. This includes tuition tax credits, tuition tax deductions and school vouchers.

Since 2005, tuition tax credit/school voucher legislation has been an agenda item in our state legislature. Every year the proposed legislation has been different. Despite several votes, no tax credit bill has become law. Last year, for the first time, a tax credit plan passed the House. However, the bill was never taken up by the full Senate. It is expected that tuition tax credit legislation will be introduced again.

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As required by law, the State Board of Economic Advisors conducts a fiscal impact analysis for every bill with an impact on state finances. Every tuition tax credit proposal in our state legislature has been projected to result in a net reduction in revenue for the State General Fund. Last year's bill was projected to reduce General Fund revenue by \$37 million. Previous proposed tax credit bills were estimated to reduce revenue by over \$100 million.

A primary reason for the net reduction in revenue is that the primary beneficiaries of these bills are families with children already in private schools. The amount of tax credits or deductions provided to these families is a direct loss in General Fund revenue. Another reason is that the number of children leaving public schools would be small for any one school or district. It would likely not decrease a school's or a district's fixed costs (administrators, building maintenance, etc.) and in many cases not reduce the number of teachers. Thus offsetting savings would be small.

A reduction in revenue to the state General Fund reduces the amount of state funding available for the base student cost, school bus replacement and other funding for public education. As outlined in position #1, for many years the state has not fully funded state laws that finance public education.

Reasons for opposing tuition tax credit legislation:

- **Unaffordable.** As stated in position #1, our state cannot fully fund public education as set forth in state laws. From fiscal analyses of proposed legislation in South Carolina and actual experience in other states, tuition tax credit programs reduce state revenue. In the case of our state, the revenue loss is to the state General Fund, which reduces funding available for public education. The base student cost is funded out of the General Fund. Full funding of the 15-year bus replacement cycle has required money from the General Fund.
- **Unaccountable.** Schools making use of tax credits would not have to provide the same level of accountability as public schools including charter schools. There would be no common way for parents and taxpayers to compare the performance of children using tax credits and those in public schools.
- **Inadequate for low-income students.** Tuition tax credit "scholarships" may not pay the entire cost of tuition, do not ensure transportation to school and do not require private schools to accept those who apply. The non-profit organizations receiving tax-credit donations are free to provide "scholarships" in whatever geographic area they want and for whatever schools they want. There is no requirement that children in the lowest-income areas of the state are served.
- **Choice is already available through Charter Schools.** Charter schools can be established anywhere in the state to provide choices outside of the regular school system. School districts cannot control the establishment of charter schools. The State Charter School System and public and private institutions of higher education can sponsor the establishment of charter schools. Charter schools must meet the same academic accountability standards as regular public schools.

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- Primarily serves those already attending private schools. Research shows that the primary beneficiaries of tuition tax credit laws are families with children already in private schools or who have already decided to send their children to private schools.
- No gain in academic achievement. Research on the impact of tuition tax credits and school vouchers is mixed with most peer-reviewed research showing no gain in academic achievement. Despite 20 years of school vouchers in Milwaukee, the consensus of research shows no academic improvement.
- An opportunity for corporate lobbyists to gain influence. Tuition tax credits offer a way for corporations to gain access to legislators. Corporate donations to one or more of a lawmaker’s favored scholarship granting organizations provide a method for corporations to gain favored treatment by a legislator. In Pennsylvania there are instances of scholarship organizations asking lawmakers to help decide which schools benefit from the scholarship dollars.

### 3. Oppose Concealed Weapons in Public Schools Except for Trained Law Enforcement Officials

#### **Rationale:**

SCPTA opposes any legislation that allows the carrying of concealed weapons by school employees in our public schools.

Last year, legislation was introduced in the House and the Senate that would allow school employees to carry concealed weapons in public schools. The Chief of the South Carolina State Law Enforcement Division opposes this idea. Better methods of increasing school safety include improved and additional building security features, more secure entrance and exit procedures and increased utilization of law enforcement professionals, such as trained School Resource Officers, on and around school grounds.

### 4. Oppose an A through F Rating System for Teachers and Principals

#### **Rationale:**

SCPTA opposes a statewide teacher and principal rating system that uses A through F performance levels.

Under the ESEA waiver requirements, South Carolina has to modify the state method of teacher and principal evaluations. The U.S. Dept. of Education requires that the state use evaluation systems that include these elements:

- Three or more performance levels
- Student growth as a “significant” component

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- Provides clear and timely feedback to teachers
- Informs personnel decisions

In response, the State Dept. of Education issued its proposed evaluation plan for teachers and principals in June of 2012. It is currently being beta tested in certain schools in the state. 2013-14 will be a “pilot” year with full implementation in 2014-15. The proposal is expected to be modified between now and full implementation.

While there are several areas of concern regarding the proposed evaluation plan, one of the elements clearly unacceptable is the proposed evaluation of teachers and principals on an A through F scale. Teachers and principals are highly-trained professionals. No professionals in other occupations or businesses are subjected to such a system. A-to-F ratings are demeaning and demoralizing and could be expected to negatively impact both the recruitment and retention of educators in our state. In reviewing the evaluation proposal, members of The State Board of Education have come out in opposition to this rating system.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Joy Grayson,  
SCPTA Vice President of Legislation and Legislative and Resolutions Chair

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