

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting

October 8, 2018

Members Present: Neil Robinson, Chair; Dr. Bob Couch, Vice-Chair; Anne Bull; Rep. Raye Felder; Barbara Hairfield; Senator Greg Hembree; Senator Kevin Johnson; Rep. Dwight Loftis; Senator John Matthews; State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman; Patti Tate; Dr. Scott Turner; and Ellen Weaver.

EOC Staff Present: Dr. Kevin Andrews; Melanie Barton; Hope Johnson-Jones; Dr. Rainey Knight; Bunnie Ward; and Dana Yow.

Mr. Robinson welcomed members and guests to the meeting. For purposes of those attending and watching the meeting through SC ETV, he noted that subcommittees did not meet in September due to Hurricane Florence. State offices were closed. Therefore, the EOC meeting today will have several new items. He encouraged members to ask questions.

The minutes of the August 6 and 7, 2018 meetings were approved as distributed.

Mr. Robinson noted that there was one action item on the agenda. This item is a staff recommendation since the Academic Standards and Assessment Subcommittee could not meet in September. While the 2017-18 district and school report cards will not be issued until November 15, the EOC is already considering proposals to improve upon our state's accountability system. The action item is a request from the Aiken County School District to amend for the accountability system for 2018-19 regarding the definition of "college ready" to include students who participate in the Cambridge Assessment International Education program and earn passing grades on Cambridge Internal exams. Mr. Robinson then called upon Mrs. Barton to explain the request.

Mrs. Barton explained that currently, any student who earns a score of 3 or higher on any Advanced Placement (AP) exam or a score of 4 or higher on any Higher Learning International Baccalaureate (IB) exam is deemed "college ready." In May of 2017 Aiken High School became the first Cambridge Assessment International Education certified school in South Carolina. Students are eligible to earn the Cambridge Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) Diploma, an international curriculum and examination system. The Aiken County School District has requested that the definition of "college ready" be amended beginning with school year 2018-19 to include as "college ready" students who participate in the Cambridge program and earn passing grades on Cambridge International exams.

The Cambridge program was developed by the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. Currently, there are schools in 160 countries that provide the curriculum. In the United States, the Cambridge schools operate in the states of Florida, Arizona, Delaware, North Carolina, Tennessee, Louisiana, Washington, New York and now South Carolina.

The staff recommends that for purposes of accountability in school year 2018-19, a student would be deemed “college ready” if the student earns a grade of C or higher in any Advanced (A) Level Cambridge International Exam **or** if the student earns a grade of C or higher in an Advanced Subsidiary (AS) Level Cambridge International Exam in: Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Economics, English Literature, Environmental Science/Management, History, Psychology, Sociology, foreign language (Chinese, French, German, Japanese or Spanish) or foreign literature (French or Spanish). Furthermore, because few postsecondary institutions in our state have formal policies awarding credit for Cambridge International Exams, the staff recommends that the state monitor the postsecondary success of students who have earned an A or AS Level Cambridge International exam to determine what changes, if any, should be made in the accountability system in the future.

In addition, because few postsecondary institutions have formal policies awarding credit for Cambridge International Exams, the EOC staff would also recommend that, in collaboration with the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and the South Carolina Technical College System, the success of students at the postsecondary level be monitored to determine what grades earned on an A or AS Level Cambridge International exam should denote “college ready.”

Rep. Felder and Dr. Turner asked clarifying questions about the program. Superintendent Spearman voiced the Department’s support for the amendment. Superintendent Spearman noted that she had testified before the Senate Education Committee in Washington at the request of Senator Alexander about the importance of having multiple measures to evaluate schools. Sen. Hembree made the motion to approve the staff recommendation. Mrs. Hairfield second the motion. There being no further discussion, the committee voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

Mr. Robinson then noted that the next items on the agenda are a series of reports and information that provide timely information for the committee. Many of these reports dealt with the current accountability system and changes for the future.

Mr. Robinson then called upon Dr. Knight who facilitated a working group of educators, South Carolina Department of Education staff, higher education officials, business leaders, South Carolina Arts Commission, and parents to review the existing accountability system and recommend changes for the future. The group also looked at the recommendations that Superintendent Spearman made last fall to the EOC for school years 2018-19 and beyond. Dr. Knight provided an overview of the findings and recommendations of the accountability working group.

EOC members discussed the subgroup performance of students on SC READY. A document was shared with the committee showing the achievement gap in mathematics for grades 3 through 5 on SC READY for years 2017 and 2018. Sen. Matthews asked if schools could be identified that were closing the achievement gap. Ms. Barton stated that the EOC in collaboration with the South Carolina Department of Education, has initiated a project with REL out of Florida to identify schools who were “beating the odds” by showing gains in achievement for historically underperforming students. The project will identify schools that have shown exceptional gains over the past two or three years with historically underperforming students. Teams of educators will visit the schools to conduct interviews and focus groups. The goal is to identify what activities these schools are doing that contribute to the gains. The results will be shared with other schools.

Sen. Hembree asked a question as to whether the growth portion of the new accountability model was a measure of the subgroup performance given the growth rating was measuring the bottom twenty percent of students. He also questioned whether closing the achievement gap could mean lowering the achievement of students who performed at a higher level. Ms. Barton stated that parameters could be set so that closing the achievement gap could be defined as all students making progress.

Also, in reference to the achievement gap, Dr. Turner asked if the test items for SC READY had undergone a check for cultural bias. Ms. Barton stated that the EOC, through an outside vendor, HumRRO, had performed a cultural bias check. In addition, the SCDE conducts such a review on all test items.

Mr. Robinson then called upon Ms. Yow to discuss the Reading Symposium which was held as part of the EOC’s annual retreat on August 7. Ms. Yow directed members to a brief in their packet which summarized the Reading Symposium. Ninety-seven individuals attended the symposium representing local school board members, policymakers, school district leaders, school leaders, and teacher preparation programs from around the state.

The first objective of the day was to examine what the research shows about effective policies and strategies to improve the teaching and learning of language, reading and literacy. Four national experts went through their own research and also looked at SC’s results over time: Dr. Lorin Anderson, Dr. Timothy Shanahan, Dr. Stacy Leftwich, and Dr. Marilyn Adams. The pdf of the brief posted online has direct links to each of the presentations. Each of the presenters brought forward their knowledge and expertise on teaching young children to be readers and writers. They encouraged educators to challenge young scholars, stop the widespread practice of assigning below grade-level texts to below grade-level readers, and include a purposeful, immersion of phonics in the early grades especially with children who are vulnerable. They also encouraged motivating children by providing them with high-quality reading material that challenges them.

The second objective of the day was for each group – teachers and school leaders, district leaders, higher education, and policymakers to determine what they could do to improve language, literacy, and reading in SC. Each group held thoughtful discussions

after what had been laid out in the morning by the speakers. Each group came up with recommendations and needs for their group and common themes also emerged:

1. Reading/literacy cannot be taught or consumed isolated from other content areas. It should be infused across the grades and content areas.
2. There is a need for high quality professional learning grounded in best practice for in-service teachers in the instruction of reading.
3. There is a need to prepare teachers in pre-service programs for classroom experiences and individual student needs by adopting a systemic approach to the teaching of reading, which can be called literacy triage at the school level. This practice is aided by formative testing and observation.
4. There is a need to connect the way we teach and the materials we use to the experiences of students.

The Reading brief was sent to all attendees of the symposium and is also posted on the EOC's website.

Mr. Robinson stated the big question was what to do with the information to move it forward, asking for SCDE feedback. Superintendent Spearman discussed plans to bring suggestions for revising Read to Succeed to the legislature this session. She stated that the mode of professional development delivered to low-performing schools needs to change; lower performing schools need basic, prescriptive professional learning. This has already been implemented in the school districts the SCDE has taken over. Dr. David Mathis echoed the remarks of Supt. Spearman, stating that they would make recommendations to strengthening the teaching of reading in schools. He said we need to stick to the basics. He also stated that the "silver bullet" is the teacher in the front of the classroom. The Superintendent stated that we have to focus efforts on recruiting teachers, relying heavily on international teachers serving poor, rural districts. The SCDE is working on a plan to do this. Dr. Turner reminded members of the considerable pressures that are being put upon classroom teachers.

Sen. Matthews asked if schools using phonics were seeing a difference in kids' reading performance. Dr. Mathis said that when he was a principal, he implemented a phonics program that worked quite well. Ms. Yow mentioned a summer reading camp that also used phonics with success. Mr. Loftis asked about the pre-service training that happens with teachers, since it does not emphasize phonics. Supt. Spearman said that they would take a look at the pre-service programs since the focus of the SCDE is for in-service teachers.

Mr. Robinson then noted that the 2018 district and school report cards will be released on November 15. To prepare the public for the release of the report cards, the staff is planning a strategic communication plan to engage the public in understanding the report cards. Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Yow then provided information to the members. Mrs. Barton discussed the statewide data that the EOC provided to the public and to the press this fall during the release of the 2017-18 state assessments used for accountability. Mrs. Barton noted that several districts have contacted the EOC staff for comparable information

related to the percentage of students on track for college and career readiness for their districts.

Mrs. Yow took members through a new publication the EOC has produced designed to help non-educators with navigating the school Report Cards. She also went through the updated communications plan that outlined the scheduled activities associated with the release of the Report Cards. Rep. Felder asked if the Report Card Guide had been produced in Spanish. Ms. Barton and Ms. Yow stated that, although the document was not yet translated and could not be printed in Spanish, the EOC staff would get costs for translation and would post a Spanish version accessible online.

Mr. Robinson then called upon Mrs. Ward to showcase the findings of the evaluation of the 2016-17 Community Block Grants for Education Pilot Program grantees. While an independent committee reviews all applications to the program and awards the funds, the EOC contracts with evaluators from Clemson University and the University of South Carolina to determine how the grant funds were expended and the impact on improving early education in the grantee districts.

Mrs. Ward introduced Dr. Sandra Linder, Professor and Early Childhood Expert in mathematical thinking from Clemson University, who attended the meeting. Dr. Linder as well as Dr. Leigh D'Amico from the University of South Carolina compiled the evaluation. Mrs. Ward summarized the highlights of the evaluation noting that:

- (1) Eight awards were made that impacted: 14 school districts, 60 schools, 246 classrooms, and almost 4,000 students. The pilot programs provided 352 professional development activities with over 750 participants.
- (2) Five projects implemented national models.
- (3) The use of partnerships has yielded positive results across grantees. Grantees are being encouraged to act in a mentor role for other districts looking to implement similar models. Grantees were encouraged to develop specific plans for scaling within their own community and collaborating across the state.

Mrs. Ward noted the following promising practices in the grantees:

- Family Engagement as exemplified in the Cherokee County School District with community-wide implementation of LENA, a pedometer that measures the number of words spoken by parents to their young child.
- Emphasis on the social and emotional development of young children as illustrated by the use of TPOT in Lexington 4 and the Pee Dee Consortium.
- Expansion across districts. For example, the Pee Dee Consortium was not always a consortium! Starting with Florence 1 mentoring Florence 2, the consortium evolved into a consortium of nine districts and the Pee Dee Head Start program. In 2016-17 this consortium served 234 teachers and 1,500 four-year-olds.

- Expansion of the 4K program. The Lancaster County School District extended the 4K school year by 35 days during the summer prior to the implementation of CERDEP expansion during 2017-18 school year.
- Better data on young children was the theme in Spartanburg County. The grant helped fund the Early Development Instrument and its implementation countywide in Spartanburg County. This effort was spearheaded by an existing Spartanburg Consortia including the Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM), local First Steps and Spartanburg County School District 7 in 2015-16. Using a 103-item teacher administered tool, more than one quarter, 29%, of kindergarteners were identified as “vulnerable.”

EOC members asked that the information be shared statewide so that districts can learn from the examples of others.

Mr. Robinson then announced that in December the EOC must elect a chairman and vice chairman. Because state law requires that the chairman be a business appointee and that the chair can serve a maximum of two consecutive terms, the EOC will have to appoint a new chairman. Dr. Couch, however, can serve another year as vice chair. Mr. Robinson also noted that, due to elections this fall, there will be new business and educator appointments to the EOC. Mr. Robinson then appointed a nominating committee composed of Senator Kevin Johnson, Rep. Dwight Loftis and Barbara Hairfield with Mrs. Hairfield, an educator appointee to the EOC, serving as chair of the nominating committee.

Superintendent Spearman introduced the newest member of her staff, Angel Malone who is the new director of Career and Technical Education.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.