

K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



South Carolina Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.



Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in South Carolina.

This guide profiles **South Carolina's** education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN SOUTH CAROLINA

South Carolina educates roughly 760,000 public K–12 students across about 79 school districts — largely county-based (the state has consolidated smaller districts over time), with enrollment concentrated in the Greenville, Charleston, and Columbia metros. Public education is overseen by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE)...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- ✓ **Start age** — 5 (by September 1)
- ✓ **End of compulsory age** — 17
- ✓ **Districts** — ~79, largely county-based
- ✓ **Satisfying it** — Public, private, or home school

PRE-K IN SOUTH CAROLINA

South Carolina does not offer a universal pre-K program. Its state-funded full-day 4K (the Child Early Reading Development and Education Program, delivered through First Steps 4K and public schools) provides free preschool for at-risk and income-eligible 4-year-olds , and has expanded to more counties over time — alongside Head Start and...



AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	Ages 5–17
Districts	~79
Testing	SC READY
Diploma	24 units
Choice	ESA (lottery)

DISTRICTS & CHARTERS

South Carolina's largest districts include Greenville County (the state's largest), Charleston County , Horry County (Myrtle Beach), Berkeley County , and Richland districts (Columbia). South Carolina has a substantial charter-school sector , notable for its statewide authorizers — the South Carolina Public Charter School District and...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

- ✓ **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed schools such as Porter-Gaud School and Ashley Hall (Charleston), Hammond School and Heathwood Hall (Columbia), and Christ...
- ✓ **Catholic & parochial schools** — Diocese of Charleston schools (such as Bishop England and Cardinal Newman)
- ✓ **Other religious & Christian schools** — A large network of Christian and faith-based schools
- ✓ **Specialty schools** — Montessori and schools for specific learning needs

READ SOUTH CAROLINA'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

South Carolina uses SC READY (ELA and math, grades 3–8), SCPASS (science), and the EOCEP (End-of-Course Examination Program) in high school. Run by the South Carolina Department of Education. There's no separate exit exam — EOCEP results count toward the course grade .

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

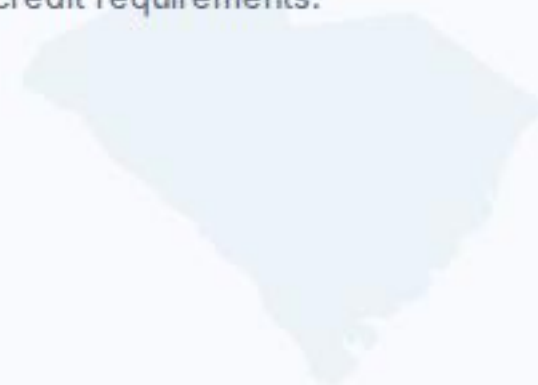
- ✓ **SC READY (grades 3–8)** — English language arts and mathematics
- ✓ **SCPASS (Science)** — Science in grades 4, 6, and 8
- ✓ **EOCEP (high school)** — End-of-course exams in English 2, Algebra 1, Biology 1, and U.S. History
- ✓ **SC-Alt** — Alternate assessment for eligible students; South Carolina also gives a college-readiness test (SAT/ACT/WorkKeys menu) in high school

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

SC READY, SCPASS, and EOCEP are online , with varied item types. EOCEP tests are subject end-of-course exams.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

No exit-exam gate. Students don't need to pass a state test to graduate; each EOCEP counts as 20% of the final grade in that course, so it affects the course grade and credit. Districts set course and credit requirements.



AT A GLANCE

Grades 3–8	SC READY (ELA & Math)
Science	SCPASS gr 4, 6, 8
High school	EOCEP
EOC weight	20% of course grade
Grad requirement?	No exit-exam gate
Format	Online

HOW IT'S SCORED

SC READY and SCPASS report performance levels (e.g., Does Not Meet, Approaches, Meets, Exceeds). EOCEP scores convert into the 20% course-grade contribution.

TESTING WINDOWS

SC READY and SCPASS are given in a spring window ; EOCEP runs in fall, spring, and summer windows tied to courses.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Practice materials** — SCDE provides practice items matching the online format
- ✓ **Course-aligned review** — EOCEP tests the specific course

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades and courses participate. Ask your district about make-up windows.

READ SOUTH CAROLINA'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

South Carolina requires 24 units with no exit exam . End-of-course (EOCEP) tests count as 20% of the final course grade , not as a separate graduation gate.

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

South Carolina's 24 units include 4 English, 4 math, 3 science, 1 U.S. history, 0.5 economics, 0.5 government, 1 other social studies, 1 PE/ROTC, 1 computer science, 1 world language or CTE, and electives.

TESTING TO GRADUATE

No exit exam. Students take EOCEP end-of-course tests (Algebra I, English II, Biology, U.S. History), and each counts as 20% of the course grade — there is no separate test to pass to graduate.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

South Carolina issues a standard diploma, with the State Seal of Biliteracy and a College- and Career-Ready designation available. Strong records support Palmetto Fellows/LIFE eligibility (see SC financial aid).

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Dual enrollment, AP/IB, and CTE offer accelerated pathways; credit recovery helps students who fall behind.



AT A GLANCE

Units	24
Exit exam?	No
EOC tests	Count 20% of course grade
Diplomas	Standard + Seal options
Confirm with	Your district

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How many credits does South Carolina require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- ✓ **Does South Carolina require a test to graduate?** — No — South Carolina has no exit exam; EOC scores count as 20% of the course grade.
- ✓ **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- ✓ **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ SOUTH CAROLINA'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

South Carolina gives each school an overall rating using descriptive levels (not letter grades or stars) on the SC School Report Card .

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

The overall rating is one of five: Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average, or Unsatisfactory . It's based on ESSA indicators — academic achievement, student progress (growth), graduation rate, English-learner progress, college/career readiness, and school climate . Read the indicator ratings alongside the overall label.

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- ✓ **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- ✓ **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- ✓ **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- ✓ **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- ✓ **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on the SC School Report Card (screportcards.com) . Review the indicator ratings (especially student progress) and the trend, not just the overall label.



AT A GLANCE

Format	Descriptive ratings (5 levels)
Ratings	Excellent, Good, Average, Below...
Tool	SC School Report Card
Look up at	screportcards.com

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- ✓ **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- ✓ **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- ✓ **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- ✓ **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- ✓ **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How does South Carolina rate schools?** — South Carolina uses five descriptive overall ratings (Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average, Unsatisfactory).
- ✓ **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- ✓ **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- ✓ **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- ✓ **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ SOUTH CAROLINA'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



School Choice

AT A GLANCE

South Carolina created the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) , an Education Savings Account (ESA) program. The state's highest court struck down part of the original program in 2024, and lawmakers revised and re-enacted it in 2025. Because of that history, confirm the current status carefully. South Carolina also has a public...

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

The ESTF (ESA) provides eligible families an account for approved education expenses. After a 2024 court ruling limited how funds could be used for private tuition, the legislature restructured the program in 2025. The exact rules, amounts, and eligibility have changed — confirm the current program details.

ELIGIBILITY

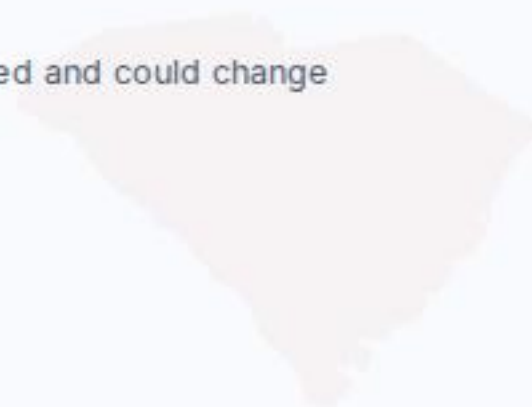
The revised program has its own (often income-related) eligibility rules and a funding cap. Because it was recently restructured, confirm current-year eligibility and amounts.

APPLYING

Apply through the South Carolina Department of Education's ESTF program. Confirm the current rules and window, given the recent changes.

LEGAL & LEGISLATIVE STATUS

The program was struck down in part (2024) and revised (2025) . Its details have changed and could change again — confirm the current status before relying on it.



AT A GLANCE

Program	Education Scholarship Trust Fund...
History	Struck down 2024; revised 2025
Note	Confirm current status closely
Plus	Public charters
Confirm with	The state program

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- ✓ **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- ✓ **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- ✓ **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- ✓ **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **Does South Carolina have a private-school-choice program?** — Yes (revised) — South Carolina's ESA was struck down in 2024 and re-enacted in revised form in 2025 — confirm current status.
- ✓ **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- ✓ **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- ✓ **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ SOUTH CAROLINA'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

South Carolina certifies teachers through the South Carolina Department of Education . You complete an approved program, pass the required Praxis exams, and earn an Initial Certificate , later a Professional Certificate .

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- ✓ **Praxis Core** — Basic skills — or satisfied with qualifying SAT/ACT/GRE scores
- ✓ **Praxis Subject Assessments** — Content test(s) for your certification area
- ✓ **Praxis PLT** — Principles of Learning and Teaching (pedagogy) for your grade band
- ✓ **Reading** — A reading-instruction requirement applies for elementary/early-childhood candidates

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- ✓ **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- ✓ **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- ✓ **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- ✓ **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- ✓ **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- ✓ **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency



AT A GLANCE

Agency	South Carolina Department of Edu...
Content & pedagogy	Praxis Subject + PLT
Basic skills	Praxis Core (or qualifying score...
Certificate	Initial — then Professional

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In South Carolina, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- ✓ **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- ✓ **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- ✓ **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with South Carolinas agency and your current state

READ SOUTH CAROLINA'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
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Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

South Carolina funds several merit scholarships from state lottery revenue, administered with the SC Commission on Higher Education (CHE) , plus need-based grants.

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- ✓ **SC Need-Based Grant** — Need-based aid for South Carolina residents at eligible in-state colleges.
- ✓ **Lottery Tuition Assistance** — Helps cover tuition at South Carolina's two-year and technical colleges.
- ✓ **SC Tuition Grant** — Need-based aid for students at eligible private, nonprofit SC colleges.

MERIT & LOTTERY SCHOLARSHIPS

- ✓ **Palmetto Fellows Scholarship** — The state's top merit award for high-achieving graduates (highest GPA/test requirements).
- ✓ **LIFE Scholarship** — A merit scholarship for students meeting GPA/test/coursework criteria at eligible SC colleges.
- ✓ **HOPE Scholarship** — A first-year merit award for students who don't qualify for LIFE or Palmetto Fellows.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

South Carolina's Future Scholar 529 plan offers a state tax deduction (SC allows a full deduction for contributions).



AT A GLANCE

Top merit	Palmetto Fellows Scholarship
Merit	LIFE & HOPE Scholarships
Need-based	SC Need-Based Grant
Two-year	Lottery Tuition Assistance
529 plan	Future Scholar
Agency	SC CHE

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- ✓ **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- ✓ **Register with South Carolina Commission on Higher Education** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- ✓ **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- ✓ **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- ✓ **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

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