

- Richland One joins other school districts in adopting policies that award full leave balances as "PTO" Paid Time Off in order to provide staff the necessary flexibility to address personal needs and life events, instituting without diminishing current annual leave benefits.
- In response to the need to expand and fill the pool of qualified educators, Richland One supports the establishment of policies to meet the needs of retired teachers providing immediate access to a highly-talented educator core. These policies include eliminating the earnings limited for retired teachers who return to work and/or the requirement for working retirees to pay the 9% SC Retirement System Contribution from their salaries, and enacting smart policies like H. 3867 helping educators better utilize existing retirement programs without requirement additional state resources.
- Richland One supports the concept of paid parental leave and recognizes its value to employee well-being and family stability. Richland One believes the proposed paid parental leave expansion propositions should be applied so they do not adversely impact school districts regarding extended teaching absences (possibly impacting student achievement) and funding.

## GOVERNANCE

Richland One supports local control in the governance of school districts:

- Richland One opposes the takeover of schools, school districts and locally raised revenues and opposes legislative efforts to remove, diminish or interfere with the authority of local governing school district boards.
- Richland One believes that local school boards should determine open enrollment and school choice options within their districts.
- Richland One believes that consolidation of schools and/or school districts should be under the control of local school boards.
- Richland One opposes transferring schools under a local school district's control to a state-defined school district (i.e. a "turnaround district").
- Richland One believes that local school boards should establish the school calendar, including the school start date, without limitations from state government.
- Richland One believes that instructional materials should continue to be vetted, monitored and reviewed by local school districts and boards as outlined in their school board policies.

## LITIGATION

- Richland One does not support increases to the S.C. Tort Claims Act without research-based data to ensure that changes in the cap will not impact the financial status of a school district.

## SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY

- Richland One supports safe, secure and positive learning environments in all of our schools and asks that the General Assembly fully fund school resource officers (SROs) and mental health professionals for all schools in addition to safety infrastructure and equipment in addition to safety infrastructure and equipment.
- Richland One supports HB 3528 directing all public schools, including charter schools, to implement certain mobile panic alert systems before July 1, 2026.
- Richland One supports the passage of HB 3831 mandating school districts and charter school authorizers to develop a cardiac emergency response plan addressing the appropriate use of school personnel to respond to incidents involving and individuals experiencing sudden cardiac arrest or similar life-threatening emergency while on school grounds.
- Richland One supports the SCBE's revision of Regulation 43-279 to provide clear and consistent procedures for addressing persistently disruptive and dangerous student behavior. Richland One advocates for adequate accountability for such behaviors while protecting and preserving students' access to a high-quality education.
- Richland One supports the protection of public servants and supports the passage of S. 73/H. 3052 to provide enhanced penalties for the assault of a teacher, or staff member, aligned with legislation providing penalties or civil remedies for online harassment or defamation of an educator.
- Richland One supports the General Assembly's action to codify Proviso 1.99, governing student cell phone access at school, and supports the General Assembly's completion of H. 3431 and S. 268 limiting the harmful effects of social media on children.
- Richland One supports the mitigation of cyber security threats and supports the SCDE's leadership in identifying best practices and resources for cybersecurity across all districts and provide adequate funding supporting these measures, and the maintenance and protection of school security camera footage.

## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- Richland One supports the Senate in reviewing and passing H. 3195 ensuring the protection of student access to play and physical activity during the school day.
- To mitigate the spread of infectious disease, Richland One supports the current statewide "required" vaccines guarding against diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough, and recommend the immunization for other, non-required vaccines, i.e., "novel" vaccines.
- Richland One supports the legislation that would appropriate adequate and sustainable funding for school districts to provide mental health services for students. According to the Association for Children's Mental Health, addressing mental health needs in schools is vital because "1 in 5 children and youth have a diagnosable emotional, behavioral or mental health disorder, and 1 in 10 young people have a mental health challenge that is severe enough to impair how they function at home, school or in the community."

- Because hunger and food insecurity is such a significant barrier to childhood growth and development, Richland One supports the expansion for student access to no-cost meals while also improving the nutritional content of the meals and snacks provided to students.
- Richland One supports the increased resources and support for special education teachers, including the reduction of the maximum class size for SPED classrooms, requiring and funding an instructional aide for every full-time SPED teacher, and improvements to the use of online databases and caseload management systems to enhance improvements in the development of IEPs.

## VOUCHERS AND TAX CREDITS

- Richland One believes that public tax dollars should not be used to support non-public schools through vouchers, tax credits or any other methods, but if state tax dollars are used for such purposes, those non-public schools should be subject to all the state testing and accountability requirements of the public schools. Taxpayers are entitled to know what they are getting for their money and that includes paying for private schools.

## RICHLAND ONE BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS

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**Mrs. Barbara Weston**  
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**Dr. Ericka Hursey**  
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**Dr. Eunice Williams**  
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**Dr. Traci Cooper**  
*Director of Strategic Partnerships and Extended-Day Programs*

**Mr. Basil Harris**  
*District Ombudsman*

## Mission Statement

We are Richland One, a leader in transforming lives through education, empowering all students to achieve their potential and dreams.

# 2026

# LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

## FOCUS ISSUES FOR THE 2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The following position statements address six key issues that Richland One urges the General Assembly to act on during the 2026 legislative session:

- Richland One opposes the takeover of schools, school districts and locally-raised revenues and opposes legislative efforts to remove, diminish or interfere with the authority of local governing school district boards.
- Richland One supports legislation allocating state funding for the expansion of broadband statewide to ensure that every student has access to the Internet at sufficient speed and affordability for remote learning.
- Richland One opposes legislation that would require third-graders to be retained based on a score on the state test. Research indicates that student retention can be detrimental to future success for some students.
- Richland One believes that the General Assembly state's education new funding structure should be designed to fully fund public education in South Carolina to include expanding local district revenue-raising options and ensuring that districts are held harmless from receiving less money through a new funding plan.
- Richland One supports the General Assembly's review of recommendations revising the distribution of State Aid to Classrooms (SAC) funding to school districts and charter school authorizers. Richland One supports the Office of Revenue and Fiscal Affairs (RFA) review of student weightings used in the current SAC formula and examine ways to improve the alignment of SAC funding with student enrollment, while ensuring consistent distributions to districts and charter authorizers helping mitigate school funding disparities.
- Richland One believes that local school boards should establish the school calendar, including the school start date, without limitations from state government.

Following are the district's positions statements on other key education-related legislative issues:

### ACCOUNTABILITY

- Richland One opposes legislation that mandates formative assessments a certain number of times a year under the penalty of losing a percentage of funding and requires the sharing of those formative assessments with the S.C. Department of Education.
- Richland One supports higher quality assessments through a better connection between the use of assessments and the data they yield in supporting instructional practices. Richland One advocates for more ongoing, formative assessment systems providing timely and rich feedback on student growth and proficiency better informing teachers with real-time data for better instructional practices and focus.
- Richland One opposes legislation that would require third-graders to be retained based on a score on the state test. Research indicates that student retention can be detrimental to future success for some students.
- Richland One believes that testing should be kept to a minimum, meeting federal requirements only, and that it be robust enough to provide instructional information on all students. Richland One believes the General Assembly should pass legislation ensuring no student loses more than 3% of their annual instructional time to state or district mandated testing and surveys.
- Richland One believes that all districts should be provided flexibility in meeting seat time requirements through innovative practices, utilizing credit retrieval practices, initiatives and policies used appropriately to address chronic absenteeism and provide meaningful and appropriate learning opportunities for students.
- Richland One opposes requiring students who are enrolled in a non-diploma track to take the state end-of-course assessments. Requiring students to take an assessment for which they have not taken the academic course is a practice that we cannot support, as it is not in the best interest of the students.
- Richland One supports raising the compulsory school attendance age from 17 to 18. We believe that any increase in the compulsory school attendance age should be supported by retention and dropout prevention policies to create a comprehensive approach to support learner success.
- Richland One supports the balanced prioritization of instruction avoiding the marginalization of certain instructional areas at the expense of others through Defined Minimum Programs Regulations.

### BROADBAND EXPANSION

- Richland One supports continued legislation allocating state funding for the expansion of broadband statewide ensuring that every student has access to the Internet at sufficient speed and affordability for remote learning.

### CHARTER SCHOOLS

- Richland One supports the recommendations offered by the Office of Revenue and Fiscal Affairs, many of which recognize concerns previously raised by school districts and encourages lawmakers to continue aiming to close the disproportionate distribution of funds between traditional school districts and charter school authorizers, and for calling for an analysis of the current education funding formula along with recommendations for improvement.
- Richland One supports the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs' recommendation to allocate funding for the charter school brick-and-mortar weighting and virtual charter school weighting – totaling \$355.6 million – separately from the overall SAC appropriation.
- Richland One supports the recommendation to allocate State Aid to Classrooms funding based on prior year's student counts to help improve consistency and predictability for districts to develop their annual operating budgets.

- Richland One encourages the General Assembly to consider the implications HB 3802 will have on school districts if there is expansion and standardized rights of home school, charter school and Governor's School students to participate in interscholastic (sports), co-curricular and Career and Technical Education (CTE), if passed, providing additional (i.e., increased resources and support).
- Richland One supports clarification of the local district's roles and responsibilities, particularly relating to special education for charter school students.
- Richland One supports review of the reporting process for charters, including giving sponsors some level of enforcement for charter school compliance.
- Richland One opposes any legislation that would lower the vote requirements for parents of a traditional public school to convert to a charter school by a "majority of returned pre-mailed ballots issued to those who are eligible to vote."
- Richland One opposes any legislation that would allow conversion charter schools to have free use of district buildings, equipment and supplies.
- Richland One opposes any legislation that would allow parents to force a school to convert to a charter school or transform under a turnaround, restart or transformation model. We believe that the local school board should determine and approve any changes to a school's structure.
- Richland One believes that district-sponsored charter schools should adopt compensation and leave policies, procedures and guidelines consistent with those of the sponsoring district and necessary for compliance and reporting.
- Richland One opposes current legislation that requires school districts to offer charter schools a first right of refusal before school district property can be sold to anyone else and further supports rescission of the current legislation. Further, Richland One does not support any additional legislation regarding the sale of its property to charter schools.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

- Richland One believes that child development programs for four-year-olds are essential to overall academic progress in the state. The General Assembly should enact legislation to provide full funding to ensure that all four-year-olds in South Carolina have the opportunity to participate in a full-day, accredited child development program.
- Richland One supports the creation and implementation of effective instructional support models and readiness programs to help ensure that all students are reading on grade level by third grade.
- In light of the growing number of non-potty-trained students in 4K and early childhood classrooms, Richland One believes SBE regulations and/or CERDEP policies should ensure classroom teachers are not required to provide diapering services they are not trained, appropriately staffed or equipped to offer.

### EDUCATION FUNDING

- Richland One believes that the state's education funding structure should be based upon specific analysis and recommendations on (1) the current tax structure and the state's tax policy, (2) the current education funding formulas and their ability to equalize educational opportunities statewide, and (3) a realistic means of computing a per pupil funding amount, which is aligned with state-imposed student performance standards and expectations. The method of fully funding public education in South Carolina should include the following:
  - Expand local district revenue-raising options;
  - Generate revenue that is adequate, stable, and recurring;
  - Provide adequate funding for other operational needs such as transportation and fringe;
  - Include state-driven initiatives to ensure that every public school student has the opportunity to learn in permanent school facilities that are safe, structurally sound and conducive to a good learning environment;
  - Ensure that districts are held harmless from receiving less money through a new funding plan;
  - Provide funds to implement innovative STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) programs.
- Richland One believes that the state should provide funding to public schools to evaluate private school students and charter school students as identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – Section 612(a)(10)(A). Moreover, Richland One believes the South Carolina Congressional Delegation should advocate for full federal funding of special education services at the full coverage percentage for special education services, and advocate for the revision of the existing funding formula currently leading to even lower percentage coverage of total special education services costs.
- Richland One opposes state or federally mandated efforts to directly or indirectly subsidize elementary or secondary, private, religious or home schools with public funds as such efforts are in contradiction with SC Constitution Article XI, Section 3 and 4. Tuition tax credits, tax deductions or vouchers for private schools undermine the principles of public education by encouraging the enrollment of children in private schools, which raises constitutional problems.
- Richland One believes that a school district's tax base should not be eroded by economic development incentives and that all revenue generated or determined by local school district tax millage must be preserved for use by school districts for school purposes. Richland One believes that school districts should be active participants in the negotiation process related to economic development incentives provided to developers and industry. Incentives that would directly or indirectly erode revenues for school district operations or debt service should require approval by the school district's board for inclusion in any incentive package.
- Richland One opposes any legislation to decentralize student transportation and turning over the operations and financial responsibility to the school districts. Transferring the responsibility of operating the school bus transportation system from the state to the local school districts does not address the real issue, which is a lack of sufficient funding to honor the statutorily mandated 15-year replacement cycle for school buses. With decentralization, equity of service would no longer be achievable as it is currently with the state-run transportation system. Transferring this responsibility without addressing sufficient funding could translate into reduced funds going to the classroom.

- Richland One supports legislation that would provide a temporary means for determining the Index of Taxpaying Ability (ITA) prior to the February deadline. The value of owner-occupied property must be included in the calculation of the ITA until a permanent change in the method of computation of the ITA is enacted by the General Assembly. Imputing the equivalent assessed value to equate the reimbursement on owner-occupied property to school districts as it is currently done for industrial property under fee-in-lieu of agreements would be a temporary approach for adjusting the ITA.
- In response to the adverse impact of Act 388 on local school funding, Richland One believes the impact can be mitigated through comprehensive tax reform, an effort to address the annual decrease in the Education Improvement Act resulting from exemptions from the sales and use of tax revenue.
- Richland One supports legislation that would increase funding from the South Carolina Education Lottery for K-12 education. An increase in lottery funds should benefit students at all levels of education and be allocated to K-12 education in accordance with the state law that enacted the lottery, which states "proceeds of lottery games must be used to support improvements and enhancements for educational purposes and programs as provided by the General Assembly and that the net proceeds must be used to supplement, not supplant, existing resources for educational purposes and programs."
- Richland One supports legislation that would ensure that all the State of South Carolina continues to participate in the Medicaid program on a national level and receive the 3-to-1 federal match, so that Medicaid funds are not jeopardized at the state level. This will ensure the Medicaid dollars are available to Richland One students who need services.
- Richland One supports legislation that would provide individual school district fiscal impact statements before passage of any legislation that requires a local district financial match or use of local funds for any reason. The state government must become sensitive to the impact of mandated programs on local taxpayers. Any new requirement that has a financial impact on local school districts falls unequally on economically rich or poor districts, unless it is made a part of the base student cost. Education-related legislation should never be considered and enacted until there is a clear understanding by lawmakers of the fiscal impact on each local school district.
- Richland One supports legislation that would provide funding for dropout prevention to allow districts to increase alternative educational delivery options for students to re-engage them in schools such as evening high schools, Saturday schools and more virtual schools. Funding is needed to support these options, as required by Section 117.36 general provisions.

### EDUCATOR QUALITY

- Because the quality of teachers in our classrooms impacts student achievement, Richland One believes that a competitive statewide salary schedule, statewide initiatives and innovative incentives should be developed to recruit, employ and retain the highest-quality teachers.
- Richland One supports differentiated compensation or state teacher salary schedules to attract staff to consistently low-performing or hard-to-staff schools to ensure the highest-quality teachers for all students.
- Richland One supports legislation that would provide college tuition assistance and tax credits to families for students pursuing teaching certification in critical needs areas, including math, science, foreign language, speech therapy and special education. The legislation should exempt the work experience requirement for those seeking alternative certification.
- Richland One supports statewide legislation that would increase the maximum number of sick days attributable to the retirement system (above 90 days), which we believe will have a positive impact on teacher attendance and an ultimate impact on student achievement.

### TEACHER/STAFF COMPENSATION

- Richland One supports the elimination of the salary cap for retired classroom teachers. South Carolina, like most states in the country, is facing a major teacher shortage. The group of teachers who are eligible or near eligibility for retirement is quickly becoming the largest group within the state's teacher force. As the teacher supply and demand gap continues to widen, school districts will need the option for recruiting retired teachers to return to the classroom, especially for critical needs subjects or in high-need areas.
- Richland One supports legislation that would fully increase teacher pay to the national average and establish a salary structure that would be appropriate considering differentiated responsibilities, so as to compensate teacher leaders in relation to skills and performance. A state salary structure must be developed that is competitive with other states to allow districts to hire and retain qualified teachers.
- In keeping with the leadership of the Governor's Office, SCDE and the General Assembly, South Carolina is poised to reach the Governor's goal of a statewide minimum salary of \$50,000 by 2026. Richland One encourages these entities to complete this work and encourages the General Assembly to fund corresponding increases across the salary schedule while maintaining salary "lanes" for postgraduate level coursework and degrees.
- Richland One supports legislation that would provide additional funding for classified staff including, but not limited to, social workers and mental health professionals.
- Richland One supports an array of strategic compensation approaches and believes the General Assembly should evaluate the effectiveness of existing compensation programs and then consider new, innovative and novel promising models - some of which more closely align salary incentives to address areas of greatest need, i.e., increased compensation for highly effective teachers that work with increased student loads.

### STAFF WORKING CONDITIONS/INCENTIVES

- Richland One believes that the state must continue to fully cover the cost of any increase in health care premiums and make efforts to lower deductibles to mitigate inflation and rising benefit costs often consuming educator salary increases.
- Richland One encourages the state to allocate funding for childcare for educators as state employees. Additionally, Richland One supports the Attorney General's recommendation to include stillbirth as an eligible event for paid leave and leave benefits supporting educators serving as primary caregivers for elderly family members.