

July 28, 2025

Ms. Joyce Gerald
Board Chair
Jasper County School District Board of Trustees
10942 N. Jacob Smart Boulevard
Ridgeland, SC 29936

Dear Ms. Gerald:

A state-of-education emergency is hereby being declared in the Jasper County School District (JCSD), pursuant to the authority granted to my office under South Carolina Code Section 59-18-1640. This statute allows the State Superintendent of Education to declare such an emergency when “the district is classified as being in a fiscal emergency status pursuant to Section 59-20-90, or financial mismanagement resulting in a deficit has occurred.” By codifying the state-of-education emergency declaration power, the General Assembly anticipated dire circumstances that would require state intervention and vested the power to act with the State Superintendent.

After careful evaluation, I have concluded that declaring a state-of-education emergency is the only responsible path forward to safeguard the interests of JCSD’s students and ensure effective use of public resources.

As a result of this declaration, my office—if approved by the State Board of Education (SBE)—will assume full management of the district and all of its schools and the JCSD board will be dissolved. While I believe that the JCSD Board desires the best outcomes for the students of Jasper County, as a body it has not met the level of action or fiduciary accountability required to address the district’s ongoing and significant challenges.

Fiscal Watch was initially declared on March 24, 2023, and was triggered by JCSD’s failure to provide an audit within 60 days of the annual December 1st deadline. Since that time, JCSD’s fiscal situation has continued to deteriorate, resulting in the elevation of JCSD to Fiscal Caution status on February 29, 2024, and subsequently to Fiscal Emergency status on August 2, 2024. The JCSD Board did not appeal any of these fiscal declarations, likely due to the clear and ongoing nature of the deficiencies.

On August 2, 2024, I also requested that the Office of the State Inspector General (SIG) investigate JCSD to determine whether fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, misconduct, or violations of state or federal law had occurred.

The District's inability to produce timely audits—or any audit at all—has proven to be a bellwether of financial disarray that seriously threatens JCSD's future. Due to the serious persistent fiscal issues, I recommended to the State Board of Education (SBE) that the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) assume control of JCSD's financial operations as part of our ongoing technical assistance efforts. The SBE approved this recommendation on December 4, 2024.

Since the SCDE's recent assumption of financial management of JCSD, it has become clear that further action is necessary to fully resolve the District's significant fiscal problems. Despite sustained efforts by the SCDE, district finance staff, and external expert consultants, the 2023 financial records remain in such a condition that an audit is still not possible.

The State Inspector General released his report on July 11, 2025, identifying significant fiscal mismanagement, conflicts of interest, possible criminal activity, and significant failures by the JCSD Board to properly supervise and oversee the district's former superintendent.

One especially troubling finding involved the handling of an investigation conducted by a law firm that had been retained by the Board. After the firm's report found serious issues and recommended forwarding the matter to law enforcement, the Board failed in its most basic duty to act, violating its oath of office, contributing to government waste, and potentially exposing the District (or its officials) to obstruction of justice claims.

The report further revealed a pattern of misconduct by the former superintendent that went unaddressed for years. The Inspector General concluded that the Board "lacked oversight and basic contract management of the employment contract with [the former superintendent]."

The Inspector General also identified employment conflict-of-interest concerns involving the former superintendent that went unnoticed by the JCSD Board and tainted the accreditation process for JCSD. An accreditation review is currently being conducted by the SCDE to determine the extent of this impact.

These failures, among others, create a crisis of confidence in the Board's ability to adequately manage and oversee the District's fiscal dilemmas and provide a clear path forward for the future of Jasper students.

Therefore, by virtue of this letter, I am formally requesting that the SBE approve this declaration of a state-of-education emergency. The SBE will consider this matter at its next regularly scheduled meeting on August 5, 2025.

While District representatives may attend and observe the public portion of this meeting, the statute does not grant JCSD the right to participate. Should the SBE approve my request, the JCSD Board has the right to appeal that decision to the Administrative Law Court (ALC) within the 10-day window provided by state law.

In light of the pending declaration as well as the SCDE's management of JCSD's financial operations, the Board should not proceed with hiring a new superintendent or enter into any contracts without the SCDE's prior approval.

In conclusion, the SCDE has exhausted every less significant measure to rectify JCSD's fiscal problems. The decision to declare a state-of-education emergency for JCSD is necessitated by the significant leadership deficits and fiscal disarray documented by the State Inspector General, independent legal counsel, independent auditing professionals, and direct observation from SCDE employees providing technical assistance. The failure to intervene would constitute a dereliction of my duty as State Superintendent to Jasper County's students and taxpayers.

Sincerely,



Ellen E. Weaver
State Superintendent of Education

cc: The Honorable Henry McMaster, Governor
The Honorable Rita Allison, State Board of Education Chair
The Honorable Greg Hembree, Senate Education Chair
The Honorable Shannon Erickson, House Education & Public Works Chair
Jasper County Legislative Delegation
Dr. Sam Whack Jr., Jasper County School District Interim Superintendent