

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Annual Retreat, Day 1

Hartsville Inn & Suites Hartsville, SC

Minutes of the Meeting

Sunday, August 7, 2022

Members Present (in-person or remote): Rep. Terry Alexander; April Allen; Melanie Barton; Dr. Russell Booker; Rep. Neal Collins; Dr. Bob Couch; Rep. Raye Felder; Barbara Hairfield; Sen. Greg Hembree; Sen. Kevin Johnson; Sen. Dwight Loftis; Dr. David Mathis (for Supt. Molly Spearman); Neil Robinson; Dr. Patti Tate; Sen. Ross Turner; and Ellen Weaver

EOC Staff Present: Matthew Ferguson; Amber Adgerson; Gabrielle Fulton; Dr. Matt Lavery; Dr. Jenny May; and Dana Yow

Guest(s) Present: Beth Thompson, Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM)

Neal Robinson called the meeting to order and welcomed members. As the first motion, Robinson called to approve minutes from the last full committee meeting. Ms. Hairfield seconded the motion. All members voted to approve.

Mr. Robinson welcomed two new members to the EOC, Sen. Ross Turner and Dr. Russell Booker. Dr. Booker then began a presentation to the committee in his capacity as Director of the Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM), joined by Beth Thompson. Dr. Booker thanked the committee and introduced SAM, a nonprofit with a cradle to career approach aiming to improve academic outcomes in Spartanburg. Ms. Thompson noted SAM's use of National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data to improve outcomes in Spartanburg. SAM has been providing this data to the community for some time, using it to create a conversation around outcomes and inspire change.

In the summer, SAM joined the EOC for a series of presentations on NSC data to school and district leaders. Ms. Thompson thanked the EOC for advocating for the use of NSC data at the state level. NSC data shows whether SC students are enrolling, persisting, and completing postsecondary education. SAM shared their action items with schools across the state as examples of what can be done with NSC data. One example of this was uncovering the idea of "summer melt," or the number of students who intend to go to college compared to actual enrollment. In looking at NSC data, SAM discovered that as much as 20 percent of intended commitments "melt" over the summer. Therefore, SAM developed the START SMART program. This helped one high school uncover the students most likely to experience summer melt. Using this data, they implemented a summer coaching program. Mentors texted students (via a secure, monitored texting platform) to provide reminders on upcoming deadlines and troubleshoot the various tasks needed prior to class starting. This provides an essential person during the critical gap between high school and college. Once students in the program certified their enrollment, they were provided with a small gift card for their college bookstore.

Dr. Booker highlighted that it is SAM's goal to use data as a flashlight, not a hammer. Mr. Robinson thanked Dr. Booker and Ms. Thompson and opened the floor to questions. Ms. Barton

stated that the Governor and General Assembly put together the SC WINS scholarship program to assist young people. Ms. Barton asked if legislation requiring FAFSA would help. Dr. Booker stated that it's a challenge to require FAFSA due to the difficulty of implementation. If this was possible right now, it would definitely be a great step in the right direction.

Ms. Thompson stated that even with the work being done in Spartanburg, they are still only at 52 percent completion. Legislation could be helpful, but we would need accompanying resources to ensure it can be implemented. Right now, there is the need for a "flashlight" approach. Ms. Barton stated that with the amount of money going to higher education, that level of collaboration should be encouraged. Ms. Thompson also noted that the data show that a majority of students who do not complete FAFSA are the very students who need it, addressing the misconception that higher income students make up the majority of non-completers.

Dr. Couch noted the need to emphasize the importance of FAFSA completion. Dr. Booker noted SAM's partnership with United Way to provide financial aid workshops in communities. Sen. Hembree welcomed Dr. Booker to the EOC. Sen. Hembree asked if SAM was aware of the number of students who would not have attended college but for FAFSA completion. Ms. Thompson stated that they do not have that number, but that it would be a very beneficial one to have. Ms. Hairfield asked how early FAFSA encouragement should start. Dr. Booker stated that in Spartanburg, they begin the main push in October of a student's senior year. Dr. Booker also noted that Spartanburg's technical college has hired four new transition specialists to assist.

Ms. Hairfield stated that it is important to help students connect dots along the way. Ms. Thompson agreed, noting that FAFSA is incredibly time sensitive and requires input from the parent and the student within a set time period. Therefore, there is a challenge to let them know in advance during a busy time. Mr. Robinson asked about the size of SAM's staff. Dr. Booker noted that SAM currently has 13 staff members, but they are looking to scale up.

Rep. Felder asked if high school students who enlist in the armed services are included in NSC data. Dr. Booker noted that they are not included in the higher education numbers provided in NSC data. Ms. Thompson added that while we can never expect 100% FAFSA completion, there is certainly room for improvement.

Sen. Loftis noted that in technical colleges, some students may get a job offer and not complete a degree. Mr. Ferguson stated that we do not see a large number of students who get a certification but do not get an associate's degree, this number would only be about five percent.

Mr. Robinson thanked Dr. Booker and Ms. Thompson and introduced Mr. Ferguson for an EIA budget update. Mr. Ferguson acknowledged that Dr. Knight was unable to attend due to the birth of her grandchild. Mr. Ferguson noted that one of the larger investments in the budget includes \$100 million for instructional materials, referencing Dr. Steiner's presentation from last year in which he highlighted that high quality instructional materials are a key investment. The EOC now has received an additional \$3.5 million in recurring Education Improvement Act (EIA) funds to establish an education data dashboard. Mr. Robinson asked if members had any budget questions. Mr. Ferguson asked the Committee to let him know if they want to hear from any specific recipients of EIA funds. Recommendations will be provided by December 5th.

With no further questions, Mr. Ferguson began his next presentation on charting the 2022-23 course for the EOC in light of the EOC's strategic plan. For a detailed outline, reference the meeting materials.

Rep. Alexander asked if certification programs are still being included in the graduation rate for accountability. Mr. Ferguson confirmed this, stating that the graduation rate last year was approximately 88 percent. Sen. Loftis asked how virtual school graduates are being accounted

for. Mr. Ferguson stated that these graduates are reflected in each virtual school's graduation rate; however, this becomes more complicated when looking at virtual programs within a school district.

Dr. Couch asked if technical courses would be reflected in the data dashboard. Mr. Ferguson stated that this year, the EOC is requesting program codes so that we can follow student success and see if these programs interact. This year, the EOC will vote on the specific scoring for the new accountability measures, coming to ASA in the late fall, early spring. ASA will look at new ELA standards in November. Mr. Ferguson stated that we are beginning to start the conversation around report cards for career centers and for K-2. Looking at K-2 will help keep students on track for reading, as 3rd grade is too late to begin most interventions.

Mr. Ferguson noted that during the fall, the EOC staff will look at the data and seek to recognize schools for high added-value growth. Dr. Mathis stated that when we have conversations around K-2, there is a need for specifics on what "on track" is; some districts measure this differently. Mr. Ferguson stated that it should no longer be districts determining "on track" status. Sen. Hembree asked if there needed to be a statutory change in order to do this. Mr. Ferguson stated that no, there was not a need; the EOC has access to relevant data. Rep. Alexander stated that we often are able to predict in 3rd grade how a student may do in high school. Therefore, we need to be intentional with interventions and supports in first through third grade.

Ms. Weaver and Mr. Robinson thanked Mr. Ferguson and EOC staff for their fidelity to the strategic plan and focused communication. Mr. Ferguson introduced EOC intern Amber Adgerson, to present on the parent school climate survey.

Ms. Adgerson provided a brief history of the parent survey before noting the recent changes made. In the past, the EOC was only able to present results from prior years (2020-21 in this instance); however, this presentation will also include the 21-22 school year. The survey moved to a digital format and all parents in SC are now able to complete the survey, rather than being limited to certain grade levels. The survey analysis uses qualitative and quantitative methods and for the first time this year, the survey included several open-ended questions. This year, the survey was offered in other languages in addition to English, in order to provide a more inclusive approach to the parent population.

There was a slight drop in participation percentage, though an increase in participation overall.

Generally, parents reported feeling satisfied with learning environment, social and physical environment, and home-school relations. Home-school relations were strongly correlated with grade level. Grade-level satisfaction was often lower during transitional years. Sen. Loftis noted that maturity can also play a key part as well. Ms. Adgerson agreed, noting that this could be brought out in the open-ended responses. Ms. Adgerson noted the responses to questions about bullying, which showed a focus on bullying that happens in other locations besides the classroom. Sen. Hembree asked if cyberbullying might be included in that category. Ms. Adgerson noted that this could definitely be looked at. Ms. Barton stated that this reflects a national trend.

Ms. Adgerson stated that the survey was able to accept free responses due to the use of a new survey software. The software shows response and sentiment based on keywords and topics, while also providing word cloud visualizations and pattern-based topic recommendations. As we think about revising the surveys, she suggested making sure we are able to capture all relevant aspects of school climate. Ultimately, this data could be useful in a dashboard available to schools and districts. Mr. Ferguson noted that these logins have been purchased, so in the fall, schools and districts can use these data to plan and make improvements based on the data.

Ms. Allen asked if the software could also drill down on specific words included in responses. Ms. Adgerson confirmed this. Ms. Barton asked how parents accessed this year's survey. Ms. Adgerson noted that some administered it through Power School, while others sent home fliers with a QR code. Ms. Barton noted that perhaps the EOC could partner with SCDE to increase response rate, perhaps offering survey nights. Ms. Yow noted that the survey is also available through mobile devices. Mr. Ferguson stated that it would be ideal to text the survey to parents, but getting these phone numbers is incredibly difficult. Ms. Tate asked when the surveys were available. Mr. Ferguson noted that the surveys were bookended by school shootings in South Carolina schools. Ms. Tate also noted that they were conducted during testing season and that these could have been pushed aside. Mr. Ferguson stated that staff are looking to upload the parent, teacher, and student surveys to one dashboard in order to examine possible disconnects between stakeholder groups. Ms. Allen asked if there were disconnects corresponding to geographic area. Mr. Ferguson stated that yes -- certain schools and districts had low response rates, likely due to a technical issue.

Mr. Robinson moved to approve the report on the Parent Climate Survey Analysis. All voted in favor and the report was approved. Mr. Robinson thanked the committee and with that, the meeting adjourned.

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Annual Retreat, Day 2

Hartsville Inn & Suites Hartsville, SC

Minutes of the Meeting

Monday, August 8, 2022

Members Present (in-person or remote): Rep. Terry Alexander; April Allen; Melanie Barton; Rep. Neal Collins; Dr. Bob Couch; Rep. Raye Felder; Barbara Hairfield; Sen. Kevin Johnson; Sen. Dwight Loftis; Dr. David Mathis (for Supt. Molly Spearman); Neil Robinson; Dr. Patti Tate; Sen. Ross Turner; and Ellen Weaver

EOC Staff Present: Matthew Ferguson; Amber Adgerson; Gabrielle Fulton; Dr. Matt Lavery; Dr. Jenny May; and Dana Yow

Guest(s) Present: Frank Rainwater, SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs (RFA); Lisa Jolliff, RFA; and Lisa Wren, RFA

Mr. Robinson called the meeting to order and welcomed Frank Rainwater from the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office (RFA). Mr. Rainwater introduced Lisa Jolliff and Lisa Wren, who joined Mr. Rainwater to discuss the new funding model and RFA's new education funding dashboard. This new funding model combines programs, all with one formula, simplifying the process and providing districts with more financial flexibility. Classrooms are funded based on average student-teacher ratios, with a target of 11.2. The cost of teachers is based on the minimum salary schedule with a Masters degree and 12 years of experience. The FY22-23 budget accounts for 67,097 teacher positions. For more details on the new funding model, view meeting materials.

Rep. Felder asked what the current cost of teachers is. Mr. Rainwater stated \$52,604, with total (including fringe) costing \$69,153. This increase brings the cost of teachers to a total of \$4.6 billion -- 75% of this cost is shared by the state and 25% is shared locally. Ms. Allen asked what the general fund amount is. Mr. Rainwater stated \$12 billion, with the cost of teachers accounting for about 25% of that. Ms. Allen asked why the weight went down for Career and Technical Education (CTE). Mr. Rainwater deferred to Ms. Barton, who stated that other weights increased due to students being generously coded in middle school. As CTE is a program, every district implements it differently; currently, there is no state uniform system.

Rep. Collins asked if districts have full discretion in terms of funding teacher salaries. Mr. Rainwater confirmed yes, and that flexibility is built into the model. Dr. Mathis asked who is not included in terms of personnel. Mr. Rainwater elaborated that janitorial staff, secretarial staff, and like positions are not included in the allocation for teachers.

Sen. Loftis asked if retirement is included as a fringe benefit. Lisa Jolliff stated that this is funded separately. Sen. Johnson asked for confirmation that the \$4.6 billion is just for teacher hiring. Mr. Rainwater stated yes, and that this number is based on student-teacher ratios. Sen. Johnson asked if we have a total figure on what is spent on education in SC. Mr. Rainwater stated that he will need to pull this number as it is significantly higher than the \$4.6 billion, particularly due to costs associated with student transportation.

Ms. Allen asked if district discretion includes broadening the definition of teacher. Mr. Rainwater stated that all districts are allowed to do what they want with funds and to make their own choices. Sen. Loftis asked if this excludes federal funds. Mr. Rainwater confirmed this, and elaborated that each district has to publish their budget on their website.

Mr. Rainwater stated that RFA is in the process of creating a public dashboard to show expenditures, demographics, and performance per the request of the General Assembly.

Rep. Collins asked to clarify teacher salary, using the example of a math teacher in his district who has 30-35 students. Rep. Collins asked if that teacher should then make \$250,000. Mr. Rainwater clarified that the model is not based on class size, but on student-teacher ratio. Ms. Jolliff stated that salaries are ranges, with Mr. Rainwater clarifying that these decisions are ultimately the districts'.

Rep. Alexander asked how teacher salary and teacher aid costs are being formalized. Mr. Rainwater stated that this is on the expenditure side. Details will be shown on the dashboard. Ms. Weaver asked how we can be sure of uniform reporting. Mr. Rainwater said that it will be relying as much as possible on the existing database, however there may need to be some realignment. Sen. Johnson stated that one thing affecting student-teacher ratio is the teacher shortage. Therefore, in making the new funding model, they looked at three things: simplicity, flexibility, and increased funding in public education. Mr. Rainwater thanked Sen. Johnson for this addition.

Dr. Mathis noted that special education often needs more teachers and lower ratios; in years prior there was a severe lack of funds in special education. Rep. Alexander asked if the dashboard will show how many teaching assistants are in classrooms; Mr. Rainwater stated that this data should already be there. Ms. Barton stated that it would be good to see the number of teachers by content area.

Rep. Alexander asked what a special school is. Mr. Rainwater elaborated that these are schools such as Department of Juvenile Justice and School for the Deaf and Blind. Mr. Robinson asked how the 11.2 student-teacher ratio was arrived at. Mr. Rainwater stated that this was due to available funds. Ms. Barton clarified that the ratio was arrived at due to what funds are available.

Mr. Rainwater stated that this funding model represents a big step forward in educational funding, but that there are still numerous questions to consider. Sen. Turner stated that Education Finance Act (EFA) used to be 100%, then went down to about 30%. Now combined, what percentage is this per student now without strings? Ms. Jolliff stated that it is approximately 75%.

Mr. Rainwater showed an image of the proposed education data dashboard. This dashboard will provide important information on students, teachers, and funding. The public will be able to know how districts are spending funds and the General Assembly can watch funds over time and collaborate with school districts. Right now, the primary goals for the dashboard's development are to ensure that it is made of understandable technology and that data can be compared across school districts. Ms. Allen asked how the new formula will be incorporated into the dashboard. Mr. Rainwater stated that RFA recognizes that districts will be funded differently, and the dashboard will provide a summary of changes by district. Rep. Felder asked when the dashboard would be available. Mr. Rainwater stated that they hope to have something live in December.

Rep. Felder asked the State Department of Education staff about districts who may have irregularities due to lessened capacity. Is the State Department actively working with school districts to ensure that funds are appropriately distributed? Dr. Mathis stated that the SCDE is conducting bootcamps for financial staff in school districts.

Rep. Felder asked if instead of waiting for the end of the year, could financial snapshots be provided midyear, as there is the worry that some districts may overspend? Mr. Rainwater stated that they are trying to anticipate fluctuations throughout the year. Dr. Mathis stated that there is a need to highlight, for certain districts, the amount of funds left.

Mr. Robinson thanked Mr. Rainwater. Mr. Rainwater stated that if any members have additional questions, they are free to reach out to him.

Mr. Robinson then introduced Dr. Marguerite Roza from the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University. Dr. Roza stated that in most school districts, budgeting is not designed to address performance and equity issues. Typically, the financial team assembles a projected budget, which is brought to a working session. The financial team then trims the budget before bringing it to a second working session. Then, the budget is approved. While it is the State's job to deliver funds, it is school districts who spend it. What can the State do to make sure that every dollar is leveraged to do the most for students?

Dr. Roza proposed several things to keep in mind: 1) Students should serve as the "North Star," ultimately funds should be spent for students. 2) There is a need to make sure the system is using data to drive continuous improvement, while also celebrating successes. 3) There is a need to keep funds flexible, set goals for students but allow the flexibility to reach these goals. 4) Make sure staff are trained to implement that flexibility.

ESSER brought over \$3,000 per SC student and it has now been over a year since ESSER III. Dr. Roza highlighted that a year later, we have no way to know its success. We are not measuring it and are not clear in what we want. This led to the Edunomics Lab producing a calculator, where users can examine recovery investments and prioritize spending going forward. (www.edunomicslab.org/calculator).

Edunomics interviewed school district leaders and principals about spending. Overall, district leaders highlighted that they asked teachers what they needed and funded that. However, Dr. Roza noted, lost in this is that the money is ultimately for students. Typically, funds are focused on supply budget, not labor. Rarely, students are mentioned in discussions surrounding teacher salary increases. There is a need to look at data and treat schools differently in the budgeting process. Edunomics put together a model demonstrating spending versus outcomes (www.edunomicslab.org/spending-v-outcomes). Dr. Roza asserted that districts should use data like these in the budgeting process.

Dr. Roza highlighted the need for an "all hands on deck" investment for all kids. In order to do this, we need low stakes data to measure the process month-to-month. Even as states deliver money to districts, there often isn't a focus on ensuring that this will work. This problem is compounded by many districts not having the financial training they need. This can be ensured by requirements for school boards and certifications for district administration and principals. When showing the model to principals, many could not even estimate where they may be in terms of spending versus outcomes. Finally, Dr. Roza noted that Edunomics provides a Certification in Education Finance (dates can be viewed in the meeting materials). Mr. Robinson asked if members had any questions.

Rep. Felder stated that this provided a good perspective on Mr. Rainwater's presentation. Mr. Robinson stated that with the flexibility provided by the new funding model, there come new issues. Ms. Weaver noted that this calls for a real culture shift in terms of education funding, asking how states have turned that corner. Dr. Roza stated that, for example, some states are better at data and requiring exposure to it prior to becoming a principal. Some states now require district leaders to go through training on using data for decision making. Many school board

members are simply not equipped to handle education funding issues. States including Indiana, Tennessee, and Connecticut are making headway. While this is a culture shift, Dr. Roza noted that it is not an expensive one and it is not a politically charged one.

Sen. Loftis stated that when he served on a school board, this kind of data was never provided. Sen. Loftis noted that he agrees with Mr. Robinson that there needs to be a connection between allocation and student performance. Mr. Robinson stated that the Edunomics training is only eight hours, not a significant time investment, and something such as this should be required of school board members. Sen. Loftis noted that this is not to say that school board members do not care, but that they are not equipped. Dr. Roza agreed, stating that many do not know what questions to ask or what data to look at. Often, the budget cycle is not focused on student outcomes.

Mr. Robinson asked what the cost of the workshop is. Dr. Roza estimated that the school board one is approximately \$850 or \$650 for groups of varying sizes. Board members get a package of their individual data in advance of the training, which they are then able to bring to their next school board meeting.

Dr. Mathis stated that some districts have the capacity to look at data and some do not. There is a gap in the districts with utilizing data. Dr. Roza noted that many other fields use tools to look at data - such as a restaurant owner who uses a Square reader to know what hours are the most profitable. Not everyone needs to know how to “do” data, but rather they need tools that provide the data when it is relevant and useful. Rep. Alexander asked if South Carolina is requesting progress from school districts. Dr. Mathis stated that districts are reporting on what they’ve done with funds, particularly with ESSER funds. Mr. Robinson thanked Dr. Roza again. Dr. Roza noted that none of Edunomics’s tools are proprietary, so she encouraged their use.

Mr. Robinson turned to Mr. Ferguson for an Executive Director update. Mr. Ferguson thanked the committee for attending this weekend. Mr. Robinson thanked EOC staff and thanked Sen. Hembree for his time and service on the EOC. The meeting adjourned at 11:36 a.m.