Pickens, Oconee schools get excellent ratings

BY GREG OLIVER
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COLUMBIA — School districts in Oconee and Pickens counties received "excellent" ratings on the 2014 South Carolina School Report Card released today.

The South Carolina Department of Education and the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee released report card ratings for schools and districts statewide as part of the requirements of the Education Accountability Act of 1998.

The absolute rating judges the district against the state's expectations and the growth rating compares the district to its own performance the previous year. Five ratings are recognized; excellent, good, average, below average and at-risk.

While Pickens County received a score of excellent, the highest possible rating, the district also received a growth rating of good.

"It takes a team effort between staff, administrators, students and families to earn this rating, and we have a great team here in Pickens County," superintendent Danny Merck said.

District officials said every school in Pickens County was average or above on the report card's absolute rating, while results on the growth rating ranged from excellent to at-risk.

"As a district, we are pleased to receive an absolute rating of excellent and to see our growth rating improve as well," assistant superintendent for instructional services Sharon Huff said.

Oconee County saw seven schools achieve excellent absolute ratings, while five were good and seven average. In the growth category, a total of three schools were rated as excellent, six were good and nine average with one school rated below average.

Two Oconee County schools improved their absolute ratings, as Northside Elementary School and Seneca High School both moved into the excellent category. Results for growth ratings were mixed, with eight schools improving and two slipping from excellent to good.

"We are proud of these results," Oconee County School Board chairman Andy Inabinet said. "Now, as we work to develop a balanced budget, we will have to find ways to do more with less. We have every confidence in the district leadership that we will continue to see these kinds of ratings, even as we work to reduce expenses."

Superintendent Michael Thorsland said the results reflect the leadership of former superintendent Mike Lucas, calling his former boss "an instructional leader who cared about students and learning and was a role model for all of us."

Board member Rosemary Bailes, who represents the Walhalla area, said the report card "validates the good work happening across our district every day."

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