

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting

April 11, 2016

Members in Attendance: Mr. Neil Robinson (Chair); Dr. Danny Merck (Vice-Chair); Ms. April Allen; Ms. Anne Bull; Dr. Bob Couch; Sen. Mike Fair; Rep. Raye Felder; Ms. Barbara Hairfield; Rep. Dwight Loftis; Sen. John Matthews; State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman; and Ms. Ellen Weaver

EOC Staff in Attendance: Dr. Kevin Andrews; Mrs. Melanie Barton; Ms. Hope Johnson-Jones; Ms. Bunnie Ward; and Ms. Dana Yow

Mr. Robinson called the meeting to order, recognizing the audience that included David Whittemore, former chairman of the EOC and now a member of the State Board of Education. He welcomed the members and audience in attendance. He then introduced the newest member of the EOC, April Allen, who is the business appointee of the Speaker of the House, Rep. Jay Lucas. Ms. Allen is the Director of State Government Relations for Continental Tire

The minutes of the February 8, 2016 meeting of the EOC were approved as distributed.

Key Constituency:

The chairman recognized Dr. Brooke Culclasure, Research Director of the Center for Education Policy and Leadership at the Riley Institute at Furman University. Dr. Culclasure provided the initial results of two longitudinal studies that focus on Montessori education in public schools and South Carolina New Tech high schools, a TransformSC initiative. Both studies analyzed student achievement and non-academic measures such as social skills, work habits, and executive functions.

For the Montessori evaluation, Dr. Culclasure examined PowerSchool data from over 20 districts offering Montessori programs at 47 sites to approximately 7,100 students. The key research findings were as follows:

- (1) When comparing Montessori to non-Montessori public school students and controlling for student characteristics, Montessori students outscored non-Montessori students in Writing and English language arts assessment results with the results being statistically significant;
- (2) In mathematics, there were no significant differences between Montessori and non-Montessori student performances when controlling for student characteristics;
- (3) When comparing test score growth, Montessori student test score growth exceeded non-Montessori test score growth in Writing and English language Arts with the results being statistically significant. However, there were no statistically significant differences in math growth between Montessori and non-Montessori students;
- (4) Montessori students scored 6 percentiles higher on executive function assessments than did the same non-Montessori students with the result being statically significant. There were no significant differences in results of social skills and work habit assessments between Montessori and non-Montessori students; and
- (5) According to survey data, Montessori teachers were extremely happy with their jobs and wanted to remain in the teaching profession. Approximately 92 percent of teachers responded to the survey administered by the Riley Institute.

Mrs. Hairfield asked if Dr. Culclasure could explain the discrepancy between the math scores. Dr. Culclasure stated that the initial results demonstrate that the gap in mathematics closes over time. Senator Fair asked about the fidelity of the programs. Dr. Culclasure responded that of the 45 programs reviewed, only 1 fell into the mid-range of fidelity.

For the New Tech evaluation, Dr. Culclasure explained that the initial results focused on four schools, two that opened during the 2013-14 school year and two that opened one year later. Currently, there are nine New Tech schools operating in South Carolina and serving approximately 3,000 students. The New Tech design is based on project-based learning for students and teachers in high school along with a 1:1 computing ratio. The key research findings regarding New Tech were:

- (1) 9th grade New Tech students scored higher on both the end-of-course assessment in Algebra I and English I as compared to students in control schools. There was no effect on dropout, dual credit attainment or retention;
- (2) Regarding fidelity to the New Tech Design, the four schools had varying levels of fidelity. One school in its second year of implementation struggled with program fidelity while others are meeting expected fidelity targets;
- (3) From the perspective of teachers, the New Tech Design is more effective in teaching; however, teachers also report that the workload is higher than in a traditional learning environment; and
- (4) Regarding the College and Work Readiness Assessment, which evaluates student's higher-order thinking skills and determines preparedness of students for college or the workforce, the spring 2015 results showed improvement in the students' mastery levels as compared to the prior year, the freshman year results. The percent of students in the class that scored Below Basic declined from 16% to 2% while the percent Proficient increased from 31% to 42%, and the percent Basic increased from 51% to 54%.

Mr. Robinson asked about parent surveys and if the evaluators would be pursuing parental feedback over time. Superintendent Spearman discussed how the New Tech model supports the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate

Subcommittee Reports:

Academic Standards and Assessment - Mr. Robinson recognized Dr. Merck, Chair of the Academic Standards and Assessment Subcommittee. While the Subcommittee did not meet in March, Mr. Robinson explained that he and Mrs. Barton did meet with the Superintendent about the issues of delaying the state's accountability system by one year to conform to the new federal law, Every Student Succeeds Act. Mr. Robinson pointed out that there is a letter from Dr. David Mathis, Superintendent of Saluda County School District and President of the Superintendents' Division of the South Carolina Association of School Administrators requesting that the state consider a proposal to delay the state accountability system. Dr. Merck pointed out that in grades 3 through 8 the state is administering for the third straight year a new assessment. He advised that the three working groups that are meeting to make recommendations on the new accountability system need time to work through the issues. He noted that districts like his that use EVAAS will have a difficult time measuring student growth. A discussion followed and Senators Hayes and Fair asked questions about pending legislation that could be amended to accomplish the delay. Senator Fair recommended that the EOC propose draft language to the General Assembly to assist in the transition. Rep. Felder noted that bills proposed in the House and Senate to change the start date bill to August 15 need to be addressed this session. Ms. Hairfield asked if student performance in

science and social studies would be included on the report card. Superintendent Spearman suggested that the consolidated accountability system as currently proposed would include testing social studies and science grades 3 through 5 and once in grades 6 through 8. She also informed the EOC that the United States Department of Education is beginning to provide information and clarification to states.

Rep. Loftis raised a concern that, due to the number of STEM jobs in the state, the testing of science is important; therefore, students may need to be assessed more than once in elementary and middle schools. Superintendent Spearman stated that more performance assessments are needed to show that students understand and can apply the knowledge.

Dr. Merck reiterated his district's support for and usefulness of EVAAS. He noted it was a tool that gave principals information on student achievement. In his district each principal meets with teachers and discusses the results. While students do spend more time taking formative assessment, the formative assessments may in the future be able to replace the summative assessments with "exit" year testing in grades 5 and 8 being more valuable to students and teachers. Sen. Matthews stated that his objective is that all students graduate college and career ready and the state assessments used can determine that trajectory.

EIA and Improvement Mechanisms – Mr. Robinson recognized Dr. Couch. Dr. Couch provided an overview of the House-passed version of the Fiscal Year 2016-17 General Appropriation Act. He also referred the committee to two reports, one on the educational performance of military-connected students and the other a report on the parent survey results from 2015. Rep. Loftis asked about the shortages of teachers. Superintendent Spearman stated that the Department is looking at increasing the starting salary and at the possibility of pay bands. Sen. Hayes noted that fewer teachers are getting certified in math and science, areas that are impacting all districts. Rep. Felder stated that the House budget did look at recruitment and retention. Another concern is finding housing for teachers.

Public Awareness - Ms. Hairfield reported on the twelve focus groups that met in March. The results of the focus groups were provided in a report to the EOC. MarketSearch is also conducting a statewide survey of educators, parents, business and community leaders as well. The results of that survey will be provided to the EOC in June. Ms. Allen noted that global companies who move their employees around the world are looking for ways to interpret assessment results from state to state. Parents and families want some national comparisons. Ms. Weaver noted that the A-F grade model does provide clarity and in many states has been an incentive for the community leaders to work together to improve education. Superintendent Spearman stated that a research group is working with the Department to review various labels used to define schools. Sen. Matthews stated that nomenclature matters, especially in rural, economically challenged areas that are losing businesses.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.