

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Full Committee Meeting

Minutes of the Meeting

February 12, 2024

Members Present (in-person or remote): April Allen, Dr. Brian Newsome, Rep. Neal Collins, Dr. Bob Couch, Rep. Bill Hager, Barbara Hairfield, Sidney Locke, Sen. Dwight Loftis, Neil Robinson, Dr. Patty Tate, Sen. Ross Turner, Russell Baxley, Melissa Pender, Rep. Terry Alexandar, Melanie Barton, Kevin L. Johnson

EOC Staff Present: Dana Yow, Dr. Rainey Knight, Riley Dixon, Dr. Matthew Lavery, Dr. Jenny May, Hope Johnson-Jones, Gabrielle Fulton, Tenell Felder

Guest(s) Present: Matthew Ferguson, SCDE

EOC Chair April Allen welcomed the committee and introduced newly appointed committee members Melissa Pender and Russell Baxley. Tenell Felder was then introduced as the EOC's new Communications Manager.

Next, Ms. Allen requested to move up the agenda item to discuss merging the Academic Standards and Assessments & Public Awareness subcommittees into the Academic Standards and Assessments (ASA) subcommittee. She informed the committee of her request to merge the two subcommittees since they have met jointly for the past three years. Dr. Patty Tate would remain as chair of the ASA and Ms. Barbara Hairfield will be the Vice Chair of ASA.

After this request, Chairperson Allen presented an action item to approve the minutes from the December 11 full committee meeting. Rep. Terry Alexander moved to approve the committee minutes which was accepted by the committee.

Project Lead the Way (PLTW) Director of Strategic Accounts Victoria Brioc was then introduced to present PLTW's impact in South Carolina.

During her presentation, Brioc outlined the PLTW curriculum and shared that PLTW is in approximately 67 school districts with more than 568 programs in South Carolina. PLTW also has more than 2,000 teachers trained throughout the state. Brioc shared that 87% of PLTW's gateway students report that their PLTW course made them more interested in a career in STEM, and that the same was true for 92% of PLTW high school students.

During the question-and-answer period, Rep. Bill Hager asked if PLTW works with charter schools, private schools, or just traditional schools. Brioc clarified that they work with all schools.

Rep. Alexander then asked about the fee and accessibility of the program. Brioc stated that the participation fee was annual and that teachers and students throughout the school would have access to all PLTW digital curriculum.

Ms. Pender stated that her school, Coosa Elementary, uses the PLTW curriculum from Pre-K to fifth grade. She described the program as phenomenal and said that she and her teachers were

trained in the program. Pender also said the program develops problem solving skills in students, and that they purchased the curriculum that targeted South Carolina learning standards.

Ms. Hairfield stated that Charleston County School District was heavily involved in Project Lead the Way and that it was very successful at middle and high school levels. She then asked if lessons were available in Spanish. Brioc clarified that units and modules were available in Spanish.

Senator Dwight Loftis then stated that a key component of the PLTW program was that it teaches students to be problem solvers and develops skills that can be used in any industry. He then asked about teacher certification for the program.

Brioc responded that PLTW offers training throughout the school year, as well as the summer when it is taught by PLTW master teachers.

With no further questions, Ms. Allen called Dr. Lee D'Andrea to present her report on the Landscape of Alternative Methods of Instruction.

Dr. D'Andrea addressed the committee and stated she was delighted to be able to present her findings after four years of work. She then provided the background that led to researching alternative methods of instruction – specifically the eLearning Pilot Project and the landscape that has emerged post-COVID. Following COVID, EOC and General Assembly members expressed interest in learning about the effectiveness of virtual learning programs which school districts around the state were offering.

Dr. D'Andrea then discussed the elements needed for a successful virtual environment which included technology infrastructure and professional learning for teachers to develop effective digital teaching strategies.

She also clarified that eLearning was a term used to describe when face-to-face teaching needed to change to a virtual environment for emergency situations such as power outages or inclement weather. South Carolina school districts are allowed five eLearning days.

Next, Dr. D'Andrea went over the report's evaluation questions which included determining the number of students participating in a State Board Approved Virtual Program and the reason that students were enrolling in the program.

On-site visits were made to 12 locations including 18 districts. The student information categories were Instructor led, SC Virtual School, Online in-state, Distance learning, Online out-of-state, and Hybrid. A main observation was that virtual instruction required high quality digital ecosystems and financial resources.

Main findings included that school district data entry and quality were a challenge, virtual teaching strategies are necessary, and that it is essential to develop or purchase virtual courses for use.

Next, Dr. D'Andrea presented End of Course assessments comparing students who received instruction through the SC Virtual School Program, Online in-state, Distance Learning, Online out-of-state, Hybrid or Instructor Led.

Main findings were that the data quality was severely lacking – such that the instruction type was not coded in many classes. The second main finding was that face-to-face instruction had higher mean scores on average.

It was recommended that professional development opportunities in virtual instruction and data collection be provided for districts and that the EOC and SCDE establish a list of data fields needed for reporting. Dr. D'Andrea also recommended that school and district level reports be verified and to require that reports be submitted with 45-day and 135-day reports.

This concluded the presentation and questions were taken.

Rep. Alexander asked how the districts could better manage data quality.

Dr. D'Andrea responded the data needed to be examined from the people who are entering it, and that the data's student information system should be able to minimize human error.

Ms. Barton commented there would need to be accountability for not following through with the data requests – citing data of this nature was especially needed due to the nationwide chronic absenteeism data which is showing disturbing trends in student absenteeism.

Dr. D'Andrea agreed, reiterating the need for data to be gathered correctly at the district level.

Next, Ms. Allen called on Dr. Tate to give the ASA subcommittee meeting report.

Dr. Tate reported that Dr. Lavery presented an action item to the subcommittee on adjusting the student Climate Survey participation requirements for 12th grade students. She then asked Dr. Lavery to present the details of his presentation.

Dr. Lavery reviewed that the School Climate Survey was currently administered to all third to twelfth grade students. He then stated the EOC staff recommendation was that all students enrolled in third to twelfth grade be administered the School Climate Survey, and that only surveys from continuously enrolled students in third to eleventh grade be included in the calculation of the school climate indicator. All survey responses collected would be provided to school and district leaders for the purposes of continuous improvement.

Rep. Collins expressed his general disapproval of the school survey requirement for the school report card. He asked Dr. Lavery if the test would still need to be administered to twelfth graders at all.

Dr. Lavery responded that leaving out a group and asking them not to complete a survey could be perceived as denying that group the opportunity to provide feedback.

Ms. Yow also responded, stating that some school officials still expressed wanting to receive 12th grade feedback about their experience at the school.

Ms. Hairfield then expressed concern about the wording of some of the survey responses – that a negative response might be interpreted as positive particularly for middle schoolers.

Ms. Pender stated third graders at her elementary school have a difficult time with the survey responses as well. She also stated that some questions were confusing to students, yet teachers are not allowed to provide clarification. She recommended that survey questions be read to elementary students.

After discussion, the chair received a motion to accept the EOC staff recommendation to adjust the Student Climate Survey participation requirements. The motion was seconded and the motion carried.

Dr. Lavery then gave an update on the Added Value Growth Model stating that EOC staff proposed to federal stakeholders using a weighted average of RPT, RPP and VAM.

Following this, Ms. Felder gave an overview of the 2024 Annual Report. This year's annual report highlighted the Education Data Dashboard, the 2023 CERDEP Report, the 2023 Report Card Summary and the 2024-25 EIA Budget Recommendations.

Next, Ms. Yow gave the Executive Director update. The first item she discussed was the EOC staff Beating the Odds Investigative Study. She presented to members the criteria for the schools that were included in the study and clarified that the first investigative stage would be followed by a confirmatory stage with a separate focus on elementary, middle and high schools. The next point of information was the SC Military Task Force. The committee was updated that the task force met on February 6 and would have a follow up meeting this Spring.

Recommendations would be made on defining academic and physical characteristics of a military-ready student in K-12 public schools. A report to the EOC will be given in June 2024.

With no further questions, the meeting was adjourned.