

South Carolina Certified Public Manager® 2026 George C. Askew Award Winner

The South Carolina Certified Public Manager® program congratulates the recipient of the 2026 George C. Askew Award, Melanie Cooper, SC Department of Education for her project, *Evaluation of Career and Technology Education (CTE) Weights and Scheduling Impact*

The George C. Askew Award is given annually to an individual (or individuals) deemed to have completed an exemplary Certified Public Manager® Capstone Project.

It was created by the American Academy of Certified Public Managers® to recognize outstanding projects throughout the country and was named in honor of George C. Askew who, by virtue of being the first name called in the first CPM graduation ceremony in Georgia in 1976, became the first individual to be certified by a Certified Public Manager® program.

Each CPM Program, through its CPM director, may nominate a capstone project to be given the award for its local program.

The criteria for selection include the project should:

- be innovative in its approach.
 - demonstrate an improvement in quality within the work unit as a result of the project.
 - show cost savings as the result of the implementation of the project.
 - be an outstanding demonstration of CPM principles.
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Nathan Strong and Bill Tomes serve as project mentors for the program. They review each project in its entirety and provide feedback and guidance to the CPM candidates. There were many great projects that will positively impact agency processes and the citizens of our state. Selecting a winner each year is no small task. Nathan Strong had this to say about Melanie's Askew Award winning project:

This project's focus was on the disparities in funding created by an outdated funding formula used to allocate funds for Career and Technology education to school districts across the state. The current formula is weighted toward enrollment in year-long courses rather than semester or block schedule courses. Melanie shared that as district scheduling practices have evolved toward semester and block scheduling a disconnect was created between instructional delivery and how funding is allocated. This structural change unintentionally reduces funding under the current CTE weighting system, which measures participation by enrollment period rather than instructional equivalence across the academic year. Over multiple years, this can translate into millions in unearned revenue, limiting a district's ability to invest in modern labs, instructional technology and industry certifications. This has especially affected smaller or rural districts. Her data analysis showed that approximately 78% of CTE enrollments

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occur within semester-based formats, yet the existing weighting formula continues to favor full-year courses, which comprise only 10–15% of the total enrollments. Support for revising the CTE funding model was identified through qualitative stakeholder engagement rather than a formal survey or interview process. District leaders, chief financial officers and program directors shared feedback during meetings, informal discussions and professional consultations conducted as part of her analysis.

To address the inequities, the initial step in her proposed solution involves establishing a cross-functional working group consisting of the SCDE Office of Finance, Office of Career and Technology Education, Office of Research and Data Analysis and relevant accountability staff. This group will review the existing CTE weighting methodology, identify assumptions tied to traditional year-long scheduling and develop an alternative calculation framework based on instructional minutes or equivalent instructional exposure. A pilot phase will need to be conducted over one fiscal year using a representative group of districts that operate under semester, block and year-long schedules. Pilot outcomes will be evaluated to ensure funding accuracy, equity and administrative feasibility. Following refinement, the revised model would be presented to SCDE leadership and legislative partners for consideration, with statewide implementation targeted for the start of a subsequent fiscal year.

Three graduates were selected to receive an honorable mention for their projects:

Pamela Kendrick | Office of Resilience

Evaluating and Improving Skills Mapping to Establish Best Practices for Agency-wide Talent Sharing

Kelly Whitlock | Department of Environmental Services

Optimizing NPDES Wastewater Permitting Efficiency to Meet Regulatory Timeframes and Reduce Backlog

Steven Suchomski | Department of Social Services

Reducing the Time to File Pleadings for Family Preservation Cases