**We all need to join S.C. bishops in supporting public education**  
By Lucas McMillan, Guest Columnist  
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COLUMBIA, SC — As a native of Mullins, a political scientist and an Episcopalian, I was heartened by the recent call to action by the bishops of the state’s Episcopal, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and United Methodist churches. I hope more religious leaders and parishioners will embrace the bishops’ focus on the need for greater educational opportunities for S.C. children, particularly those in rural areas and the “Corridor of Shame” near I-95. And I hope we all will encourage our legislators to consider what can be done to improve education in our state.

I grew up in Mullins, a short drive from Dillon’s J.V. Martin Junior High School that has been showcased in documentaries about the “Corridor of Shame.” I benefitted from Mullins’ public schools, even though I did not have the same resources as some students in Charleston or Greenville. My family was always supportive of my education and furthered it at home, perhaps because my mother and paternal grandmother were teachers. I agree with the bishops’ statement that “the family remains the foundation of our society’s ability to nurture and develop people of character.” My paternal grandfather and father both chaired our local school board, so I am proud that my family worked to improve public education.

Today I teach at Lander University, a state-supported institution in a rural area. My work is to help teach and train young South Carolinians. My academic research on the ways in which U.S. states recruit foreign investment and promote exports has shown that higher levels of educational attainment — defined by the U.S. Census as the highest level of education that an individual has completed — correlate with increased economic development. My quantitative and qualitative studies of all 50 states for a decade illustrate this connection. In other words, helping to provide a population with educational skills today helps to produce good jobs in the future.

As an Episcopalian, I first heard the Right Reverend Andrew Waldo, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina, talk last summer about the public policy advocacy of the Lutherans, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and United Methodists. I was excited about this since most religious-oriented advocacy focuses upon national and international issues, such as global humanitarian relief.

And even before our parish knew the bishops would call on local congregations to engage in supporting public education, some of our parishioners started a tutoring program for children at the Greenwood County library. So, I am happy that we are contributing at the local level.

Greenwood is next door to Abbeville County, the lead plaintiff in the long-running lawsuit that revolves around the concept of a “minimally adequate” education that is addressed in the state constitution. Abbeville also is my mother’s hometown, so I feel like this subject keeps connecting back to me.

But this issue is much bigger than me or my family. It is about our state’s commitment to education, a public policy concern that connects to all families.

I am happy that the Christian Action Council, Interfaith Partners of South Carolina, and bishops from the African Methodist Episcopal and AME Zion churches have joined the LARCUM bishops’ effort. My hope is that many other citizens will as well.

In their letter, the bishops write, “Public education is also an essential component of ensuring that the people of our state are formed to be good citizens, prepared to be contributors to our economy, and given passion for the common good of society.”

Amen to that.

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