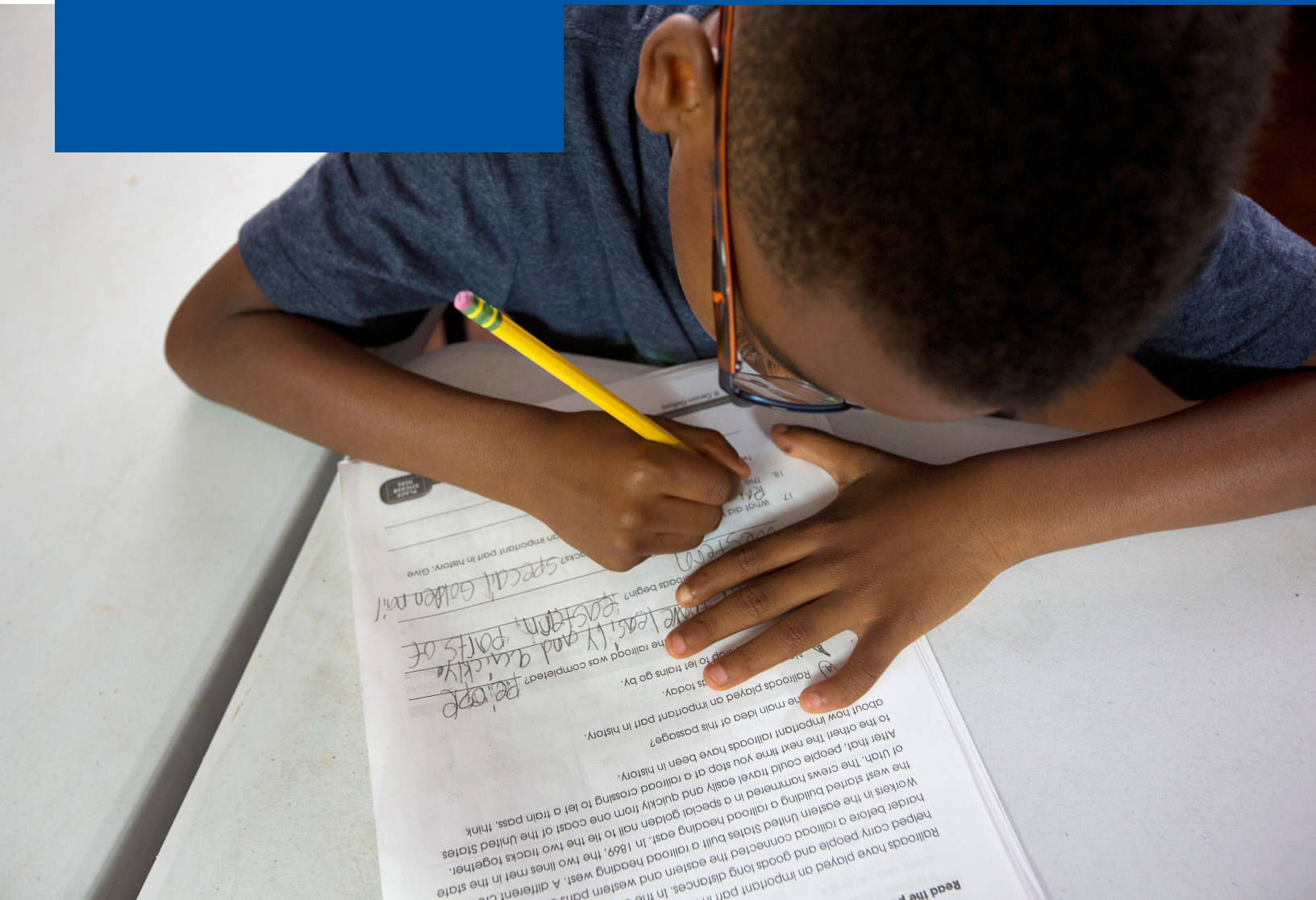


Schools of Innovation

A policy model for equitable education for South Carolina students



Coastal
Community
Foundation
OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Introduction

The Post and Courier's 2018 series, *Minimally Adequate*, sounded an alarm and shined a spotlight on the dire situation that confront many students and communities in South Carolina. Since its publication, our state has been dealing with education reform as a means to resolve the issues identified in the article. This White Paper seeks to propose a solution to one of the many issues identified: The creation of high-quality, dynamic, and innovative schools for children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds and communities. This work provides evidence-based solutions based on a single premise: all students are capable of learning; it is the environment in which they learn, the educators that teach them, and the parents and communities that support them, that must be willing to change and adapt.

Indiana's state policy on Innovation Network Schools provides a model for success in South Carolina and other states with the goal of creating innovative schools. A set of legislative policies adopted in 2014 gave Indianapolis Public Schools the authority to create Innovation Network Schools by entering into a contract with a school management team responsible for transforming persistently underperforming schools¹. In 2015² and again in 2016³, Indiana's State Legislature passed legislation that now provides the context for 16 Innovation Network Schools to thrive in the City of Indianapolis. According to the Indianapolis Business Journal⁴, the 2014 legislation resulted from the lobbying efforts of Indiana Public Schools (IPS) alongside former Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard and The Mind Trust, an influential education-reform advocacy group. At the time, the district was facing state-takeover for their lowest performing schools. In response, the superintendent pushed for legislation allowing the district to maintain local control. When compared to historical outcomes of state takeovers, the Innovation Schools legislation proved to be a successful strategy in improving academic outcomes in low-performing schools.

Since the bill was enacted, Indiana schools have explored and implemented several models of innovation. With approval control over the selection process, IPS has been successful in restarting an existing underperforming school, converting an existing high-performing school, launching novel innovation

¹ Indiana P.L. 1321 - 2014

² P.L. 1009 – 2015

³ H.E.A 1394 – 2016

⁴ [Indianapolis Business Journal, "Seven Lessons from IPS innovation schools."](#)

schools and launching an innovation charter school. Their legislative partners have continued to support the creation and sustainability of these innovative schools. The Mind Trust, in conjunction with IPS, developed an innovation school fellowship program to kickstart the innovation network. The fellowship, completely funded through philanthropy, allows each innovative school to receive dedicated recruitment and talent investment. The program fellows receive one- or two year salaries up to \$100,000 per year, health care and benefits—and all resources and expertise necessary to incubate and plan out a school. The biggest gift of this incubation period is simply the time to design and build the school effectively. Additionally, The Mind Trust has been instrumental in funding positions within the district related to innovation and transformation. Once the schools are up and running, they continue to be funded by public dollars. The School Board and District have a responsibility to monitor progress and ensure state policies are followed.

While Indianapolis Innovation Network Schools are thriving, there are successful examples in the South as well. New Schools Baton Rouge in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and New Schools New Orleans both provide adequate information and insight into the success of this model for turning around failing schools and educating all children. Based on the success in Indiana and Louisiana, Coastal Community Foundation believes a system for Innovation Schools, based on the Indiana model, is a viable option for South Carolina students.

South Carolina Public Education

The State of South Carolina is quickly becoming one of the most significant economic drivers in the Southeastern United States⁵. The State's manufacturing, medical, biomedical research and technology industries create opportunities for South Carolina residents to flourish. But, while the state has successfully recruited many major businesses in these fields to our communities, it has done a minimally adequate job of equipping South Carolina workers with the education and skillsets required for the knowledge-based jobs that emerge. South Carolina is not producing enough qualified workers with the basic skills to be successful in a modern, more technologically sophisticated workplace⁶. The Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce's 2018 Tri-County Talent Demand Study found that industries will require hundreds more positions beyond

⁵ Site SC's economic development rankings among Southeastern US cities.

⁶ SC MAP, ACT, and SAT scores for the most recent year compared to the National Average.

the number of local graduates qualified to fill the roles⁷. In fact, less than 40% of graduates from South Carolina schools are ready to enter college or the workforce at the time of graduation. This skills gap creates a problem for both the employer and job seeker. Companies that might prefer to recruit local workers are forced to seek talent from outside the state because many of South Carolina's workers are ill prepared to compete for the jobs offering the most attractive wages, benefits and growth opportunities in their communities. They are then left to work in jobs that, while important, often do not provide those opportunities.

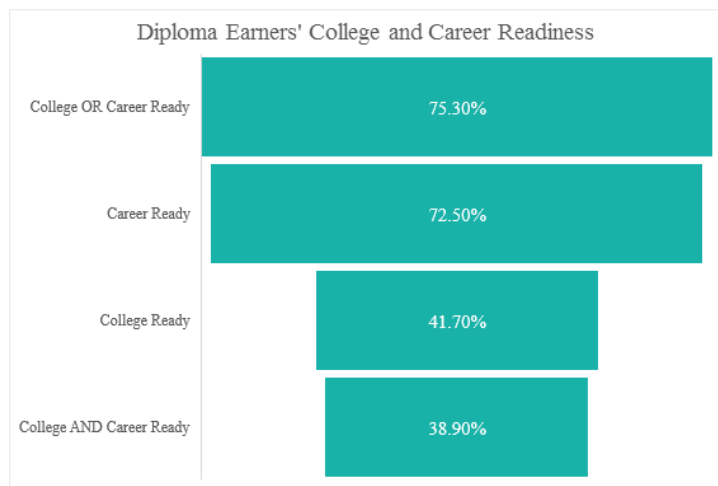


Figure 1: Percentage of students meeting college and career readiness levels at the completion of high school. Most students lack the flexibility to either enter the workforce or to attend college. Most graduates are forced to choose one option or the other at the completion of high school.

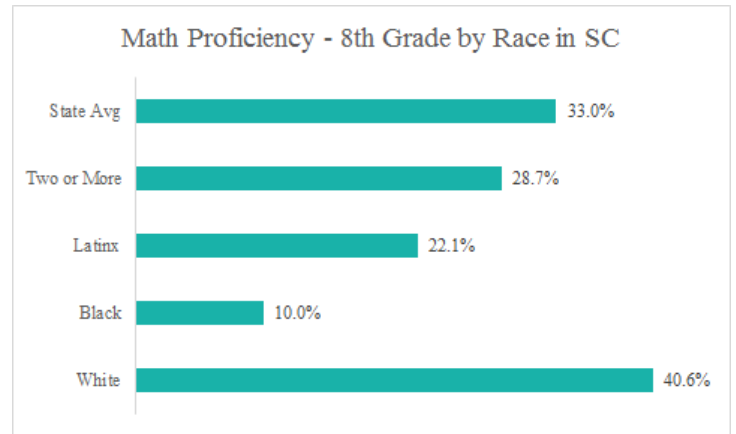
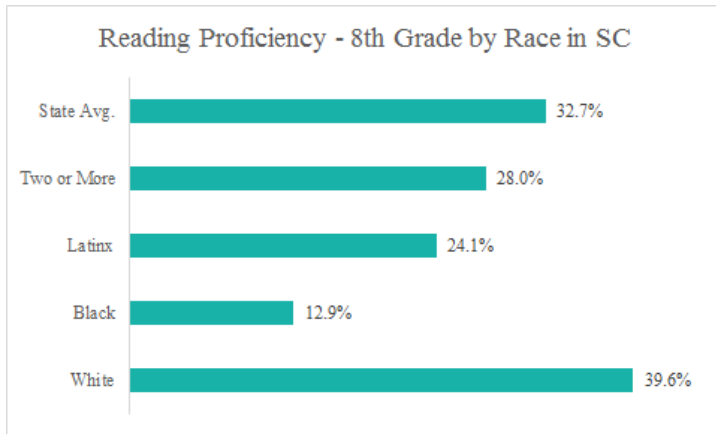
The challenge is that South Carolina's K-12 public educational system doesn't work for all students in our state. When reviewing college readiness data (see Figure 1), graduation rates (see Figure 3), and college persistence at 2- and 4-year public institutions⁹ in SC, the issue is clear. Underserved children of color, especially those living in rural and/or impoverished settings, are less prepared for success than middle-class counterparts of all races and location¹⁰.

⁷2018 Tri-County Talent Demand Study: https://www.charlestonchamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Talent-Demand-Study-2018_final.pdf

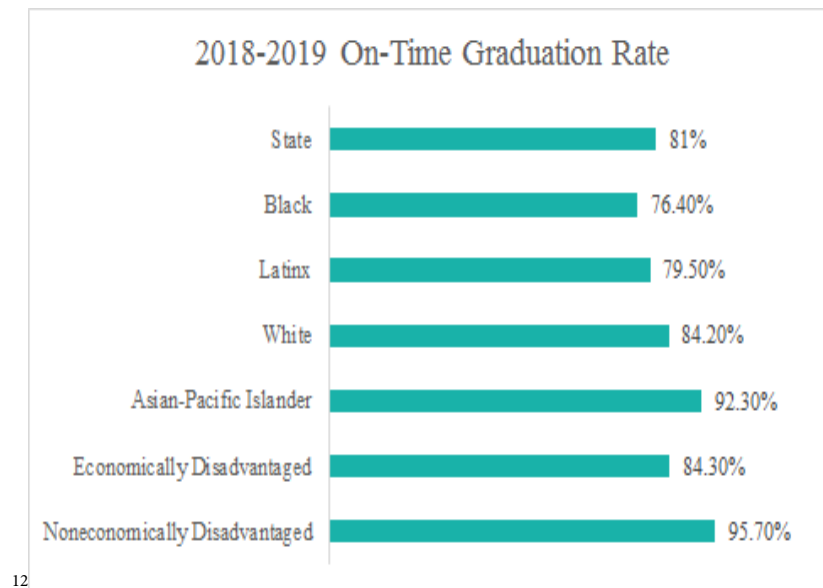
⁸College and Career Readiness Source: <https://www.screportcards.com/overview/academics/college-career-readiness/?q=eToyMDE5JnQ9UyZzaWQ9MDAwMA>

⁹ 2-year college persistence data at technical and 4-year universities in SC

¹⁰ Performance data



¹¹ Figures 2 and 3: Percent of students meeting subject proficiency as measured by annual standardized assessments. Students of color perform disproportionately worse than white students across the state.



¹² Figure 3: South Carolina high school graduation rates by ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students have lower on-time graduation rates when compared to their peers.

¹¹ Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

¹² Source: <https://www.screportcards.com/overview/academics/graduation-rate/details/?q=eToyMDE5JnQ9UyZzaWQ9MDAwMA>

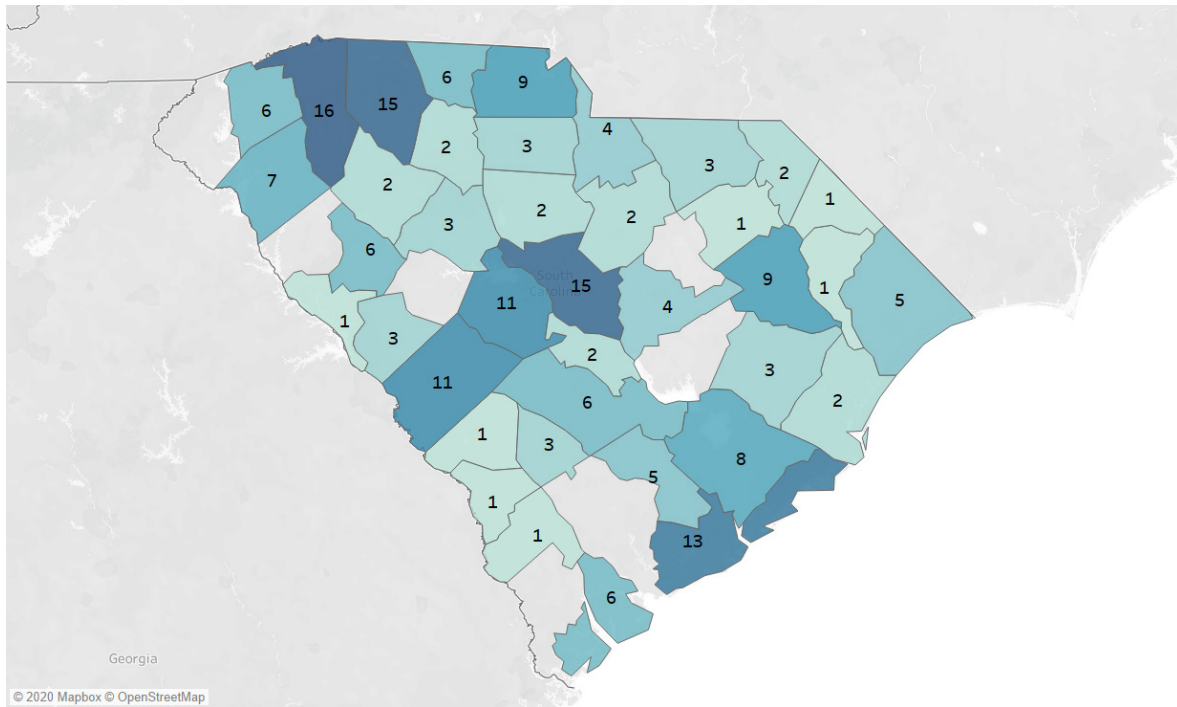


Figure 4: The number of underperforming schools in each county. Schools that underperform persistently are prime environments for innovation to take place. Nearly every county has an opportunity to engage an innovative school partnership.

A Viable Solution

The State of Indiana has created a blueprint for solving some of South Carolina’s challenges in educating its most economically challenged children: Innovation Network Schools (INS). INS schools are specifically designed to give school administrators the flexibility and autonomies necessary to educate children in communities with very complex social challenges. Under Indiana state statute, Innovation Network Schools operating with a charter are called Innovation Network Charter Schools, and Innovation Network Schools operating without a charter are referred to as Innovation Network Schools. In practice, all of these schools are called Innovation Network Schools.”¹⁴ Innovation Network Schools legally have “full operational autonomy”. This autonomy is guaranteed by state statute and provides several important features:

¹³ Source: <https://ed.sc.gov/districts-schools/school-improvement/school-improvement-programs/tsi/>

¹⁴ INS Law Summary

- Schools exist outside of the district’s existing collective bargaining agreement.
- Employees of the Innovation Network School are employees of the school management team’s organization, not employees of the district.
- Enrollment and performance data for Innovation Network Schools are counted as part of the district’s overall performance profile.
- The Innovation Network School management team receives access to a district school building and all accompanying real property, and can contract with the district to provide services, such as transportation, maintenance, special education, or other services, either for free or at the district’s cost.

In Indiana, the IPS school district is taking advantage of this policy. They have chosen to exercise the following requirements in order to execute the INS policy.

- The IPS Board has set a policy to only enter Innovation Network School partnerships with non-profit operators. The Board can in fact enter partnerships with any school management team under state statute.
- The nonprofit operators can either hold a charter from an independent authorizer or they can enter a contract with the district to operate the school.

Advantages and accountabilities of this Model: There are several advantages to this model as outlined in Attachment 1: Indianapolis Public Schools Innovation Network Schools including:

- Three types of Innovation Network Schools: New, Restart, and Conversion.
- Major autonomies that allow for innovation: choose and design curriculum, set school start/stop times, and staff hiring, and budgeting to name a few.
- These schools must also abide by all local, state and federal labor laws; receive funds according to district student-based budgeting model; receive funds according to enrollment with district as “pass through” entity; and form a nonprofit and establish a local board to oversee the operations of the school

Application for South Carolina

Given that South Carolina already has many of the key ingredients for such a policy, it is important to build on the current infrastructure by strengthening the current Schools of Choice Proviso and transforming it

into law using the INS as a model. In South Carolina, the following additional measures should be considered for adopting its own Innovation Network Schools policy. Schools that are identified as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) Schools are ideally situated to be targeted for innovation.

Building on the INS, a South Carolina policy could include:

- **Mandatory Community Engagement:**
 - Require School Districts conduct mandatory community meetings detailing the status of the failing school and describe the three courses of action for an INS:
 - Stakeholders should be engaged the first year a school is identified as a CSI to understand current student performance level and review strategies (a three-year plan with targeted outcomes) designed to produce improvement.
 - Require School Districts who decide to pursue an INS to engage community stakeholders (parents, faith-community, business community, parents, faculty, students and administrators) in determining the type of school that will best serve students in that community.
 - Require that a third-party convener facilitate the community engagement process and that that process creates the qualifications for an effective Request for Proposal for school operation.
- A requirement that Schools of Innovation apply to schools that are “failing” (the bottom 5% of schools in the state with a standard quality indicator such as “Two-thirds of the students perform one or more years below expected grade level in reading or math.”) or identified as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools by the State Department of Education for three consecutive years.
- Incentives for Innovation Network Schools to hire and support existing teachers in the school, through a requirement that an INS retain a minimum third (ideally two-thirds) of the teaching faculty of the school and provide professional development and training in the operators’ method of operation in order for those teachers to be successful in the new school.
- Unlike Indiana, South Carolina Innovation Network Schools would not provide incentive or a path for creating a charter school, as existing state law allows for districts to establish charter schools. Rather, local school districts would have three viable options to turnaround a school:

New school creation, restarting a school, or converting a CSI school with the autonomies and requirements set forth above.

Arguments from charter, anti-charter, and public-school only groups do very little to improve the overall success of children who most desperately need access to the highest quality educational options. That is because we have focused energy on a limited number of options. Coastal Community Foundation believes that the dialogue has too often fallen into opposing sides, while students and families are left in the void. We believe in more choices, real autonomy for educators with a track record, and authentic buy-in and ownership in local school options is the best-case scenario for meeting the growing demand for a skilled workforce and the moral demand for quality education.

Elected officials, school district boards, superintendents, teachers and parents are very aware that our current approach to educational funding, innovation, and delivery fall well short of the ideal for students in our great State and especially our most economically challenged students.

Innovation Network Schools as outlined above do, however, provide us a viable set of options that can be tailored and customized based on local community context, leadership, and needs. Our state and nation have felt the massive disruptions to learning that came with emergency efforts to close schools and limit spread of COVID-19. Students who are behind academically have only fallen further behind, and it exposed the massive challenges to providing accessible learning for all students, regardless of race, family income or resources. As we collectively envision our new reality, we should embrace out-of-the-box thinking about the policies our educators need to transform outcomes. We should embrace the many new approaches we have seen across the country, and the Innovation Network Schools would be a core pillar of the systemic changes we all expect. Our students, families, educators, and elected leaders know what is possible – let's accelerate the progress by fostering new ideas and big goals, and giving every superintendent in South Carolina these three critical tools in their toolbox.