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## **EDUCATION STUDY FINDS SOUTH CAROLINA TEST SCORES ON PAR WITH US AND RISING MORE RAPIDLY, WHILE GRADUATION RATES LAG WELL BEHIND**

COLUMBIA, SC, August 22, 2006 — The Carolina First Foundation is pleased to release the results of the *South Carolina Education Benchmarking Project*. Conducted by the Monitor Group for the South Carolina business community—represented by the South Carolina State Chamber of Commerce, Palmetto Institute, and the Palmetto Business Forum—the report provides a rigorous, data-rich assessment of South Carolina's educational performance, particularly with regards to the *quality* of student performance and the *quantity* of students making it through the educational system.

Monitor—a Boston-based firm comprised of a comprehensive group of companies, talent, content, and knowledge all focused on helping organizations, economies, and people grow—found that the quality of student performance in South Carolina (as measured by standardized test scores) is on par with the US and improving much more rapidly, while the quantity of students making it through the system (as measured by graduation rates) lags well behind the US and is falling further behind.

The purpose of the study was not to comment on education policy, but rather to provide an independent assessment of the state's education performance. "The business community has been hearing contradictory messages about how the state is doing," said Mack Whittle, who is the CEO of the South Financial Group, and spearheaded the project. "We wanted a rigorous, outside assessment of South Carolina's educational performance, and that is exactly what we got. I think the key message is that there is some very good news; the improvement in most of our test scores over the last 5-10 years is tops in the country. At the same time, our graduation rate is much too low. We've got to figure out how to improve that without relaxing our standards."

Monitor vetted numerous information sources to collect reputable, accurate data that is comparable across the US states. Using these data, it measured student performance across a host of metrics. It also normalized for numerous factors, such as poverty level, the educational attainment of students' parents, teen pregnancy, parental involvement, and more, to assess the true performance of South Carolina students.

"South Carolina's economic success is tied directly to the quality of our workforce," notes Larry Wilson, Managing General Partner at the Trelys Funds and former member of the state's Education Oversight Committee. "We must continue the journey to increase student achievement and make it our top priority to achieve global competitiveness and higher incomes. Accurate benchmarking of our progress, such as that provided by this report, is a critical piece of what we must do to succeed."

The business community plans to communicate the results of the project to inform and stimulate debate on education in South Carolina. It also plans to repeat the effort in future years to track improvement. The report summarizing the data, research, analysis, and findings can be found at [http://www.thesouthgroup.com/community/tsfg\\_report.pdf](http://www.thesouthgroup.com/community/tsfg_report.pdf).