

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting

October 10, 2016

Members Present: Danny Merck, (Vice-Chair); April Allen; Cynthia Bennett; Anne Bull; Bob Couch; Sen. Mike Fair; Rep. Raye Felder; Barbara Hairfield; Sen. Wes Hayes; Rep. Dwight Loftis; Rep. Joe Neal; State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman; John Stockwell; PattiTate; and Ellen Weaver.

EOC Staff Present: Melanie Barton; Kevin Andrews; Paulette Geiger; Rainey Knight; Bunnie Ward; and Dana Yow.

Dr. Merck welcomed the members and guests. He noted that the chairman was not able to be in Columbia today due to the impact of Hurricane Matthew. Dr. Merck expressed his and the committee's thoughts and prayers for the affected communities.

The minutes of the July 31 and August 1 summer retreat meeting were approved as distributed.

Dr. Merck recognized Brandi Sabb, Director of the K-12 State and District Partnerships and Asenith Dixon, Director of Government Relations in the South for The College Board to share an update on Advanced Placement (AP) results for South Carolina. The most recent AP results show that South Carolina students performed above the national level, with more students taking AP exams and more students scoring a 3 or higher. The College Board estimated that for the state's investment of \$3.4 million for AP courses saved parents over \$34 million in the cost of college courses. The College Board representatives asked that South Carolina consider using AP passage rates in the definition of postsecondary readiness for purposes of complying with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Rep. Loftis asked if all students in the state have access to AP courses. Superintendent Spearman responded that while virtual course offerings exist there are still technological challenges that prevent some students from having access to the courses. However, Superintendent Spearman said that the Department is committed to increasing the availability of courses across the state.

Then Dr. Merck recognized Dr. David Mathis, Superintendent of the Saluda County School District. Dr. Mathis who introduced members of the Accountability Working Group from the South Carolina Association of School Administrators in attendance: Dr. Karen Woodward, former superintendent of Lexington School District 1; Dr. Debbie Hamm, superintendent of Richland 2; Dr. Russell Booker, superintendent of Spartanburg 7; and Bruce Royster, superintendent of Greenville County School District. The group provided an update to the EOC on the status of recommendations for merging the federal and state accountability systems. The superintendents focused on the need to create a 21st century continuous improvement accountability system with multiple measures. Ms. Weaver asked if any other states had implemented comparable accountability systems without summative ratings and what were the consequences. Dr. Woodward referred to New Hampshire who is developing a Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE). Rep. Loftis expressed concern that, while educators may be able to understand the metrics, the public and parents might be confused by an accountability system that does not have an overall ranking or rating, especially since the state has to identify the lowest five percent of Title I schools per the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Dr. Merck recognized Rob Cardelli, an independent consultant who managed the Technology Readiness Studies of the Abbeville equity school districts for the South Carolina Department of Education. Mr. Cardelli explained how the districts were evaluated for technology readiness on the following measures: facilities; infrastructure; hardware; teacher readiness; student readiness; funding; strategic planning; and technical support. The common themes found included: high teacher turnover that directly impacts teacher readiness; low salaries for technical staff that are significantly below market verges; the use of CATE labs for testing in lower grades that displace the CATE students; limited information technology resources; and districts that collaborate with peers or consortiums are generally better prepared for online testing. Rep. Neal expressed concern with the findings of the report and need to address the technology needs of districts.

Subcommittee Reports:

Dr. Merck provided an update on the Academic Standards and Assessment Sub committee's meeting on September 19. Ms. Hairfield discussed the joint meeting of the subcommittees which was held on October 3 and was a public hearing to get input on the merging of the state and federal accountability reports. She provided summary of the meeting where Dan Ralyea, Director of Data Management from the SC Dept. of Education, presented the report card portal developed by the SCDE. She also summarized remarks from those who spoke to the committee on the merged accountability system:

- Chandra Robinson and Albert Robinson from the Social Studies Supervisors Association spoke. Both talked about the need for social studies to remain a vital part of the accountability system. Both discussed the need for strong civics education and reminded members that "social sciences" were an integral part of the Profile of the SC Graduate.
- Tana Lee and three of her colleagues from Career and Technical Education Centers discussed their wish to move the unit requirements for a CATE Completer from 4 to 3.
- Both Hunter Schempf, the Director of Policy and Analytics with the SC Public Charter School District and Kerry Donahue, Director of Strategy spoke on behalf of the Charter School District. Mr. Schempf discussed the need for accountability, stating it was a hallmark of charter schools. He stated that a student growth model really matters and encouraged careful attention be given to this in the accountability model. He also said it is important to include growth models that include math, not just reading. Schempf's colleague Kerry Donahue stated that we have a broader opportunity to advanced public education with the development of the new accountability system. She said we often lose sight of to whom the education system is accountable to – the students. We must view accountability as an important duty and we need pressure to improve. She suggested using former Governor Jeb Bush's requirements in a system: 1. A system must measure data that accountability reflects; 2. Disseminate results; and 3. Reward and incentivize success. It is important to fully align a system to an articulated goal. Use alignment and track progress early on. Student growth must be tracked. Lastly, annually disaggregate goals.
- Mr. Rodney Johnson, Principal of the LEAD Academy Charter School, a school in the Public Charter School District, felt in his remarks that schools need to be judged fairly and that report cards are a good tool for the public to know about our schools. He also feels like a big focus of report cards should be student learning growth, achievement gap closure, career readiness, and the need to make sure students are ready to achieve. Parents without backgrounds in education need report cards to be meaningful in an accessible way. Johnson supports a summative rating and suggested that we look at a way that report cards can be digested in a meaningful way.

- Dana Laurens, with SC Students First, spoke to the group and gave five broad recommendations for the new accountability system. Data must be released in a timely manner – as close to the school year. Need data before the start of the school year. The recommendations include 1. Report cards need to be accessible. Need one-page report with performance ratings. Laurens reminded the group that 11 of 16 SREB states use A-F rating systems to rate schools. 2. Schools with at least one subgroup at the lowest performance level shouldn't earn the highest accountability rating. 3. Ensure state data from all grade levels should be included in report cards. Need to know if students are on track. 4. Set rigorous cut scores that reflect high standards. 5. Create longitudinal data system.
- Oran Smith from Palmetto Promise Institute discussed the A-F grading system in Florida, pointing to the research that shows that A-F communicates to parents and families that are not familiar with the education system. It clearly communicates. He suggested schools and districts having one overall grade; it is clear, transparent, and unambiguous. Schools rated "F" don't mean the teachers there are "F" teachers. We must reward growth which provides incentives to get students to grade level.
- The final speaker was Bernadette Hampton, who is a high school teacher and the President of the SC Education Association. She appealed to the group for smaller class sizes and a reduction of testing, which would free teachers up to instill a love of learning within their students. We need wrap-around services for students, who come to the classroom with a host of needs. She also said that while world and multiple languages in the Profile of the SC Graduate, there is no identification within the accountability system.

Dr. Couch provided a summary of two reports that are information items. The first report is the report required by Proviso 3.6 of the 2015-16 General Appropriation Act which requires the EOC to report on the expenditure of the \$29.3 million in lottery revenues appropriated annually since 2014-15 for K-12 Technology Initiative. These funds are to improve external and internal connections to schools and districts and to develop or expand 1:1 computing initiatives. Schools and school districts responded to an online survey conducted in collaboration with the SC Department and EOC. The survey responses, which are self-reported, document the following:

- Districts expended the majority of funds to replace or purchase devices, 67% in 2014-15 and 63% in 2015-16. Districts also expended 16% in 2014-15 and 20% in 2015-16 to improve internal connections.
- The greatest challenge continues to be internal connections within the school walls. Only slightly half of schools, 55%, have at least 1 Mbps of bandwidth within the school.
- Regarding one-to-one computing, 28% of schools reported having 1:1 computing available for 91% or more of their students. Another 27 percent of schools reported having no students with 1:1 learning. Those schools which total 335 schools are in noted in Table 8.

The second report concerned the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children Program. The EOC is required by Proviso 109.15 to approve eligible schools to participate in the program. The report documents the procedures that were taken by the EOC in approving the schools. To date, 111 schools have been approved to participate. For comparison purposes, there were 117 schools that participated in the program last fiscal year. The report also documents that 100 schools applying to participate in the program received tuition grants last year for 1,626 students totaling just over \$10 million in grants.

Finally, Dr. Merck recognized Dr. Rainey Knight to report on the results of the 2014-15 Community Block Grants for Education Pilot Program. Dr. Knight provided copies of the full report to the members as well as a summary of the findings. She asked that members review the details and she would respond to any questions.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at noon.