

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting

April 12, 2021

Members Present (in-person or remote): Ellen Weaver, Chair; Rep. Terry Alexander; April Allen (remote); Melanie Barton; Rep. Neal Collins; Dr. Bob Couch, Rep. Raye Felder; Barbara Hairfield; Sen. Greg Hembree; Sidney Locke; Dr. Brian Newsome; Neil Robinson (remote); Supt. Molly Spearman; and Dr. Scott Turner (remote)

EOC Staff Present: Dr. Kevin Andrews; Matthew Ferguson; Dr. Valerie Harrison; Hope Johnson-Jones; Dr. Rainey Knight; Dr. Matthew Lavery; and Dana Yow.

Guests Present: Dr. Lee D'Andrea, EOC Consultant; Dr. David Mathis, Deputy Superintendent, SCDE; Dan Ralyea, Director of Office of Research and Data Analysis, SCDE; Georgia Mjartan, Office of First Steps; and Chelsea Richards, Office of First Steps

Ms. Weaver welcomed members and guests to the meeting. She congratulated Mr. Ferguson on his first year as Executive Director and Rep. Collins for his recent wedding. She also asked Mr. Ferguson to introduce Dr. Matthew Lavery, the EOC's newest Director of Research.

The minutes of the February 8, 2021 EOC meeting were approved and seconded. Ms. Weaver asked Mr. Robinson to present the report of the Academic Standards and Assessments subcommittee meeting, which met on January 25. Mr. Robinson summarized the discussion that occurred on the Remote Learning Report as well as the ECENC Report. He asked Dr. Andrews to give the report. Since a quorum was not present during subcommittee, Ms. Weaver asked for a second, which was received.

Dr. Andrews noted an amendment to a paragraph on page 11 of the report. It impacted the report that was printed for the members. Only 20% of students were reported on for this year's report, an impact of COVID.

Mr. Robinson amended his motion to include Dr. Andrews' noted technical amendment. Ms. Weaver asked for unanimous consent to make the technical amendment, which she received.

Dr. Turner asked for the reporting requirements required for the schools in this program. Dr. Andrews stated that they had to provide summary information to establish their eligibility. They must provide a financial audit and the number of grants and dollar amounts for the prior year. Once they are eligible, they must provide assessment information at the end of the year.

Ms. Weaver stated that if schools provided data, they are eligible for the program. Ms. Barton reminded the committee that if there are less than 10 students, data are not reported because of concerns about identifying individual children.

The report was adopted unanimously.

Mr. Ferguson then reported on the remote learning report. He first congratulated SC for being ahead of states, requiring assessment of students per Act 142. The report looked at students in 67 districts who were tested using MAP.

Key findings from the report include that less than 3 out of 10 South Carolina students in grades 3 through 8 are projected to meet grade level proficiency in mathematics and ELA/reading. Fall-to-winter growth is far below what is expected by normed growth projections in all grades for reading and in all grades except 5 and 8 in mathematics.

For the fall/winter 2020 cohort analysis, while the overall COVID slide has been most dramatic in mathematics, cohort percentile declines in fall-to-winter were most dramatic in reading. Achievement gaps also do not appear to have widened during fall-to-winter 2021. However, vulnerable student populations are likely missing from the sample.

The EOC recommends that we focus on student catch-up growth in addition to annual growth. The primary driver of catch-up growth is increased instructional time and high-quality instruction.

Another recommendation is to consider increased academic offerings and the re-organization and addition of instructional time. It is only after 2-3 years of intensive instruction of more than 200 minutes per day that students in the bottom quartile begin to cross the threshold of performance at the 50th percentile. We can't continue to do what we are doing and expect different results.

Finally, the third recommendation emphasizes acceleration rather than remediation. Remediation does not work for many students. There are many ways to do this, and school districts will have flexibility in implementation.

Sen. Hembree asked about vulnerable populations missing from the sample – is there any opportunity we will have to catch these students up? Students will be tested this year, but the concern is with the 95% requirement being waived will impact these vulnerable students.

Rep. Collins then asked if it was fair to say that the COVID slide means that five percent of our student populations became non-proficient. Mr. Ferguson stated that these are projections so the data he is asking for isn't in the charts presented; we can answer this question when we have summative data later this year. Rep. Collins stated that we needed to know who these kids are.

Rep. Alexander wanted to know if he heard that we were comparing vulnerable student groups. Mr. Ferguson stated that we wouldn't have that until we had census testing. We don't know how many students will opt out and the data will not be as comprehensive. Rep. Alexander asked what we will be done about African American students in largely rural areas; we will have to do something to reboot the system. Mr. Ferguson said we will have to double down on instruction for students who are far behind, especially in reading and writing over the next two to three years. He stated that we need to look at school calendars differently – look at summer instruction and even year-round instruction that focuses on intervention and teaching essential standards with scaffolding. We need more time with quality resources and with quality teachers.

Rep. Felder asked where the other students not reflected in data from 67 districts were. Mr. Ferguson stated that we did not focus our research on assessments other than MAP. Rep. Felder asked if we were able to identify if assessments were tested in-person or remotely. Mr. Ferguson stated that we did receive data about the environment students were tested in, but that may not have been the same environment instruction was delivered in. We weren't comfortable inferring that students assessed remotely also received instruction remotely.

Supt. Spearman stated that she would touch on some of this in her presentation although she pointed to nuances in the data that are important to point out.

Rep. Felder said that it appears that students need 20 minutes of ELA plus math, so we must come up with a better way to deliver instruction.

Supt. Spearman then provided an update. She stated that 72 districts are currently offering full 5-day face-to-face instruction for all students. Currently, 1164 schools are delivering instruction face-to-face; 96 are hybrid (2-4 days), and 1 school is all virtual. She discussed academic recovery and summer learning plans for school districts.

The SCDE has developed a roadmap document to assist school and district leaders with implementing data-based problem solving and choosing effective strategies and interventions that fit students' needs. The roadmap includes effective leadership; complete data system; excellent core instruction; targeted interventions; and district key supports.

In the academic recovery plans, districts will outline goals and strategies to accelerate learning for students in: Tier 1: Mild Remediation; Tier 2: Moderate Remediation; and Tier 3: Significant Remediation.

The work with the SCDE is doing with Education Analytics includes converting interim assessments to a common SC READY scale; using historical summative assessments and interims to predict scores if COVID had not occurred; measuring the gap between current interim scores and projecting interim scores to determine achievement gaps. The SCDE has developed an Academic Recovery Plan Template based on common data set and evidence-based practice expectations.

Dr. David Mathis and Dan Ralyea added to Supt. Spearman's update, stressing the need to implement recovery plans with fidelity. School districts will have a multi-year plan which will have to be evaluated.

Supt. Spearman stated that she was alarmed at the lack of growth coupled with some of the interventions being implemented. The science of reading is an important topic as is the LTRS training that literacy coaches are currently undergoing. The SCDE is purchasing curriculum for some school districts. Teachers don't have the tools they need currently. Ms. Spearman stated that with the federal money the SCDE has received, they have been able to purchase critical tools like the Learning Management System (LMS) and the Learning Object Repository (LOR).

Mr. Ralyea discussed the Rally tool that he stated started out as a tool for teachers. The tool now also includes social emotional supports designed to be delivered at the classroom level. Based on data from EA, incorporated into Rally, students are 2.4 months of ELA learning and 2.5 months in math learning behind where they would have been without COVID school closures. A reasonable estimate for recovery is two to three years.

Dr. Couch stated that all students don't need the full course. How can we speed up aspects of recovery for students who are behind in addition to all students? Supt. Spearman stated that it is important for teachers to know how to differentiate instruction. It is important to also make school fun and engaging for students. Dr. Mathis stressed that it is important to focus on the quality of instructional time.

Dr. Mathis said that engagement of parents is also important. We need to focus on building capacity in parents to help children at home. That is part of the plan with Waterford/Upstart. The LTRS training is also key for districts. Do teachers have the skill set to figure out a plan for kids? The transition from 4th to 5th grade in math is a key benchmark, according to Dr. Mathis.

Ms. Hairfield asked if teachers could see specific skills students are behind in with the Rally too. Mr. Ralyea stated that the display vehicle on the Rally tool uses a common platform, and that teachers should be able to see these data.

Ms. Weaver asked if all districts are participating. Mr. Ralyea said that not all districts have chosen to give teachers availability. Some districts have chosen to use other tools.

Rep. Alexander stated that we know that all districts are not all equipped in terms of capacity and delivery. He asked about the considerations for these districts. Dr. Mathis stated that they are doing audits in schools and they are hiring their reading coaches.

Supt. Spearman stated that they would be glad to come back and give a report on ESSER funding. Some of the pots of money include facility upgrades. She stated they are seeing how best to leverage these funds since this is an area that needs to be addressed in districts that lack an adequate tax base.

Rep. Alexander asked if a child does not have what they need by 3rd grade, what can be done? Dr. Mathis stated that there are examples of children overcoming learning loss after 3rd grade, but they are rare. We need strong strategies to help all children.

Ms. Hairfield stated that we need to assess children before 3rd grade, and that early childhood is the foundation for learning.

Ms. Barton asked if districts were identifying children in the intervention tiers. She also asked if SCDE is reading the plans and giving feedback. Dr. Mathis stated that they are partnering with Education Elements to determine which plans were the most promising.

Rep. Collins stated that this is frustrating since we need to have some sort of oversight over these plans districts are producing. Dr. Mathis stated that he believes that we will have models and exemplars after this process is over.

Ms. Weaver then called up Dr. Lee D'Andrea to deliver the final report of the eLearning Pilot Project. The findings from Year 1, 2018-19 were

- Components of participating districts included existing, well-embedded technology landscape, including a Learning Management System, instructional technology integration, teacher professional development, and 1:1 device distribution.
- Participating school districts reported that at least two years is necessary to lay the foundation for successful implementation.
- eLearning is a viable option for instruction on days when inclement weather or other natural disasters prevent school attendance; even make-up days can be eLearning days

Year 2, school year 2019-20, included the following findings:

- District leadership and organization structure were critical to overall success.

- eLearning was not the same as online, virtual learning for longer periods of time.
- Preparation and planning made a difference in the quality of the migration from a digital learning environment (in school) to eLearning (away from school).

For Year 3, the 2020-21 school year, the findings and recommendations include:

- When schools closed due to COVID, EOC staff pivoted for eLearning Year 3. Year of support for districts.

eLearning for the short term was not the same as virtual learning that is exclusively online.

- The development of the SC Digital Ecosystem (for the state and within each district) is critical to systemic student achievement.

The recommendations for the program, which is set to be transferred to the SCDE, include:

- The use of up to five eLearning days should be continued for all current eLearning districts in the 2021-2022 school year to allow for the make up for short term disruptions. Districts should report the use and reasons for eLearning days in the state level Student Information System (SIS).
- Additional research and resulting state level guidance is needed for the effective utilization of virtual classes, programs, and/or schools.
- The continued development of a digital ecosystem at both the district and state level should be supported. State level support and guidance is necessary to ensure resources and equity of access.
- There is a need for intentional work to standardize and collect data, particularly as it relates to attendance, virtual offerings, and conditions for success measures, such as access to high-speed internet at home.

Following Dr. D'Andrea's report, Ms. Weaver called upon Ms. Mjartan, Mr. Ralyea, and others to present on the SC Early Learning Extension. Ms. Mjartan discussed this project, as the lead agency on the SC Early Childhood Advisory Council. The recommendations on early childhood program data they heard from the EOC include: improve data quality (e.g., demographics); update county-level data at least annually; track eligible population vs. those served through publicly-funded programs; link to outcomes longitudinally via unique identifiers; and allow for disaggregation of outcomes by demographics. The consortium is building the SC Early Learning Extension of the K-12 Statewide Longitudinal Data System.

The final item on the agenda was the EOC's 2021 Annual Report. Ms. Yow briefly presented the document, which was included in the EOC packet. The document, which is required by State statute, was provided to all members of the SC General Assembly, on March 1, 2021.

There being no additional business, the meeting adjourned.