

# EMPOWER

CHARTER HOME MAGNET PRIVATE TRADITIONAL VIRTUAL

# OPPORTUNITY



EDUCATION OPTIONS FOR SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILIES

EMPOWER  
OPPORTUNITY  
FOR SOUTH  
CAROLINA  
STUDENTS  
HOME  
CHARTER  
MAGNET  
PRIVATE  
TRADITIONAL  
VIRTUAL



EDUCATION OPTIONS FOR SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILIES



## A MESSAGE FROM U.S. SENATOR TIM SCOTT

Dear South Carolina Family,

For me, education is one of our most important manifestations of the American Dream. It is a fundamental force that allows Americans, regardless of background, the ability to improve their lives. It is part of what truly makes this the land of opportunity.

I believe in education and the American Dream because I have seen them work in my own life. As a kid growing up poor with a single mom in North Charleston I did not see many opportunities in my future. Early on, I gave up on myself. Education was a huge part of what turned my life around.

Education for me was a transformative force, and I believe that it has the ability to change the lives of all who are willing to invest their time and energy. Learning is an ongoing journey, not a destination. There is no one-size-fits-all program that will help every student reach his or her potential. I believe that a robust system of school choice is a vital part of the solution.

We have heard success stories from charter schools, online schools, home schools, technical schools, traditional schools, industry partnerships, and many other innovative ways of delivering high-quality education to kids from across South Carolina and the nation. Every student has a unique learning style and needs, so the best thing we can do is to put all of the options on the table. Parents have a right to homeschool their children, just as they have a right to choose the school that is best for their child. I truly believe that when a parent has a choice, a kid has a better chance.

I am proud to see South Carolina taking a leading role in doing such amazing things to ensure that every one of our children has the resources necessary to give him or her the very best chance to succeed. My hope is that this guide will be a resource for you as you seek to find the right fit, and to take advantage of all the resources that are available to your student.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim".

Tim Scott  
United States Senator



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## FROM THE EDITOR

### **EVERY CHILD DESERVES A HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION THAT EQUIPS THEM TO REACH THEIR FULL GOD-GIVEN POTENTIAL.**

But the reality is that far too many children in South Carolina are stuck in schools that simply aren't meeting their needs. And as a parent, finding the best place for your child can be a daunting – and at times frustrating – task.

That's why we put together *Empower Opportunity*.

In this catalog, you'll read the stories of real families just like yours who share their journey to find the perfect place for their child. You'll find helpful links to other resources to learn more about education options currently available in South Carolina.

You'll also learn about exciting ideas growing around the country that are delivering real results for students and unlocking new opportunities for success. While there is no silver bullet to fix every challenge our schools face, empowering parents to choose what's best for their child has been proven to deliver results time and again.

It's simply unfair to expect that every school can be everything to every child. And when a school fails at this impossible task, we rob our children of the bright future that they deserve. We can't afford to lose another generation of unrealized student potential.

Please take a minute to share this information with families you know. Knowledge is power, and working together, we can *Empower Opportunity* for students in every corner of the Palmetto State!

Together for Students,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen".

Ellen Weaver

President & CEO | Palmetto Promise Institute

P.S. – I hope you'll visit [MySCEducation.org](https://MySCEducation.org) to let us know if you found this resource helpful. We'd love to get your feedback and hear your stories for future editions. And while you're there, amplify your voice and become part of our "parent power" community. By signing up for our informative emails, you'll stay "in the know" on the latest developments in education options in the Palmetto State and learn about opportunities to make a difference for your family...and every SC student!

## EMPOWER OPPORTUNITY: CHARTER

### DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 30,000 South Carolina students are attending 68 public charter schools. That's over 100% growth since 2007-08.

# CHARTER SCHOOLS

### MEET THE LISINSKI FAMILY

For parents Chris and Tricia Lisinski, going the extra mile in the search of better educational options for their two children was worth the effort.

Their twins, Damian and Dante, are at the beginning of their educational journey, but Chris and Tricia have already had to face dealing with a poor classroom environment. Disappointed by the twins' old school, Chris and Tricia began to explore other options a few years ago. "We felt that their previous school did not meet the needs of the boys nor gave them the attention we believe they deserve," they explained.

But many of the other options available to them seemed to offer little better. "We noticed during our research of local schools that the older, larger elementary schools are more of a daycare or warehouse for the children. Numbers not results seem to drive them," Tricia observed.

A school where the equation "more students equal more funding" was king was not going to work. Chris and Tricia's hope was to find a school where Damian and Dante would be valued as individuals.

The Lisinski's found the perfect fit for the twins in Carolina Voyager Charter School (CVCS), a Charleston public charter school. The open, diverse, and parent-friendly school especially appealed to the family. As Tricia reflected, "The school staff was very helpful in making ALL of us feel welcome."

The twins have just begun their second year at CVCS as first graders and are thriving. "The boys now get the attention that they deserve," says Tricia happily. With its emphasis on meeting the individual needs of each child, CVCS has the full support of the Lisinski family.

"We are absolutely thrilled with our choice," says Tricia, "We have and will have to make sacrifices to keep the boys at the school, but find all of what we do well worth it!"

*The Lisinski's love the individual attention their boys receive at Carolina Voyager Charter School (CVCS).*

## FAST FACTS

Charter schools are unique public schools that are allowed the freedom to be more innovative in exchange for being held strictly accountable for advancing student achievement. They are publically funded, do not charge tuition and are open to ALL students.

Charters are structured to foster a close partnership between parents, teachers and students and seek to increase parent involvement, allow teacher innovation and create an environment tailored to the unique needs of individual students. This model has made them some of the top performing schools in the country.

In South Carolina, more than half of charter schools are sponsored by local districts, while the remaining schools are sponsored by the statewide South Carolina Public Charter School District or higher education institutes.



## WHAT TO DO

- To find a charter school in South Carolina, visit the South Carolina Department of Education's "School Directory" at <http://ed.sc.gov/schools/> and select "Charter Schools." The Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina is a non-profit group that provides support and advocates for high quality public charter schools. Find their map of public charter schools in South Carolina at <http://ow.ly/CnChu> or call (800) 691-7133. You can also find a list of charter schools authorized by the statewide South Carolina Public Charter School District at [www.sccharter.org](http://www.sccharter.org) (the "Our Schools" tab) or by calling (803) 734-8322.
- Compare schools on [www.greatschools.org](http://www.greatschools.org) or by comparing school report cards on the State Department of Education's page at <http://ow.ly/BiWGS>. All traditional, charter and virtual public schools will have report cards listed.
- Contact your public charter school. Some charter schools enroll children throughout the year, while others may have a waiting list. Call or visit your school of choice to find out more.
- Check with the school office to learn how to register. Some charter school enrollment periods begin as early as the fall prior to the school year in which you want to enroll your child.

## EMPOWER OPPORTUNITY: HOME

### DID YOU KNOW?

Approximately 23,000 students are home schooled in South Carolina.

# HOME SCHOOLS

## MEET THE WOOD FAMILY

7 children and 23 years later, Bill and Tammy Wood remain big believers in home schooling.

The Woods began “home schooling for convenience.” But soon after sending their second oldest daughter, Lucinda, to a private school for her 8th grade year, the Woods realized home schooling truly provided the best educational option for their family.

Speaking of Lucinda’s year at private school, Bill explains that “it was one of the most frustrating years. It was so constricting.” Lucinda swam competitively, and found that the private school lacked the flexibility for her busy competition schedule.

So the Woods decided to return to home schooling...and never looked back. “It’s been great,” Tammy says. “The time that Bill and I got to spend with our oldest daughters in high school was fabulous.”

After their two oldest daughters headed for college to become teachers, the Woods made the life-changing decision to adopt 5 more children. And they never doubted how to educate them: “Home schooling is what we do,” says Tammy.

For their new children, home schooling indeed provides the best option because of the individual attention Tammy can give each of them. “They had no English skills at all. Imagine putting them into an American middle school having only three months of English, and no understanding of Western culture. That would have been awful!” Home schooling allowed the Woods to “bond as a family,” and “better help the kids gain English skills.”

Home schooling provides other benefits for their family. Bill’s strenuous work schedule makes having family time difficult, but home schooling gives their family flexibility to work around his schedule. This has created a tight-knit family dynamic that they love.

Tammy also expresses that “home schooling has been a blessing to push each student to their full potential. It allows us to send everyone out successfully. It’s exciting to see them meet their potential!”

*Tammy Wood encourages parents not to be intimidated by the thought of home schooling and says she wouldn't trade the bonding time she spends with her children for anything.*

## FAST FACTS

Under South Carolina's home school law, children can learn at home and do not have to enroll full-time in a traditional school. Children may take online classes, use home-based instruction, or attend K-12 and even college classes in various settings.

There are many home school groups and resource centers around the state to help families find great opportunities for their children. South Carolina law provides parents with a choice of three (3) possible accountability options (see below).



## WHAT TO DO

- Choose the accountability option that is best for your family: local school district oversight, membership in the South Carolina Association of Independent Home Schools (SCAIHS), or participation in a local "third option" association. An explanation of the three options and a list of South Carolina home school associations is available from the SC Department of Education at <http://ow.ly/CnoVF> or Palmetto Family Council at [www.palmettofamily.org/homeschool](http://www.palmettofamily.org/homeschool).
- Get more information on teaching materials, local and national conferences and how to get started homeschooling in South Carolina by visiting the Home School Legal Defense Association's web site at [www.hsllda.org](http://www.hsllda.org) or by calling (520) 338-5600. More information is also available from the South Carolina Association of Independent Home Schools (SCAIHS) at [www.scaihs.org](http://www.scaihs.org) or (803) 454-0427. Visit the HSLDA "You Can Homeschool" page at <http://ow.ly/BiXRe> or the SCAIHS "Getting Started" page at <http://ow.ly/CnpSM>.
- Independently run homeschool "resource centers" and co-ops are located throughout the state. While no one website captures all of them, many are listed with the State Department of Education at <http://ow.ly/BiY2g>. A Google search of "homeschool resource centers in South Carolina" will also turn up many options across the state.

*South Carolina homeschool students are not required to take state tests unless the home school operates under district oversight (Option 1). Contact the South Carolina Home Educators Association or the Home School Legal Defense Association for more information.*

## EMPOWER OPPORTUNITY: **MAGNET**

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

There are 100 magnet schools in South Carolina serving nearly 75,000 students.

# MAGNET SCHOOLS

### **MEET THE WILLIAMS FAMILY**

"I think this just happened to be God's gift." That's what Karen Williams had to say about Spring Hill High School, a career pathways magnet school located in Chapin, SC.

After attending Irmo Middle, the Williams' oldest son, Tyler, now attends Spring Hill High School where he studies in the school's Entrepreneurial Academy, one of five career programs that are offered. The "Stallion Station" retail store and "Spring Bean" coffee shop are run by students in the Academy who develop the business plans, marketing, staffing and operations, and management of the stores as a very practical part of their larger education experience.

"Ever since he was little, Tyler always wanted to go somewhere different," Karen says. "He loves everything about Spring Hill." Tyler has good reason—Spring Hill provides him with the atmosphere that helps him succeed.

When asked if Tyler benefits academically from attending a magnet school, Karen responds with a resounding, "Absolutely! Tyler has always been a good student...but he does better in a smaller class environment, and getting to know the teachers, and having that one on one relationship with them. The teacher relationships are amazing."

The Williams chose the magnet school because it best fits Tyler's needs. "Spring Hill has truly adapted to help us. It feels like they're doing it just for you, but they're doing it for every child. They will accommodate your need," expresses Karen. Tyler plays basketball, participates in student government, and is president of the Entrepreneurial Academy.

"Tyler is very happy. He wants nothing to do with going back to his other school because he loves Spring Hill so much."

Tyler wants to be an attorney, and the Williams know what is necessary for him to accomplish his dream: "One of our goals is for him to go to college, and Spring Hill has given him the opportunity to see that it's possible," explains Karen. "I can definitely say Spring Hill was made for Tyler. It has all the pieces Tyler needs."

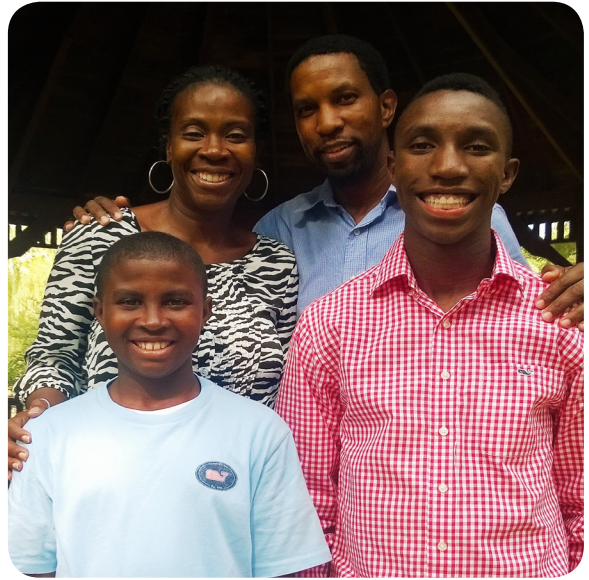


*Karen Williams knows she and her husband made the right choice for their oldest son, “I can definitely say Spring Hill was made for Tyler.”*

## FAST FACTS

Although magnet programs in South Carolina vary widely in size and scope, they are typically public schools operated by a district or consortium of districts that teach all subject areas with a special themed focus such as Fine & Performing Arts; Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) and more.

Designed to attract students from all parts of a community regardless of zoned school district, magnet schools typically have a diverse body of students based on interest in the school's theme. Teachers are “highly specialized” through specific theme-based training and professional development.



## WHAT TO DO

- To learn more about magnet schools in general, visit [www.magnet.edu](http://www.magnet.edu). In fact, South Carolina's own Sara Wheeler who hails from Lexington-Richland District 5 is president-elect of the Magnet Schools of America Board of Directors.
- For a list of magnet school programs in South Carolina, visit <http://ow.ly/BiWwS>. You may also contact the State Department of Education office of School Transformation at 803-734-2781 or by email at [schoolchoice@ed.sc.gov](mailto:schoolchoice@ed.sc.gov).

## OTHER SPECIAL PUBLIC SCHOOL OPTIONS

Parents may also wish to explore the opportunities offered by our two public “residential” high schools, The South Carolina Governor's School for Science & Math in Hartsville ([www.scgssm.org](http://www.scgssm.org)) and the Governor's School for Arts & Humanities in Greenville ([www.scgsah.org](http://www.scgsah.org)).

## EMPOWER OPPORTUNITY: PRIVATE

### DID YOU KNOW?

There are 449 private schools in South Carolina, serving over 66,000 students.

# PRIVATE SCHOOLS

### MEET THE WASHINGTON FAMILY

"After our daughter's first couple of weeks in the 1st grade, we knew that we needed a change," says Venita Washington.

Venita and her husband Julius both grew up in Charleston and knew that's where they wanted to raise their two children. But though they love the city, the Washingtons quickly realized that their daughter's public school was not meeting her needs. "Victoria tried so hard to be on her best behavior, but when she was in that setting, she got lost and forgotten about," Venita said of her daughter's experience. "I was shocked that my daughter was in timeout, because she was very quiet and shy."

Julius and Venita also worried about the quality of their daughter's education. "I felt like I was always playing catch-up because of the schools that I went to growing up," Venita explained. So when she and her husband realized that Victoria was a struggling reader and falling behind, they knew they had to act. They were determined to give her and her younger brother, Julius Jr., a better education than they had received.

"That's when I remembered my friend telling me about Meeting Street Academy...I heard so many good things from my friends and other people," says Venita. "We completely fell in love with it because the class size is so small," Venita shares. This allows each of their children to get individual attention, and has been a perfect fit for Victoria, who now reads several grades ahead of her peers.

Julius and Venita also value Meeting Street's emphasis on parent involvement. Thanks to required parent meetings, the Washingtons know almost everyone in the school and have a lot of helpful interaction with their children's teachers. "We would definitely recommend Meeting Street Academy," they agree. In fact, Venita loves Meeting Street Academy so much that she even convinced her sister to send her children there!

Which is why she passionately states the goal she knows she shares with parents across South Carolina: "We just want our children to learn as much as they can."

*Venita and Julius Washington love the fact that their children “get so much attention” at Meeting Street Academy, a private school.*

## FAST FACTS

Private schools may be traditional or online schools that do not receive state or local funding. Private schools may charge tuition and have a religious mission statement. Some private schools offer scholarships or other tuition assistance programs.

Meeting Street Academy is a relatively new, South Carolina-based private school model created to put an affordable, world class education within the reach of children who live in neighborhoods where quality public education or affordable private education is severely limited.



## WHAT TO DO

- To find a private or religious school in South Carolina, visit the South Carolina Independent Schools Association (SCISA) at [www.scisa.org/about/member-listing](http://www.scisa.org/about/member-listing), the South Carolina Association of Christian Schools (SCACS) at <http://ow.ly/CvPum>, or the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) at <http://ow.ly/CnCSu>.
- Recently, South Carolina opened up a tax credit scholarship program to help parents of children with exceptional need cover tuition costs at private schools. And new in 2015, parents may also now apply directly for refundable tuition tax credits. Learn more about this exciting new program on pages 16-19 of this publication.
- To learn more about Meeting Street Academy visit [www.meetingstreetacademy.com](http://www.meetingstreetacademy.com)

## EMPOWER OPPORTUNITY: TRADITIONAL

### DID YOU KNOW?

There are over 750,000 students in South Carolina public schools.

# PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### MEET JEORGIE HICKS

To 3rd graders in Columbia's Hyatt Park Elementary School, Jeorgie Hicks is a role model. But it was a long journey from his childhood in Atlantic City, New Jersey to finding his calling to help others realize their full potential.

As a youngster, Jeorgie faced several challenges both personally and in school. Jeorgie admits that he had many "disobedient behaviors in school" and that he "acted out a lot." Another difficulty was his transition from his mom's care into his dad's care when he turned 12. "I just had to move in with him and deal with it," Jeorgie said. But with some hard work, Jeorgie was still able to succeed.

Thankfully, he found an important motivator in his older sister's "aspirations to go to college and be a student athlete." Jeorgie explains that, "seeing how people cared about her success inspired me a lot." This motivation helped him overcome long odds to graduate as a student athlete from Benedict College, becoming the first college graduate in his family.

But despite his sister's inspiration, when asked if he would have benefitted from more direct mentoring growing up, Jeorgie quickly answers, "Yes!" Reflecting back on navigating the difficult high school years, he says, "If I would have had that mentor in high school... he could have come to support me at the track, and then taken me to the library to study for the SAT."

Equipped with this life experience, Jeorgie decided to be that mentor to help other children succeed in school. So after graduation from college, he joined City Year, an education-focused nonprofit that equips young leaders to serve as full-time tutors, mentors and role models for a year in a local school. City Year partners with teachers and school leaders to identify students at risk to drop out of school and helps them develop good habits of attendance, behavior, and course performance that will put them on the path to success.

"I'm here to support," Jeorgie says. "We have to spend at least 3.5 hours of tutoring time a month with each of our students." What Jeorgie calls the "I do; you do" tactic is one way he supports his students. To help them understand a problem, Jeorgie will demonstrate it, and then have that student try it on their own. "The most rewarding thing is... to see a student who had never made the A-B honor role, make the honor role three periods in a row. They get so pumped! That's a big reward."

*Jeorgie's advice for young students? "Don't be afraid to use your resources, don't be afraid to make mistakes, and don't be afraid to ask for help."*

Jeorgie and his fellow City Year mentors also try to brighten up every student's day by talking to them about life or making birthday signs for their birthdays. "It's their smiles that are most precious," Jeorgie says.

Jeorgie's personal experience has convinced him that mentoring can make the difference in schools that struggle with high school graduation rates. "You can't put a price on mentoring... everyone needs that advice, everyone needs that friend."



## FAST FACTS

Traditional public schools – often called neighborhood schools – are the education option most familiar to many people. They are free, tax-supported schools controlled by a local school district and board and typically students are assigned to them based upon where they live.

Though recent bills have proposed to make public school enrollment truly "open," in most cases, districts are not required to accept Intra- or Interdistrict transfers.

An Intradistrict transfer, where a student wishes to attend another public school within the same district, is usually accommodated so long as the parent or guardian is responsible for transportation. For Interdistrict public school choice (between two districts), the parents and resident school district need the permission of the district where the student wishes to attend. Parents or guardians are responsible for transportation.

## WHAT TO DO

- Visit South Carolina's State Department of Education at [www.ed.sc.gov/schools](http://www.ed.sc.gov/schools) for a complete list of K-12 public schools. You may compare school report cards at <http://ow.ly/BiWGS>.
- Call your local school and make an appointment to visit.
- Charter schools (pages 4-5), magnet schools (pages 8-9) and many virtual schools (pages 14-15) are 100% public schools. Although they are organized differently, they still must accept all students and are accountable to train teachers and measure student achievement just like a traditional public school.
- To learn more about City Year, visit [www.cityyear.org](http://www.cityyear.org).

## EMPOWER OPPORTUNITY: VIRTUAL

### DID YOU KNOW?

For the 2013-2014 school year, there were 24,491 students enrolled in VirtualSC, a 46% increase over the previous year. There are also 8,877 students in seven virtual charter schools.

# VIRTUAL SCHOOLS

### MEET THE JACOBS FAMILY

Sometimes success is only one decision away...and this was certainly the case for Tre'Shaun Jacobs and his family.

Though he now enjoys and excels in school, Tre'Shaun found his local school setting difficult to handle. "It just wasn't right for him," according to Tre'Shaun's mom, Barbara. The Jacobs decided that Tre'Shaun needed something different to help him excel. That's when they found Connections Academy—a public virtual school.

"It's been working ever since," says Barbara. "Connections Academy has allowed Tre'Shaun to work without the distractions of a traditional classroom setting."

The decision is still paying dividends. This past year, Connections Academy awarded Tre'Shaun with the Student of the Year award, and he finished with high honors. Tre'Shaun attributes his success to "a different school with different teachers." This has also relieved some pressure from the Jacobs' life: "I haven't been worried about getting a phone call...it has made things much easier," Barbara explains.

Tre'Shaun wants to be a mechanical engineer one day. As he puts it, "Getting a good education will help me do that."

Thanks to the powerful flexibility of an online school, the Jacobs family has also been able to stay active in the community, allowing Tre'Shaun to pursue interests outside of school like playing golf and other sports, as well as his beloved drums. Barbara stays active in their church, a foster parent association, and Connections' Parent-Teacher Organization. With the added flexibility, the Jacobs are even able to travel on historical field trips all over the county. These trips have cemented Tre'Shaun's love of history and when asked his favorite place to visit, he exclaims, "New York City!"

Barbara now feels empowered to help her son meet his full potential, and she has become a big believer in virtual education. "It's best for you to really know where your child is, so that you can do what's best for your child. Someone else doesn't need to tell you what's best."



*Barbara Jacobs loves the fact that her son, Tre'Shaun, has found the flexible online environment he needs to succeed.*

## FAST FACTS

Tuition-free online public school programs come in different shapes and sizes: the South Carolina Department of Education operates the statewide South Carolina Virtual School Program and the South Carolina State Public Charter School District has authorized six online charter schools.

South Carolina students can even use virtual classes offered in other states like Florida's Virtual School ([www.flvs.net](http://www.flvs.net)). Some schools will assist families in buying the hardware and software needed to support online learning.



## WHAT TO DO

- Learn more about K-12 virtual schools in South Carolina by visiting the South Carolina Public Charter School District at [www.sccharter.org](http://www.sccharter.org) or calling (803) 734-8322. Six virtual charter schools operate under the Public Charter School District. These schools do not charge tuition.
- VirtualSC offers nearly 100 diverse courses online for high school credit, including Advanced Placement, career and technology, and world languages. The number of students served has grown exponentially in the last 5 years, from 7,262 students served in 2009 to 22,279 in 2014. Learn more about VirtualSC at [www.virtualsc.org](http://www.virtualsc.org).
- Contact your online school to learn more about how to enroll and transfer credits between schools.

## LEARN MORE

Learn about virtual programs outside of South Carolina and available to all children, anywhere in the country. See "A Custom Education for Every Child: The Promise of Online Learning and Education Savings Accounts," available at [www.goldwaterinstitute.org/onlineschool](http://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/onlineschool).

## EMPOWER OPPORTUNITY: EXCEPTIONAL NEEDS

### DID YOU KNOW?

South Carolina now has two programs to provide scholarships for children with exceptional needs, the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children and the Refundable Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children.

# HELP FOR EXCEPTIONAL NEEDS

### MEET THE HOLLINGSWORTH FAMILY

John and Delaine Hollingsworth knows how difficult it can be to give a child with exceptional needs a good education.

The Hollingsworth's adopted their autistic grandson, Cody, when he was in kindergarten "knowing that he would have special needs for a long time." The Hollingsworth's placed Cody in a private school, hoping that it could provide the help that he needed. But after several up-and-down years, the school wasn't able to give Cody the attention he needed and simply placed him in a traditional classroom.

"It was awful," expresses Delaine. "Cody would get in the car and say, 'Grandma, I had a really bad day.'" That's when the Hollingsworth's knew they needed something different.

So the Hollingsworth's began to search for the right place for Cody. They found the perfect situation in Hidden Treasure Christian School—a private school that specializes in helping children with exceptional needs. "From the instant we walked into Hidden Treasure, there was a calm and a peace," explains Delaine. There was just one concern—the cost.

Thankfully, Cody is eligible for South Carolina's relatively new Exceptional Needs Tax Credit Scholarship. When asked if they could afford to send Cody to Hidden Treasure without the help of this Scholarship, Delaine answers simply, "No." Cody receives a full scholarship, which allows the Hollingsworth's to place and keep him in this environment that allows him to excel.

Cody benefits in many ways from his time at Hidden Treasure. "They've taken him in, and loved us all," says Delaine. "It's been a wonderful experience. Cody had learned some really bad habits at the [other] school, but now Cody is obedient," she explains. Not only has Cody matured, but he has also excelled academically at Hidden Treasure because "everyone is so supportive. Cody is very intelligent, and the small classroom atmosphere really helps him," says Delaine.

Delaine expresses how grateful they are for the comfort and the opportunity that the Exceptional Needs Scholarship provides: "It means peace of mind. Hidden Treasure is an amazing place, and the right place for Cody."

*When asked about what the Exceptional Needs Tax Credit Scholarship means to her family, Delaine Hollingsworth says that “it’s better than a million bucks” because she can send her son to a great school.*

## FAST FACTS

The Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children (ECENC) was South Carolina’s first private choice program (2014). Modeled on Florida’s highly successful McKay Scholarship program, the ECENC enables special charities, called “Scholarship Funding Organizations” (SFOs) to award grants of up to \$10,000 to eligible private schools on behalf of individually qualified children with exceptional needs. Donors to approved SFOs are eligible for South Carolina income tax credits of up to 60% of their income tax liability. There is a annual statewide tax credit cap of \$8 million.



## NEW!

In 2015, the SC General Assembly created the Refundable Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children (RECENC). This program provides a tax credit of up to \$10,000 directly to the parents or guardians of a child with special needs. The tax credit is called refundable because if the taxes owed by the parents are less than the total credit allowed, they may receive a payment equal to the balance of the unused credit. The cap on this program is \$4 million.

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**“My life has been richly blessed by each child and family with whom I have had the great privilege to share this journey. We must continue to advocate with passion for our children with disabilities.”**

—DR. SUSAN THOMAS, HEAD OF GLENFOREST SCHOOL

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*Exceptional Needs continued next page*

## IT'S EASY AS...

1... **EXCEPTIONAL NEEDS TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM & 1 PARENTAL TAX CREDIT PROGRAM**

2... **PATHWAYS TO ELIGIBILITY** • Identified by a public school district as eligible for special ed services  
• Diagnosed by a licensed private provider

3... **ELIGIBLE EXPENSE CATEGORIES** • Tuition  
• Textbooks  
• Transportation



## WHAT TO DO

For more information or specific questions on South Carolina's help for children with special needs, contact Access Opportunity at [www.independented.org](http://www.independented.org). You may also call the Education Oversight Committee who administers the program for the state at (803) 734-6148 or visit them online at <http://ow.ly/CnBBO>.

## TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS

Navigating the education process for students with special needs can be complicated and at times frustrating. And if a student's needs cannot be met in a traditional school setting, the alternatives can also be incredibly expensive.

Thanks to South Carolina's new tax-credit scholarship, these special students now have more options than ever. Special charities, called "Scholarship Funding Organizations" (SFO's) award grants of up to \$10,000 on behalf of students with exceptional needs to attend eligible private schools.

- Find out if your STUDENT qualifies for an exceptional needs scholarship: <http://ow.ly/BiWPj>.
- Find out which SCHOOLS are eligible to receive exceptional needs scholarships: <http://ow.ly/BiWUt>.
- To become a Scholarship Funding Organization DONOR, learn more at <http://ow.ly/BiX1j>.

## PARENTAL TUITION TAX CREDITS

New this year, parents can now receive a tax credit directly. First, parents pay tuition for an eligible exceptional needs student to an eligible school. They then must complete and submit a special form to the South Carolina Department of Revenue. DOR then confirms the "reservation" of the family's credit, up until the statewide \$4 million cap is met. Finally, when the family completes their state income taxes for that year, the credit is then applied to their tax liability. If they have no liability, they still receive a refund for the amount of the credit, hence the term "refundable tax credit."

## TECHNICAL RESOURCES

- SC Department of Education Regulations for Special Education – <http://ow.ly/BiX5m>
- The Parent Guide to Special Education Services in South Carolina – <http://ow.ly/BiXbv>
- Standards for Evaluation and Eligibility Determination (SEED) – <http://ow.ly/BiXls>
- Wrightslaw – [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com) (an online resource on special education law and advocacy for children with disabilities)



# EMPOWER SUCCESS

## PROVEN RESULTS

Gold standard research consistently shows that education choice programs create vital education competition, boosting test scores and graduation rates both for participants and traditional public schools. Other benefits including better integrated classrooms, saving scarce taxpayer resources and strengthened civic values that are essential to maintaining America's republic.

In other words, these growing options help define the idea of public education not simply as a system, but as a student-centered experience that produces the ultimate goal: an educated public, equipped to succeed in school and life.







## GRADUATION RATES

### WASHINGTON, DC

The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program boasts a 91% graduation rate. This is more than 30% higher than other private school students who did not receive the scholarship, and 29% higher than DC public school students.



## COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

### NEW YORK

African American students who received a private school voucher were 24% more likely to enroll in college than their peers who did not.



## ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT + TAXPAYER SAVINGS

### FLORIDA

Low-income students who received the FL Tax Credit Scholarship equaled and even surpassed the national average of all students in terms of academic achievement. Meanwhile, Florida's nonpartisan Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability estimated that for every \$1.00 loss in tax revenue due to scholarship contributions, the state saved \$1.49 in state education funding, a net gain for taxpayers.

## PARENTS AGREE...

A recent national poll released in early 2015 conducted by the Democrat polling firm Beck Research revealed that 69% of Americans support the idea of school choice. Further, 65% believe that choice and competition among schools improve education!

# EMPOWER INNOVATION

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

South Carolina families don't have to look far to find states that offer even more quality choices in education. So why not bring these good ideas to the Palmetto State?



### COURSE ACCESS LOUISIANA

Too often, students who attend school rural or economically depressed areas lack access to advanced science and math classes, college prep courses, foreign language classes, career technical classes in high-demand job sectors, and other specialized subjects taught by expert teachers. Course Access helps solve this problem by providing public school students with high-quality classes from approved public and private providers. Students can choose from a wide variety of courses in online, face-to-face, or blended classroom formats. In order to place a strong focus on student outcomes, course providers only receive full funding upon a student's successful completion of a Course Access course. At least 10 states have authorized Course Access programs. In Louisiana, this option has grown by leaps and bounds, with student enrolling in 19,000 Course Access classes in the 2014-2015 school year...a 700% increase over the prior year!

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**“By supplementing traditional school course offerings with options from partnering providers, Course Access programs can increase dramatically the learning opportunities available to students.”**

—DICK RILEY, FORMER U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION AND FORMER GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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## EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

### ARIZONA

First piloted in Arizona and Florida, Education Savings Accounts (ESA's) are the "iPhone" of education options, giving parents direct access to their child's funding from the state student funding formula to create the ultimate customized education for their student. How does it work? The state deposits the money into a dedicated personal account and parents may then spend that money on a wide variety of approved service—including tuition, therapy and tutoring—to create an education that matches the individual needs of their child. In some states, unused funds can even be rolled over from year-to-year and used to save for college! In Arizona, qualified students include those attending persistently failing schools, students with a disability that has been diagnosed or recognized by the public school system, adopted or foster care students who were previously a ward of a state court, students who have siblings that currently receive an ESA, and students who are from families with an active duty member of the Armed Forces. Tennessee, Mississippi and Nevada (where all public school students are eligible to apply for an ESA) have all recently enacted ESA's and they are being actively considered in our neighbor state of Georgia.



## ACHIEVEMENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

### GEORGIA

Achievement School Districts (ASD's – also known as "Recovery School Districts" or "Opportunity School Districts") are delivering results and showing tremendous progress for students where they have been established in Louisiana, Tennessee and Michigan...and now in our neighbor state of Georgia. Designed to oversee the turnaround of a state's lowest performing schools, an ASD is created legislatively to define what schools (usually the bottom 5%) will be part of it and then to give the Governor or Superintendent of Education the power to choose a high-caliber, accountable Superintendent. ASD's free these leaders from bureaucratic red tape and outdated policies and practices often entrenched in low-performing school systems and allow for the autonomy and innovation necessary to create truly transformational school turnaround. South Carolina's accountability system currently identifies chronically low-performing schools, but these schools too often go without meaningful, lasting interventions that deliver results for students. South Carolina's Education Accountability Act needs the reinforcement and laser-like focus of a statewide Achievement School District.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A SPECIAL THANKS to our publication contributors

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### **PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH...**

Public Charter School Alliance  
of South Carolina



## ABOUT

### Palmetto Promise Institute

#### ABOUT US

Founded in early 2013, Palmetto Promise Institute is an independent, non-partisan education foundation committed to a vibrant, prosperous South Carolina. We research and promote visionary but practical public policy ideas to afford every South Carolinian the opportunity to flourish and reach their dreams.

#### STAY CONNECTED

Let us hear from YOU! Was this catalog helpful? How has education choice impacted your family? Join our online education community to keep up with the latest information on the growing education options in South Carolina!



**JOIN THE CONVERSATION, SHARE THE RESOURCE — [mySCeducation.org](http://mySCeducation.org)**



