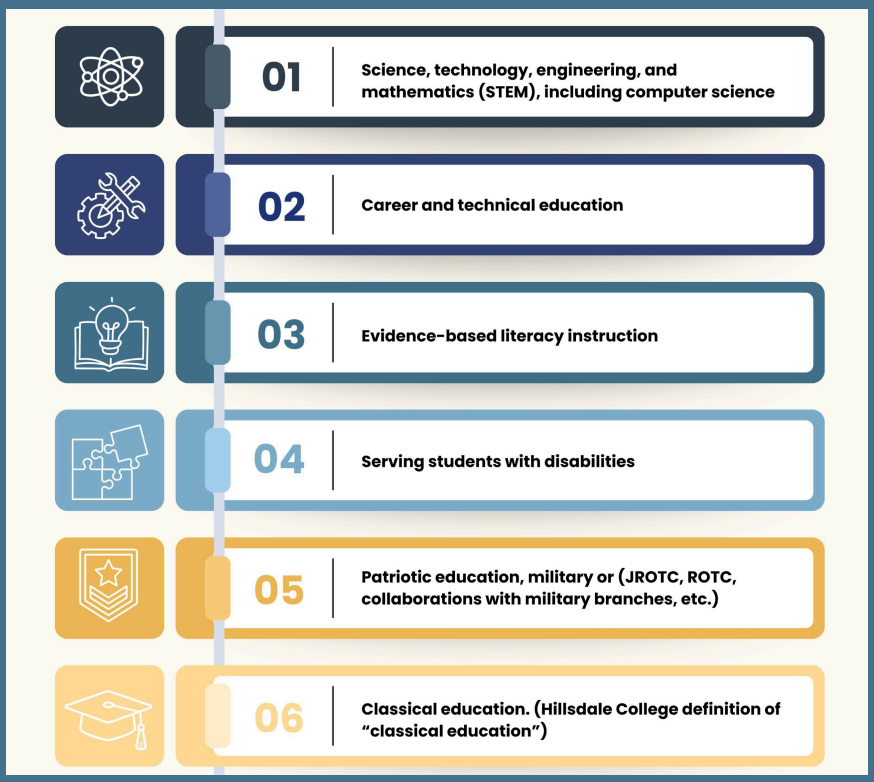
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Summer 2026

The Charter School Chronicle

The Voice for Education Choice and Family Engagement in South Carolina



South Carolina Charter Schools Are INCREASING!

of Charter Schools in SC
2024-2025 = 104
2025-2026 = 111
2026-2027 = 115 (projected)

18 New Charters were approved this cycle.

We are also receiving a variety of application types
Within the 40 Applications
6 = STEM
9 = CTE
1 = Literacy
4 = AEC
7 = Classical

This Month's News

Act 123: What Does It Mean for You?

School Spotlight: PALM

Award Season

Character and Resilience Education (CARE) Updates

What Is Happening with ACT 123 (Formerly Bill 454)?

More Importantly, What Does It Mean for You?

Contact Us:

We here at the SCDE are here to support you:!

803.734.0526
charterschools@ed.sc.gov

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ACT 123: What Does It Mean for You?

The Charter School Accountability Act (A.123) introduces a comprehensive set of updates designed to strengthen transparency, governance, and oversight across South Carolina's charter school sector. **While the law preserves the core flexibility and autonomy that define charter schools, it establishes clearer expectations for financial reporting, board governance, and authorizer oversight.** Notably, the legislation formalizes terminology by replacing "sponsor" with "authorizer" and requires schools to publicly post annual audits and disclose management contracts, ensuring greater visibility into financial operations.

The Act also places a stronger emphasis on governance and accountability. Charter school boards will be expected to meet enhanced ethics and conflict-of-interest standards, and authorizers will take on a more structured and active oversight role, supported by the SCDE. Schools should anticipate more consistent performance evaluations, clearer renewal and intervention processes, and defined requirements for replicating schools.

Over the past month, the SCDE has met with the Statewide Authorizers, the Local District Authorizers, and the Public Charter School Alliance to share the methodical timeline for implementation and listen to feedback on any questions, concerns, and needs for specific clarifications. The goal is to maintain the healthy relationship the SCDE has developed with the authorizers and charter schools, and ensure effective communication on processes and expectations throughout. In the near future, the SCDE will meet with select charter schools to receive direct feedback. In the meantime, continue to ask any questions you might have to your authorizer to see if they have already received feedback to your particular question.

Overall, ACT.123 represents a shift toward a more mature accountability framework for charter schools—one that maintains innovation and choice while introducing stronger guardrails. Schools are encouraged to begin reviewing their financial practices, governance policies, and compliance systems now to prepare for implementation, and to stay engaged with their authorizer as additional guidance becomes available.

Is There a Financial Impact to the Act?

The Authorizers believe there may be some operational impact on charter schools, but could not financially quantify at this time. The SCDE is exploring additional supports to aid with this as well as authorizer oversight.

Read the Fiscal Impact Summary yourself

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School Spotlight: P.A.L.M.

Palmetto Academy for Learning Motorsports Charter School (PALM) is one of the most unique educational institutions in our state. Its competency-based courses prepare students for a variety of careers within the motorsports industry, including Automotive Technology, Digital Arts & Graphics, Welding, and Collision Technology. Students can even earn industry certifications through their local technical college in these highly competitive fields. As seen in the picture on the left, PALM has the first and only **stock car race team** in the country.

However, three years ago, the school faced a major obstacle. Statewide test scores indicated that many students were performing below grade level in Language Arts and Mathematics, resulting in an Unsatisfactory designation on the state report card.

With a change in leadership came a strong determination to improve academic outcomes. Principal Cedric Brown and Assistant Principal Heidi Roberts implemented several key changes that yielded significant results. First, the South Carolina Department of Education connected PALM with Transformation Coach Amy Dellinger. Together, they deconstructed curriculum standards and worked backward to create manageable goals with clear action steps. Once a plan was in place, the focus shifted to implementation. Second, they secured staff buy-in. As Dellinger built trust and provided professional development support to Roberts, Roberts then extended that same support and guidance to the academic teaching staff. The school shifted to a 90-minute block schedule, giving teachers uninterrupted time to implement instructional strategies effectively. Finally, PALM established one-on-one tutoring sessions on Fridays to help struggling students catch up, while students who were on track were granted a remote workday. The school also developed an incentive structure that leveraged students' interest in additional motorsports electives, provided they remained current with their academic assignments.

These structural changes proved highly successful. In the years since receiving an Unsatisfactory rating, PALM has climbed all the way to an Excellent rating on this past year's State Report Card! Great work team!

DID YOU KNOW?

The SCDE is here to support our charter schools in bringing Character and Resilience Education (CARE) resources and programs to all students.

Contact Mandy Roberts, CARE Manager
mroberts@ed.sc.gov (803) 734-8559

Mandy can provide more information on how to build the durable life skills every student needs to be college, career, and/or military ready.

More info on Page 5

Workforce Center of Excellence Award

April 21, 2026 The South Carolina Public Charter School district (PCSD) bestowed the designation of **Workforce Center of Excellence** upon Pee Dee Math, Science, & Technology Academy (PDMSTA) in order to recognize its success preparing students through real-world industry certifications, dual enrollment courses opportunities, and authentic internship experiences.

Located in rural Bishopville, PDMSTA serves as an excellent example of the South Carolina Department of Education's vision that every student graduates prepared for college, a career, or military service. This past year, PDMSTA achieved a remarkable milestone by graduating 100% of its seniors, with each student equipped for their next steps in life.

PCSD Superintendent Chris Neely captured the significance of this achievement when he stated, “This moment proves that opportunity is not limited by zip code.” His words reflect an important truth, not only for South Carolina, but for communities across the nation. Every student, regardless of where they live, deserves access to high-quality educational opportunities that prepare them for future success.

We applaud the recognition that PCSD has given to PDMSTA through the Workforce Center of Excellence Award and celebrate the school's commitment to student achievement. We look forward to seeing which schools will be honored with this distinction in the future.

Valor In Education Award

May 20, 2026 The Charter Institute at Erskine held their **8th Annual Awards Night**, recognizing principals, teachers, students, and the many educational support professionals whose contributions are not often celebrated at such events. Among the honors presented was the inaugural Valor in Education Award.

Created to recognize American veterans and active-duty service members serving in Institute schools, the award highlights the valuable contributions these individuals make both in uniform and in the field of education. The timing of the award was particularly meaningful. Just one day earlier, on May 19, 2026, the South Carolina Department of Education honored hundreds of graduating seniors who committed to serving our country during the **Military Honor Cord Ceremony**. Together, these events illustrate the powerful impact of service and leadership across generations. It is inspiring to consider the full-circle journey that can occur: a student is encouraged and challenged in the classroom, chooses to serve our nation, returns home to invest in the next generation, and ultimately recognized for that dedication through an honor such as the Valor in Education Award.

This year's recipient was Dr. Lionel “TK” Kennedy, Chief Executive Officer of Midlands STEM Charter School. His leadership, service, and commitment to students made him the fitting choice for this inaugural recognition. Following the ceremony, WIS10 News captured a brief interview with Dr. Kennedy reflecting on the honor. Check it out **HERE**.

Exciting Updates

Mark Your Calendars!

South Carolina has been chosen to be the model Lighthouse State for the **Let Grow Organization** (co-founded by Jonathan Haidt, author of The Anxious Generation) Visit the **website** and enter your email to receive instant access to all Let Grow resources, print ready communication materials, and other great resources to build confidence, resilience, and independence in students.

The SCDE, in partnership with the **Maxwell Leadership Foundation** is pleased to offer FREE Legacy series iLead program materials (first come, first served) for THIS SCHOOL YEAR ONLY to interested schools. An iLead virtual Information session will be offered Wednesday, July 15th (10:00am-11:00am) Register **NOW**

Additionally, SCDE and Maxwell Leadership are partnering to offer an opt-in, virtual FREE Educator Leadership series – **Elevate Impact** to educators across the state beginning September 3rd and continuing the 1st Thursday of the month Sept–Nov & Jan–March (6 sessions in all). The hour-long (4:00pm–5:00pm) sessions will highlight key leadership character values and offer strategies, guest speaker leadership perspectives, and authentic small group discussions. Certificate credit renewal is available for each session attended. Registration is now open.
Email **Mandy Roberts** to be added to the guest list

Nominations **coming soon** for middle and high school students to participate in the **Maxwell Leadership Student Ambassador Program**. This unique program, developed in partnership with the SCDE offers leadership development training, coaching, peer collaboration, networking, and community service while building student leadership capacity on your school campus.

A FREE training for educators and counselors interested in implementing the **Congressional Medal of Honor Character Development Program** (middle/high school students) is scheduled for Thursday, October 1st (8:30 am – 3:30 pm) at the SCDE. Space is limited and the training, lunch, & materials are all FREE. Register **HERE**