South Carolina Association of Early Care & Education NEWSLETTER

2026 Edition

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Ask The Board
We want to hear from you!

Do you have a question, concern, or suggestion that the Board of Directors can help you with? Go to www.scaece.com and click on "Ask The Board".

Message from the President

Dear SCAECE Members,

As we continue to serve the children and families of South Carolina, I am reminded daily of the essential role licensed child care providers play in strengthening our communities and supporting our state's workforce. Your commitment to quality care and early education is the foundation upon which lifelong learning is built.

Across South Carolina, our industry is navigating both opportunities and challenges. From evolving regulatory expectations to workforce recruitment and retention, the landscape continues to shift. Yet through it all, one constant remains—your dedication to providing safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate environments for the children in your care.

As an association, SCAECE remains focused on three key priorities:

1. Advocacy
We are actively working with state leaders to ensure that the voices of licensed providers are heard and respected. Our goal is to influence policies that are practical, sustainable, and supportive of high-quality child care businesses.

2. Professional Support
We are committed to equipping you with the tools, resources, and training necessary to operate successfully in today's environment. From compliance guidance to business best practices, we aim to be a trusted partner in your work.

3. Community & Connection
Strong networks create resilient providers. We encourage you to engage with fellow members, attend upcoming events, and share your experiences. Together, we can elevate our profession and support one another.

Looking ahead, we are excited about upcoming opportunities to connect, learn, and advocate together. Your involvement in SCAECE strengthens our collective impact and ensures that licensed providers remain at the center of conversations shaping the future of early childhood education in our state.

Thank you for the vital work you do each day. It does not go unnoticed, and it makes a lasting difference.

With appreciation,

Tami Nix
President, SCAECE
Archway Academy

Officers

President
Tami Nix
Archway Academy

Vice President
Melissa Jordon
La Petite Academy

Secretary
Nancy Pryor
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Vacant
Director
(term expiring 2026)

Associate Member
Vacant

Lobbyist: Jeff Thordahl — *Copper Dome Strategies, LLC*

Member Testimonial

"As the second generation owner of a single-location family-owned childcare center licensed for 150 children, I have found the SC Association of Early Care and Education to be my most beneficial resource with regards to staying current on legislation and regulation changes. In addition to having a paid lobbyist championing our cause at the State House and hosting a professional, well-coordinated conference for training each year, Association membership is a networking must for centers of all sizes. Our center has been a member for forty years and the return on our investment in membership is priceless."

— Margaret-Anne Pitts Gaffney
Owner / Director, Anne Pitts Child Development Center • Lexington, SC

Celebrating Teacher Appreciation Week

Small Gestures, Big Impact

It is Teacher Appreciation Week! Did you know Teacher Appreciation Week was first established in 1953 by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who persuaded Congress that there needed to be a specific day to recognize teachers? My dad was born in 1955—I imagine his parents didn't feel pressure to go over the top for his teachers, and it's a good reminder that bigger isn't always better. Sometimes, being intentional and simply acknowledging our teachers in small ways can go a long way.

Teacher Appreciation Week is a time to celebrate the people who pour so much into our children every single day. This year, that celebration may feel a little different. With enrollment lower and resources stretched, showing appreciation can feel like one more challenge on an already full plate. But recognizing our teachers is not about how much we spend—it's about making sure they feel seen, valued, and supported, especially when times are tough.

Encourage families to join us in showing appreciation in simple, meaningful ways. A handwritten note, a kind word at drop-off or pick-up, or a small gesture of gratitude can truly brighten a teacher's day and remind them how valued they are.

A Week of Appreciation Ideas	
Message Monday	Send a thoughtful note of gratitude to each teacher.
Tasty Tuesday	Share a favorite recipe or ask the community to provide lunch for your staff.
Why Not Wednesday	Let teachers enjoy the freedom of wearing something outside the usual dress code.
Thoughtful Thursday	Offer an extra 10-minute break during the day.
Finally Friday	Provide a small, sweet treat to end the week on a positive note.

The childcare industry is facing real challenges right now, and many teams are doing more with less. That's exactly why it matters to pause and recognize those who continue to show up, care deeply, and provide a safe, nurturing environment for our children. Appreciation doesn't have to be big to be meaningful—it just has to be genuine.

Kind regards,

Amber Bishop, M. Ed.
Owner, Kids 'R' Kids of Pelham Medical Center
SCAECE Board Member

SCAECE Legislative Update

2026 Session Recap from the State House

The 2026 Legislative Session is coming to an end — though it will be an adventure all the way to the finish. While the General Assembly is scheduled to end the session on May 14, lawmakers could return almost immediately to take up a new Congressional District map for the state's seven congressional seats.

A significant piece of legislation has become law that will reduce the state individual income tax for you as well as your employees. The immediate reductions are somewhat incremental, but they are notable — and over the next several years, with continued state revenue growth, the new two-bracket system will be reduced further. The 1.99 percent bracket will go to zero, and the 5.2 percent bracket will be reduced to 1.99 percent.

In addition, there has been tremendous work done in the House and Senate on the **Small Business Regulatory Freedom Act**. It is almost to the finish line, and if it becomes law there will be a more aggressive review of regulations affecting small business and a better opportunity to reduce unnecessary red tape.

Looking Ahead: The Governor's Race

Of great importance for the child care industry is the upcoming Governor's race. No matter who wins, there will likely be new agency directors at some — if not all — of the agencies. If there are changes at the top of DSS, there will be a window for the Association to get in early and be heard by the new administration.

Friends of the Child Care Industry

Related more specifically to the Association's membership: there are active supporters of providers at the General Assembly. With the right effort by the Association's membership, significant changes can be made to improve the climate for child care businesses.

Chairman Shannon Erickson is a seasoned legislator with a deep understanding of the industry, although she is no longer in the business herself. **Senator Ross Turner** of Greenville continues to grow in knowledge about the child care industry and is looking for ways to improve the business climate for parents, children, and center owners. **Senator Russell Ott** and **Representative Brandon Newton** introduced a resolution this year recognizing providers' important work and great value to their communities.

In addition, we have a new strong voice in the General Assembly: **Representative James Teeple**. Assuming he wins re-election, and given that he owns multiple child care centers, we have a legislator who understands the realities of our industry from the inside — an invaluable ally in the years ahead.

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STRATEGIES, LLC
A Subsidiary of Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd, P.A.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Thordahl
Lobbyist, Copper Dome Strategies, LLC
on behalf of SCAECE

Child Care at a Crossroads

Why Advocacy Matters Now More Than Ever

Across South Carolina, early care and education professionals are facing one of the most pivotal moments in recent history. As our industry continues to recover from the long-term impacts of the pandemic, new challenges—particularly surrounding the pause in state-funded child care scholarship programs—are creating uncertainty for providers, families, and the workforce that supports them.

Child care is not just a service—it is the backbone of a thriving economy. Without reliable, high-quality early education, working families cannot fully participate in the workforce, and businesses cannot operate at full capacity. Yet today, many providers are being asked to do more with less: maintain quality standards, support staff, and serve families—all while navigating funding instability.

For many centers, scholarship programs have been a lifeline. They've enabled families to access care they otherwise couldn't afford and allowed providers to maintain stable enrollment. The current pause has disrupted that balance, leaving families scrambling and centers facing difficult financial decisions.

"But within this challenge lies an opportunity—an opportunity for our collective voice to be heard."

Organizations like the South Carolina Association for Early Care and Education (SCAECE) play a critical role in advocating for policies that support sustainable, high-quality child care. Now more than ever, it is essential for providers, directors, teachers, and industry partners to come together, engage in advocacy efforts, and ensure that decision-makers understand the real impact of these policies on our communities.

What Can You Do?

- Stay informed on policy changes and funding updates.
- Engage with SCAECE initiatives and advocacy efforts.
- Share your story—real experiences from the field matter.
- Encourage partnerships with local businesses and community leaders.

We must continue to elevate the conversation around early care and education—not just as a necessity, but as a strategic investment in South Carolina's future.

Together, we can ensure that our industry not only endures but grows stronger, more resilient, and more recognized for the essential role it plays in shaping the next generation.