

## SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

### Minutes of the Meeting

June 15, 2020

**Members Present (in-person or via WebEx):** Ellen Weaver, Chair; Terry Alexander; April Allen; Rep. Neal Collins; Dr. Bob Couch, Rep. Raye Felder; Barbara Hairfield; Sen. Greg Hembree; Sen. Kevin Johnson; Dr. Brian Newsome; Dr. David Mathis (for Supt. Molly Spearman); Neil Robinson; John Stockwell; Patti Tate; and Dr. Scott Turner

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

**Guests Present (in-person or via WebEx):** Dr. Lee D'Andrea; EOC Consultant; Dr. Christine DiStefano, USC; Dr. Fred Greer, USC; Dr. Larry Miller, Greenville Technical College; Chelsea Richard, SC First Steps; Debbie Robertson, SC First Steps; Martha Strickland, SC First Steps

Ms. Weaver welcomed members and guests to the meeting. The minutes of the April 20, 2020, EOC meeting were approved and seconded with an edit: Dr. Newsome attended the meeting in April. Ms. Weaver discussed many of the current events, both state and national, pertaining to education policy. She then asked Dr. DiStefano to present the findings from the 2019 administration of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA).

Dr. DiStefano discussed how results showed slight improvements across the board, when comparing students for the three statewide administrations. Roughly a third of students are demonstrating readiness, with slight gains across years. She also presented the results by ethnicity, poverty status, and by prior setting type (i.e., First Steps CERDEP, Public CERDEP, Head Start, informal, etc.). There are disparities in readiness for minority and lower incomes students as compared to White students. Regarding ideas for future examination, Dr. DiStefano stressed the need for better data collection methods and data quality so that matching techniques to compare participants. The report included seven recommendations: 1.) Improve data management; 2.) Update scprofile.com; 3.) report date of KRA administration; 4.) study KRA results by ELL & SPED status, household income; 5.) KRA domain results should be shared with families along with resources for assisting their child; 6.) explore potential for using a briefer KRA; and 7.) training for First Steps and public system 4K teachers to attain a common familiarity with skills measured by KRA.

Senator Johnson said it looked like African American students are not doing well. He is concerned about students in poverty too. He said we need to do a better job of closing the achievement gap at the beginning of kindergarten.

Sen. Hembree noted we are seeing an increase in readiness; he asked if we have theories about why that would be. Dr. DiStefano said that the increase could potentially be attributed to familiarity with the test since teachers have given the assessment for a few years. They also know the skills that need to be addressed. She said it would be great to ask teachers what they are seeing with these kids. We also need to make sure that we are testing at a uniform time.

Sen. Hembree noted the increase in Dillon and Fairfield school districts. He asked if part of the charge with this report is to look at what is being done in these districts leading to increases. Dr. DiStefano said they didn't go into the district level although that would be interesting to look at. She noted that the number of students tested could be a factor; it is harder to move a larger population of children.

Sen. Hembree asked about a shorter test – would the value of the test be going to a shorter test? He has heard teacher ask about this. Dr. DiStefano said that this is something to explore and investigate. Dr. Stockwell asked about the purposes of the KRA: what information is provided to them in order to help children? There is no return on investment for teachers, and teachers have not been shown that the test is meaningful. The results in other states are available quicker. Dr. Stockwell said the EOC would benefit from some brain science research. Would be interesting to look at the variables to see what his making a difference for these children. KRA completely misses the point. We need to do something different, stated Dr. Stockwell.

Rep. Alexander asked about when we do these assessments, and when these children are tested again. Teachers are saying that testing children in Kindergarten and then waiting four years is not a good strategy. Dr. DiStefano suggested looking at the relationship between KRA and some of the formative assessments to see if there is a way to compare achievement.

Rep. Felder asked if we know what the testing requirements for KRA are in Maryland and Ohio. She is also concerned about the SC First Steps CERDEP data. She wants to know if we can identify what is being done in communities where there is a high percentage of students doing well on the KRA. What is happening in those communities that is working so well? What happens between birth and age 3? We need ways of informing the community much earlier. She also would like to see a measure of KRA's value from teachers and principals.

Ms. Weaver asked if we know if any of these students are English Learners or have special needs? Do we collect this in current data? Not sure if that is in the dataset, and we aren't getting it. Rep. Alexander would like to follow-up with Rep. Felder's request to see what Fairfield, Dillon, and others are doing differently. Maybe we can look at what they have access to. He suspects there is not an achievement gap, but an access gap. Dr. Newsome reiterated the need to talk to teachers, since we do not get systematic feedback from teachers on the KRA.

Sen. Johnson noted the huge drop in Florence 4. Do we have any data that show why there was such a huge drop? Is there something going on there? Dr. Stockwell suggested it is time to take a hard look at First Steps. There are some programs in communities that are not performing well; there are high degrees of effectiveness in different communities but not consistent everywhere.

Following discussion, Ms. Weaver asked Dr. Miller to present his report on the funding of charter schools in SC. In terms of enrollment findings, Dr. Miller stated there were five virtual charter schools out of 71 charter schools in his sample, but the virtual charter schools serve 31% of charter school students in South Carolina. Virtual charter schools serve a slightly more costly to educate student population than brick-and-mortar charter schools. Seven out of 35 charter schools reported that they do not have a school-based attendance policy, and instead follow state guidelines. A few charter schools had exemplary attendance policies that should be shared statewide. The two online charter school attendance policies we received did not address the

state's" real time" instruction requirement and we could not obtain data from state sources showing compliance with this rule.

Dr. Miller suggested the following short-term policy considerations:

- Establish an in-person attendance policy and reporting requirements for virtual schools and school-specific attendance policy requirements for all charter schools.
- Collect annual financial reports (AFR's) from all charter schools each year and making them available for download.
- Convene charter schools to recognize and promote financial reporting best practices.
- District-level spending is insufficient - make school level spending transparent.
- Allocate all charter school funding through the existing weighted student formula.
- Use the success-spending quadrants to inform schools of where they stand and pair those needing improvement with high performers.

Dr. Miller suggested the following medium-term policy considerations:

- Poor student outcomes in virtual schools is a national problem and South Carolina can strengthen both funding formulas and accountability standards for virtual charter schools, and thus become a leader in the country.
- Follow New Hampshire's approach and fund virtual charter schools on completion of student assignments to support personalized learning.
- After all funds are going through the funding formula (weighted or performance), re-evaluate weighted and add on services.

Sen. Hembree stated that virtual charters tell him that they are being judged unfairly since they are being used as a "dumping ground" by school districts. Is this accurate or is it an overstatement?

Dr. Miller stated this is a fair question since virtual schools are showing almost 41 fewer days of learning, they are not keeping pace with brick and mortar schools since there are limitations. Additional accountability measures need to be taken to improve the outcomes of virtual schools.

Ms. Weaver then called upon Mr. Robinson to present the report of the ASA Subcommittee. English 2 End-of-Course Assessment

The ASA Subcommittee received a report on June 3 from Dr. Christine DiStefano at USC. The End-of Course in English 2 (EOCEP English 2) is scheduled to replace the English 1 assessment for accountability reporting. Dr. DiStefano reviewed test information and procedures to ensure the test provides valid and reliable information. The evaluation provided a comprehensive review of testing procedures, alignment, content review, and evaluation of item indices from the English 2 assessment. Overall, the study found that English 2 test items were aligned with content standards and accurately represent expectations by content domain and Depth of Knowledge. Test materials and procedures are adequate and support preparation and fidelity of administration. Item statistics are enough to support the construction of operational forms. Scoring and cut-score information supports use of the scores for accountability at local and federal levels. The test was recommended for approval by the ASA Subcommittee. A motion was made and seconded to approve the test.

Mr. Robinson then moved on to the Educational Performance of Military-Connected Students report. Dr. Valerie Harrison presented the 2020 Educational Performance of Military-Connected

Students, to the ASA Subcommittee report for approval. This report focuses on military connected children who attend primary, elementary, middle, and high schools in SC. As required, the annual report includes data on the attendance, academic performance in reading, math, and science, and graduation rates of military-connected children. There were 16,515 military-connected students in South Carolina's public schools in school year 2018-19. Almost 74 percent of military-connected students have at least one parent who is active duty, a slight increase from the prior school year; approximately 83 percent (13,780) students attended one of eleven school districts.

Military-connected students continue to perform better than their peers (tested students of their same age and grade level) on state-administered standardized tests. The performance of military-connected students, as compared to their peers, is most significant in third through fifth grades. During the 2018-19 school year, the high school graduation rate for all military-connected students was 86.9 percent, down from 94.1 percent in 2017-18. The state on-time graduation rate in 2018-19 was 87.6 percent. The report was recommended for approval by the ASA Subcommittee. A motion was made and seconded to approve the report as submitted

Mr. Robinson then moved on to the Parent Survey Report. Dr. Kevin Andrews presented the Parent Survey Report to the ASA Subcommittee. There continues to be tremendous consistency in results of the parent survey over time. The percentage of parents who indicate they are satisfied are 86 percent for the school Learning Environment; 74 percent for Home and School Relations; and 84 percent for the Social and Physical Environment of the school. In all three of these areas, parents of Elementary school students are more satisfied than parents of Middle or High school students. Parents of Middle and High school students are similar in their levels of satisfaction. Parents continue to report that their Work Schedule is the biggest obstacle to their involvement with the school (58 percent). 24 percent of parents indicate they do not receive notification of volunteer opportunities. About 20 percent of parents report that their child was bullied at school, most frequently in the classroom. This percentage has increased by less than 2 percent over the past 4 years. Only 1 percent of parents indicate that their child was bullied online. For elementary and middle schools, parent satisfaction increases as report card rating. For high schools this pattern is only clear for the school learning environment.

After the meeting on June 3, additional analyses were performed by: (1) Parent Race/Ethnicity, (2) Parent Education Level, and (3) Classroom Grades the Child receives. Those data were sent out by email to members the week before the meeting.

Rep. Alexander asked when the survey had been updated. Dr. Andrews said the survey had been revised for this year, but the survey was not given because of COVID.

Dr. Stockwell said he appreciated the demographic breakdown. The satisfaction with home school relations is markedly lower for African Americans. He said this bears clear headed examination because it is a problem.

The report was recommended for approval by the ASA Subcommittee. A motion was made and seconded to approve the report as submitted

Dr. Couch then presented the report of the EIA and Improvement Mechanisms Subcommittee. The EIA subcommittee met on May 18 and received the 2018-19 Teacher Loan Program Report as information. The report provides information from the teacher recruitment and retention initiatives that support the South Carolina Teacher Loan Program, and information for the Fiscal year 2018-19 about implementation of the South Carolina Teacher Loan Program.

In terms of the SC teaching force, approximately 6,650 teachers (in FTEs) left their positions during or at the end of the 2018-19, a nine percent decrease from previous year.

- The proportion of newly hired teachers who are recent graduates of an in-state teacher preparation program remained steady, accounting for 23% of all new hires in 2019-20. The number of SC students who graduated with a bachelor's degree and teacher certification eligibility during 2018-19 is up by 79 graduates. This is the first annual increase since 2013-14.
- SC public school districts reported 555.5 teaching positions still vacant at the beginning of the 2019-20 school year. This number represents an eleven percent decrease.

Applications to the SC Teacher Loan Program increased in 2018-19.

- The total number of applications approved increased from 1,132 in 2017-18 to 1,453 in 2018-19 for continuing undergraduate and graduate applicants.
- A significant majority of the 1,057 loan recipients (87.4 percent) were undergraduate students with graduate students representing 12.6 percent.
- Of the 206 applications that were denied, the overriding reason for denial (43.2 percent) was due to the failure of the applicant to meet the academic grade point criteria.
- South Carolina Student Loan Corporation reports that as of June 30, 2019, 19,537 loans were in a repayment or cancellation status.
- Historically, applicants for the program have been overwhelmingly white and/or female. This trend continued in 2018-19 with 81.7 percent of all applicants were female and 81.2 percent white.
- The percentage of male applicants increased to 17.2 percent from 16.7 percent in 2017-18.
- The number of African American applicants increased from the prior year to 35 applicants.
- The number of loan recipients at historically African American institutions increased from 1 in 2017-18 to 5 in 2018-19

South Carolina Teacher Loan Program-Recommended Areas of Focus

- Continuation of support for the Rural Recruitment Initiative and loan forgiveness programs
- Increased Minority Loan Access and Continued Review of Loan Eligibility Modifications as recommended (December 2017)
- Process for SLC Funding of All Eligible Loans.
- Revolving Fund expenditures guidelines.

Ms. Weaver stated she was struck by the \$8.6 million that is still sitting in a revolving fund. Dr. Stockwell likes the recommendation for minority access. Is there a group in state to focus on marketing to young black males in the state because he said a marketing effort is needed. Dr. Couch spoke about the Call Me Mister program. Mr. Ferguson stated that CERRA has a program built out for band directors and coaches, and they are looking to build that program up further.

Ms. Weaver asked if we had a clear idea about how many teachers would not be returning the classroom next year. CERRA is collecting from districts now but not reporting out until the fall. Mr. Ferguson said he would follow up with CERRA.

The report was recommended for approval by the EIA Subcommittee. A motion was made and seconded to approve the report as submitted.

Ms. Yow then provided an update to members on the Accountability Cyclical Review. Current state statute directs the EOC to work this year with the State Board of Education and a broad-based group of stakeholders to conduct a comprehensive cyclical review of the accountability. The results are to be provided to the General Assembly with a report on the findings and recommended actions to improve the accountability system and to accelerate improvements in student and school performance.

The group must be composed of parents, business and industry persons, community leaders, and educators. The cyclical review must include recommendations of a process for determining if students are graduating with the world class skills and life and career characteristics of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate to be successful in postsecondary education and in careers. The accountability system needs to reflect evidence that students have developed these skills and characteristics.

Process is ongoing. The group (16 individuals) has met twice. The first meeting was in-person in Columbia on February 24. The primary purpose of the meeting was to review the current accountability system and then members identified what their goals and priorities were. The second meeting was conducted May 5 and was conducted via web-call. The focus of this meeting was on the school quality/student success measures within the system. These can be academic and non-academic indicators. The group discussed what SC has used and what other states have used and then more importantly, talked about how these measures can tie back to the overall goals and priorities.

The group is scheduled to meet again on July 28. The focus will be digging into designing components of an accountability system and developing recommendations they see as immediate and those that may take time to implement. We are hoping that most of the group can meet in person. It is expected that the Accountability Framework will be finalized in December. EOC members will receive a survey about accountability.

Dr. D'Andrea then provided an update on year 3 of the eLearning Pilot Project, thanking everyone for their support over the last two years.

Dr. Couch discussed his district's experience with eLearning. There are still issues with a lack of connectivity and technical assistance on the learning management platforms.

Dr. Knight provided an update on the English Language Arts Standards Review. The EOC staff will complete the review of the 2015 ELA academic standards in two parts. A panel of national reviewers will assess the 2015 ELA standards. This panel will provide the EOC staff with the strengths and weaknesses of the standards as well as recommendations for improvements to these standards. The national and state level reviews will be conducted during the spring, summer and fall of 2020.

In addition to the national reviewers, the EOC will create a panel of state reviewers who will conduct a similar review of the 2015 English language arts standards. This panel will draw from nominations the EOC staff received from district superintendents, instructional leaders, classroom teachers, the EOC members, the SBE, the House of Representatives Education and Public Works Committee and the Senate Education Committee. The state panel will represent English language arts teachers, teachers of English Learners, exceptional education teachers, and parents, members of the business community. The EOC staff will submit a compiled review of the English language arts academic standards to the EOC in December 2020 for approval. The

document will also be shared with the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) as a resource in their review and revision of the ELA standards. Upon completion of the revision of the ELA standards, the revised ELA standards will be submitted to the EOC for approval. The SBE also must approve the revised ELA academic standards.

Mr. Ferguson then provided an update on the COVID-19 Impact on Students Review. The purpose of the review is to provide a review of remote learning's impact on student learning in South Carolina due to the COVID-19 school closures. The review should include the perspective of a variety of stakeholders regarding the opportunities for innovation, lessons learned for future planning, and barriers remaining to the success of this necessary endeavor.

Ms. Weaver provided a quick update on the retreat. The purpose of the day is to do some strategic planning and will be a unique opportunity for us to better clarify the vision of the EOC. Staff will make accommodations if members wish to participate remotely.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.